

SUPPLEMENT NO. 24

(Article 98)

INFALLIBILITY AND INSPIRATION IN THE LIGHT OF
SCRIPTURE AND THE CREEDS

ANALYSIS OF THE MANDATE

A. The mandate of the committee as given by Synod reads as follows:
"To study the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and our own Creedal statements."

B. "To study the matter upon which Synod withheld judgment" (*Acts*, 1959, p. 73). Synod withheld judgment whether or not a view expressed by President Kromminga in his paper "How Shall We Understand Infallibility?" is consistent with the Creeds. This matter on which Synod withheld judgment has to do with the charge of Professor Wyngaarden that President Kromminga makes an unwarranted distinction between the so-called periphery of Scripture and that which does not belong to this so-called periphery. Synod replied that the word *Periphery* in the context of President Kromminga's article is ambiguous. He has employed language which may easily leave the impression that there is an area in Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies. President Kromminga assured Synod that in using the term *periphery* he did not mean "this or that word" of Scripture, but some aspect of the content of the words which is not germane to the Spirit's purpose. After declaring that it is inconsonant with the Creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies, and appealing to Article V of the Belgic Confession, "Believing without any doubt all things contained therein," Synod decided to withhold *further* judgment whether or not the distinction of President Kromminga is consistent with the Creeds.

This mandate contains two parts. The first is *general* and *sweeping*. We must study the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and the Creeds. The second is *particular* and *specific*. It has to do with the distinction of President Kromminga concerning Scripture's *periphery* understood as some aspect of the content of the words of Scripture which is not germane to the purpose of the Holy Spirit. Regarding this second part of the mandate, Synod asks for a *thorough* study. The grounds adduced appeal to the fact that this is a relatively new distinction in the theological discussion of our church, and that the problem is exceedingly complex, involving both apologetic methodology and far-reaching doctrinal implications.

To understand the entire mandate correctly, it must be seen clearly, first of all, that the Synod of 1959 adopted the Conclusions of the Report of the Committee on Inspiration to the Fourth Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1958 (henceforth FRES) and, secondly, made a Declaration regarding the impropriety of positing actual historical inaccuracies in the

Bible. These matters Synod did not want committed to a thorough study. It was against extensive argumentation that the Conclusions and the Declaration be committed first of all to a study before they be adopted that Synod decided to adopt the Conclusions and make its Declaration. The intention of Synod on this matter comes out clearly in directing the attention of the committee to the decisions of the Synods of 1922, 1924, and 1937 in which Articles III to VII of the Belgic Confession receive an official interpretation in the light of specific cases, to the Conclusions of the FRES and to the Declaration made by the Synod of 1959. Patently, Synod wanted our Committee to make its investigation in the light of what Synod has decided, adopted and declared, not to make an investigation of its decisions, adoptions and Declaration to find out whether or not they are correct.

We must, then, make a thorough study. But we are not to start *de novo*. We must study the whole problem of the relationship of inspiration and infallibility in the light of the Scriptures and the Creeds. We must also study thoroughly the matter on which Synod withheld judgment in the light of the Conclusions of the FRES of 1958 and the Declaration of Synod of 1959.

The Synod of 1960 has more recently declared "that it is the right of the churches and any ecclesiastical committee to study and test *in the light of Scripture* (italics in original) all creedal statements and synodical declarations" (*Acts*, 1960, p. 72). Our committee must accordingly keep in mind both the intentions of the Synod of 1959 and the reminder of the Synod of 1960 that the one and only absolute standard of all pronouncements is the Holy Scriptures.

Having submitted these initial remarks in regard to our mandate, our committee presents its report according to the following arrangement of materials:

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE
- III. DOCTRINAL IMPLICATIONS OF SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONY
- IV. THE WITNESS OF THE CREEDS
- V. DOCTRINAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CREEDAL WITNESS
- VI. SYNODICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS
- VII. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS
- VIII. THE "PERIPHERY" QUESTION
- IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Limitation of scope of work*

In introducing this study of the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and the Creeds, we would, at the outset, delineate and limit the scope of our work. Such a study might conceivably extend to the entire doctrine of Scripture. Obviously a selection must be made.

In the judgment of the committee the following matters, while they warrant mentioning, do not require detailed study at this time because on them there is common agreement among us.

1. *The distinction between the original text of the Bible and the many translations of the original*

The activity of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Holy Scripture was an unique phenomenon, limited to the writing of the original manuscripts. It does not extend to the translation of the originals. Accordingly, there is no perfect translation. The church has the continuous task to produce translations which reproduce the original text as closely as possible.

We therefore take exception to the position of the Roman Catholic Church, which has declared that the Vulgate is the authentic translation of the Bible (cf. Council of Trent, *Sessio IV; Vaticanum, Sessio III*). The text of this translation is considered to be "the doctrinal authority of the Church, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek*, p. 213).

2. *The distinction between the autographs and the various manuscripts of the Bible*

There exists today a vast number of manuscripts of the Bible or parts of the Bible. We do not, however, possess any of the original writings as they came from the authors' hands. Abraham Kuyper has given an explanation of this fact in these words. "Such autographs might soon have been idolized, and apparently it pleased the Lord to prevent this evil by rather exposing His Holy Scriptures to the tooth of time than to lead His church into the temptation of superstition" (*Encyclopaedia III*, p. 67). It is impossible to speak with absolute certainty on this matter, but we must recognize that the extant manuscripts contain variant readings. However, many of these variants are of a very insignificant nature. "The vast bulk of the Word of God is not affected by variations of text at all. Many of the variants concern differences in spelling only. Others can be readily accounted for as scribal embellishments" (Everett F. Harrison, in *Revelation and the Bible*, p. 240). In the New Testament the verses that give real difficulty can be counted; they are Matt. 16:13b; Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 22:43, 44; John 5:4; John 7:53, 8:11; Acts 8:37; I John 5:7 (cf. F. W. Grosheide, *Hermeneutiek*, p. 153). In the Old Testament there are also some real problems of which the conflict in numbers found in parallel passages is a striking example (cf. II Samuel 10:18 and I Chronicles 19:18; I Kings 4:26 and II Chronicles 9:25).

In spite of these difficulties it is justifiable to speak of a most careful preservation of the text of Holy Scripture through the centuries. The recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has only confirmed our confidence in the reliability of the traditional text. It has aptly been stated: "What we possess in our present Bible is a remarkably substantial copy of this first set of writings, the purity of which is determined by the research of lower criticism" (E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, pp. 192, 193). F. W. Grosheide has remarked, "Sometimes the suggestion is made that the text of the New Testament is uncertain to

such an extent that we can speak no longer of an infallible Bible. The first requirement for such an infallibility, so the suggestion goes, is that we know precisely what it is that is infallible. This we do not know. Now we readily agree with the thesis that infallibility belongs, strictly speaking, to the writings as they were written by men of God by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But it is wrong to say that we do not really possess these writings any more. First of all, quite a number of difficulties about the text can be solved with certainty. The remaining ones are of no consequence. A famous English scholar has intimated that only one thousandth part of the New Testament may be called dubious. And recently discovered ancient fragments of the Bible (Chester-Beatty Papyri) show that the text which is generally accepted today was the current text of the second century. However true it may be in itself to assert that the textual differences make no point of the doctrine of salvation uncertain, this need not even be mentioned. It is, however, necessary to point out that they are insignificant for the text itself' (*Bijbelse Handboek*, II, p. 53).

The position from which we proceed is that the perfections of Scripture apply in the first instance to the original manuscripts and to the various extant manuscripts and copies to the extent that they faithfully reproduce the original. The difficulties with which the variants confront us do not prevent us from maintaining that we have in our Bible today the very Word of God.

3. *The distinction between the mechanical and the organic theory of inspiration*

The writers of Scripture were not passive instruments of the Holy Spirit. Although it is true that some parts of Scripture were literally dictated (cf. Exodus 34:27; Revelation 2:1), other passages place the active participation of the human authors beyond dispute (cf. Proverbs 25:1; Luke 1:1-4). This activity of the writers accounts for the differences in language, style, and manner of presentation. The organic theory of inspiration would give due recognition to the human aspect of Scripture (cf. *Acts*, FRES, 1958, p. 48).

The mechanical dictation theory, which is found in the *Consensus Helvetica* (1675), finds no defense today in the churches maintaining the Reformed Confessions. Berkouwer rightly states that the distinction between the divine and the human element may never be used to make a separation between them. "The doctrine of organic inspiration does not indicate a compromise nor the admission of an accommodation of the divine revelation by which the reliability of Holy Scripture might be endangered, but has reference to the mystery of the Holy Scripture in the miracle of its realization in which in an inscrutable way the Holy Spirit took into His service what was in itself an imperfect human instrument, but by means of which He presented to us that reliable Word which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" (*Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek*, pp. 352-353).

The doctrine of organic inspiration to which we hold on the one hand guards against the negation and/or depreciation of the human partici-

pation in the inspiration of Scripture and on the other hand upholds the priority and sovereignty of God over the human agents He used to produce the Sacred Scriptures.

B. *Basis of our study*

The doctrine of inspiration assumed by this study is that which is set forth in the Belgic Confession, Articles III and V, and in the Conclusions of the FRES as adopted by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1959, i.e., it assumes "an inspiration of an organic nature which extends not only to the ideas but also to the words of Holy Scripture," so that "Holy Scripture in its entirety is the Word of God written."

The doctrine of infallibility assumed by this study is that which is set forth in the Belgic Confession, Articles IV, V, VII, and in the Conclusions of the FRES as adopted by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1959, i.e., it assumes that the Old and New Testaments are two canonical books "against which nothing can be alleged," that we are to believe "without any doubt all things contained in them" because "the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects," "that Scripture in its whole extent and in all its parts is the infallible and inerrant Word of God."

The doctrine of the Bible, the Word of God written, assumed by this study is that which the Bible itself provides, i.e., it assumes that the Bible is the dynamic WORD of God, a light to our path (Psalm 119:105), the living and active discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12), that which is able to make us wise unto salvation (II Timothy 3:15), the Word that will endure forever (I Peter 1:25). Accordingly, our purpose in this study is not to investigate coldly and dispassionately a supposedly dead and inactive book which we by careful exegesis may increasingly control or manipulate. Our purpose is rather, by reverent and painstaking analysis, to subject ourselves increasingly to the inscripturated Word by bringing every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). The God of the Scriptures, who in inspiring His own Word once spoke through the inspired written Word, still speaks through it today. We recognize that our attitude must be that of listening ever more intently to the voice of God speaking in the Scriptures.

C. *Defining the question*

The present question to be considered is: What is the relationship between the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration and the doctrine of infallibility in the light of Scripture and the Creeds? ⁽¹⁾

It is not to be asked whether there is a relationship between the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture and the doctrine of Scriptural infalli-

⁽¹⁾ Plenary inspiration and verbal inspiration are often used interchangeably. Both indicate that the Scriptures in their entirety are inspired. However, the two terms are not identical in meaning. Plenary inspiration refers to the scope of inspiration, meaning that the whole of Scripture is inspired. Verbal inspiration refers to the intensity of inspiration, meaning that all the parts (words) are inspired.

bility. This is admitted on all sides.⁽²⁾ Moreover, the Conclusions of the FRÉS on Inspiration say expressly that the Biblical doctrine of inspiration holds "that the human authors of Scripture were moved by the Holy Spirit so as to insure that what they wrote communicated infallibly God's self-revelation" and "does not . . . allow for the inference that Scripture may be regarded as a fallible human witness to divine revelation, for such an evaluation constitutes an attack upon the glorious sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration." The Conclusions also state: "The considerations that Scripture pervasively witnesses to its own God-breathed origin and character and that as redemptive revelation it is necessarily characterized by the divinity which belongs to redemption are the explanation of the sustained faith of the historic Christian church that Scripture in its whole extent and in all its parts is the infallible and inerrant Word of God."

The question then is not whether the Biblical doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture implies Biblical infallibility. That it most certainly does, and that fact is not being challenged in the present discussions. But there remains the question of the nature of the relation between inspiration and infallibility and the clarification of the latter.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

Before examining the testimony of Scripture, it should be observed that our submission to Scripture's self-testimony and our minute study of Scripture to discover with some measure of precision what that self-testimony is, involves us at the outset in an acknowledgment of Scripture's absolute authority. We approach this particular study of Scripture in the confidence that Scripture's own account of its origin and nature is historically trustworthy and doctrinally authoritative. We study to learn, not to evaluate or criticize. We look to Scripture as our teacher, not as a mere participant in our discussion.⁽³⁾ It is our presupposition that God, in Scripture, speaks authoritatively and trustworthily concerning Scripture; and that to discover what God has said concerning Scripture we must canvass what Scripture says concerning itself, giving due weight to each word which Scripture employs in its self-testimony. This is the presupposition of faith. As such it is faith's "yes" to the affirmation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts in that act which has become technically known as the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*.

A word of caution is here in order, however. The internal testimony of the Spirit is not an independent source of revelation concerning Scripture. It is neither more nor less than an internal affirmation of the Spirit in our hearts of that which He testifies to us externally in the Scripture. As the Westminster Confession says, "Our full persuasion and assurance

⁽²⁾ Synod of 1959 adopted the recommendation of the Board of Trustees which contained a declaration of the Seminary Faculty "that there is a necessary connection between the Scriptural teaching on Inspiration and Infallibility rightly understood" (*Acts*, 1959, p. 73).

⁽³⁾ This of course does not imply the stamp of approval on doctrines such as some propounded by the Pharisees, which the Scripture records, but does not approve and may even repudiate.

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" (Ch. I, V). The content of that internal testimony is not, therefore, to be learned by analyzing our faith; nor is it to be learned by an independent examination of the internal testimony of the Spirit. So we are led back to Scripture to test our faith with respect to Scripture and to discover just what it is to which the Spirit bears testimony in our hearts concerning Scripture.

A. *II Tim. 3:16, 17*: "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

1. Relevant Observations:

- a. This is one of the *loci classici* for the doctrine of verbal inspiration of Scripture.
- b. Without reflecting here on the role of the human agency in the writing of Scripture, Paul declares Scripture's full divinity. Whatever else Scripture may be, it is "God-breathed" (theopneustos).⁽⁴⁾ It is "God-breathed" in such a fashion that, as Paul understands it, it is all one to say "Scripture says" as to say "God says" and conversely. A number of passages from the Pauline epistles illustrates the point.

(1) Gal. 3:8, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed." A quick reading of this verse would leave the impression that a message had come to Abraham by a certain "Scripture." From the Genesis account of this episode, however, we learn that this is not the case. Gen. 12:1-3 tells us plainly that Jehovah spoke this "gospel" to Abram by direct revelation.

(2) Rom. 9:17, "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up that I might show in thee My power, and that My name might be published abroad in all the earth." . . . Once more Paul asserts that "Scripture" speaks. But the witness of Exodus 9:13ff is that this message was communicated directly to Moses who was commanded in turn to speak it to Pharaoh.

(3) Gal. 3:22, "But the Scripture shut up all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." This passage illustrates the same point in a somewhat different fashion. Nevertheless here also Paul uses "Scripture" for God.

(4) Acts 13:32-35. Although this passage is from Luke's account of Paul's preaching rather than from Paul's own writings, it ought to be considered. We read: "And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children

⁽⁴⁾ It has been suggested that theopneustos should be understood in the active voice so that we ought to interpret Paul to say here that Scripture breathes God or is "gifted with God's Spirit, breathing the Divine Spirit," H. Cremer in Herzog's *Realencyclopädie*, 1880, sub "Inspiration." This suggestion has not generally found favor among scholars, however. Warfield has adequately refuted it in his article "God-inspired Scripture" (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 245ff).

in that He raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Because he saith also in another psalm, Thou wilt not give Thy Holy One to see corruption." In this significant passage Paul quotes three verses from the Old Testament (Ps. 2:7; Isa. 55:3; Ps. 16:10) and ascribes them all directly to God. The peculiar relevance to the present discussion of this Pauline use of Scripture becomes apparent when we observe that in their original settings the first passage quoted is introduced with the words, "Jehovah said unto me." The second, however, has no such introduction but appears only in the context of the normal prophetic formula, "Thus saith Jehovah." The third makes no express claim to divine authorship at all. It is therefore apparent that for Paul whatever is found written in Scripture can properly be ascribed directly to God simply because it is in Scripture whether or not there appears, with respect to it, any kind of explicit claim to divine authorship. This does not mean, of course, that every statement found in Scripture taken in isolation is to be understood as revelatory of the mind of God, or that Paul would make such a claim. It is the fool and not God who says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

c. Paul speaks of "every Scripture" or "all Scripture" (*pasa graphé*), i.e. every Scripture which is included in "the sacred writings," vs. 15. And there is no warrant to suppose that Paul intends to ascribe "God-breathedness" only to portions of these inspired writings. They are, he quite clearly asserts, in their entirety "God-breathed." Paul's own extensive use of Scripture in his preaching and writing indicates how far he understands that "God-breathedness" to extend. Nowhere does he cast doubts on any of the accepted writings nor on any portions of them but rather makes free and indiscriminate use of many of them. In his account of Paul's ministry Luke records references to Exodus (1), I Samuel (1), II Samuel (1), Psalms (3), Isaiah (5), Habakkuk (1), and possibly also Genesis (1). In Paul's epistles there are unmistakable references to Genesis (15), Exodus (8), Leviticus (4), Deuteronomy (13), I Kings (2), Job (1), Psalms (20), Proverbs (1), Isaiah (24), Jeremiah (3), Hosea (5), Joel (1), Habakkuk (1), Zechariah (1), Malachi (1), and possible references to Numbers (1) and Ezekiel (1).

It is highly relevant to note that these include references to historical narrative, psalmody, wisdom literature, prophecy, and legislation. Although Paul himself was chiefly interested in doctrine and morality, he accepts all the Scriptures, in whatever literary category, as belonging to the "God-breathed" body of sacred writings.

Furthermore, Paul's own use of Scripture indicates that the quality of "God-breathedness" extends to the very words of Scripture. Paul does not hesitate, when the purpose of the Spirit so demands, to turn an argument on the form of a word. Gal. 3:16 is the classic example: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

It is evident, then, that the writer of II Tim. 3:16 viewed the whole of the body of canonical writings possessed by Israel in the days of Christ as comprising the "God-breathed" Scriptures which are profitable for perfecting the man of God. For that reason he called them "the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2), a term in itself highly significant, for, as Warfield has amply shown, it means "divinely authoritative communications," "emanations from God," "God's own utterances" ("The Oracles of God," *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, pp. 403, 404).

The question of the status of New Testament writings naturally arises in view of the fact that the discussion so far has dealt only with Paul's view of the Old Testament canonical writings. Obviously we are faced with a difficulty here, for the New Testament body of writings was not yet in existence. There was as yet no finished and accepted canon. Nor is there any sure reference in Paul's letters to New Testament writings other than his own. It is true that I Tim. 5:18b appears to be a quotation from Luke 10:7. If it is, and the possibility is not to be doubted, then we have an explicit equating of a New Testament writing with the Old Testament Scripture, for in one breath Paul quotes from Deuteronomy and from Luke, and introduces both with a single formula, "the Scripture saith." It is not sure, however, that Paul has Luke's gospel in mind. It may be that he is but quoting a common proverb, based on Old Testament teaching, a proverb also known and used by Jesus.

Be that as it may, it is significant that Paul, while holding to the view of a canon of "God-breathed" writings which constitute "the oracles of God," claims for his own teaching, either oral or written, equal status. The word that he preached was not "the word of men" but "the word of God" (I Thess. 2:13). That which he wrote was "the commandment of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). He that does not obey the writing of the apostle is to be disciplined (II Thess. 3:14). If any man preach or teach any other gospel than that which Paul proclaimed, he is to be accused (Gal. 1:8,9). When Paul speaks as an apostle of Jesus Christ to the churches it is "Christ that speaketh" in him (II Cor. 13:3). Paul did not learn his gospel at the feet of men but rather received it "through revelations of Jesus Christ," Gal. 1:12, some of which were "exceeding great" (II Cor. 12:7).

Such statements as these, together with the authority over the faith and practice of the churches which Paul pervasively claimed, indicate clearly that he expected the churches to accept a new body of authoritative, Spirit-taught writings which were to serve as authentic witnesses to and interpreters of the new and final series of revelatory events centered in the earthly ministry and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He did not give, and could not have given any indication as to the identity and number of all these writings. Yet he quite obviously considered his own writings to be among them (cf. Col. 4:16). He gave to the church, moreover, a standard by which to judge the canonical acceptability of any message, oral or written. This he did when he wrote, "If any man preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:9b).

We ought to conclude, therefore, that it is consistent with Paul's teaching to extend the idea of "God-breathedness" to New Testament writings also.

d. The quality of "God-breathedness" is what makes Scripture "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." By asserting its profitability in these categories Paul claims for Scripture both divine authority and divine trustworthiness. He places all men under the authority of this word even as he himself made Scripture the final court of appeal and the solid foundation for his own faith and teaching (cf. Acts 17:2, 3; 26:22, 23; 28:23). At the same time he calls all men to believe with him, "all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets" (Acts 24:14). He who would be a "man of God," "complete, furnished completely unto every good work" must submit to the "God-breathed" Scriptures as completely trustworthy and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

Obviously, this divine authority and trustworthiness which Paul claims for Scripture extends as far as "God-breathedness" extends, that is to all the sacred writings in their whole extent and in all their parts, even to the very words.

e. While it is clear that Paul asserts the divine authority and trustworthiness of Scripture, extending as far as the "God-breathedness" of Scripture extends, i.e. to its whole extent and to all its parts, even to its words, there remains the question: on what matters does Scripture speak with divine authority and trustworthiness?

The claim expressly made by Paul in the passage presently under consideration is that Scripture speaks with divine authority and trustworthiness on those matters "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (vs. 15), i.e., those matters which are able to teach, to reprove, to correct, and to instruct in righteousness "that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (vs. 17). In making this claim for Scripture Paul focuses his attention on the message of which Scripture is the sole witness and of which, by virtue of inspiration, it is an authoritative and trustworthy witness.

However, Paul's own use of Scripture as the teacher, corrector, re-prover, and instructor in righteousness with divine authority and trustworthiness, demonstrates his conviction that, in order to speak its divine message with absolute authority and trustworthiness, Scripture must speak with absolute authority and trustworthiness on many things. On matters of doctrine, of course: Rom. 3:4 (Ps. 51:4); Rom. 4:3 (Gen. 15:6); Rom. 4:7, 8 (Ps. 32:1f); Rom. 9:15 (Ex. 33:19); Rom. 9:27 (Isa. 10:22f); Rom. 10:18 (Ps. 19:4); Rom. 11:8 (Isa. 29:10; Deut. 29:4); I Cor. 3:19 (Job 5:13); I Cor. 3:20 (Ps. 94:11); II Cor. 9:9 (Ps. 112:9); Gal. 3:11 (Hab. 2:4), etc.

but also on matters of the divine promises: Rom. 9:33 (Isa. 28:16); Rom. 10:11 (Isa. 28:16); Rom. 10:13 (Joel 2:32); Rom. 11:26, 27 (Isa. 59:20f; 27:9); Rom. 15:9-12 (Ps. 18:49; cf. II Sam. 22:50; Deut.

32:43; Ps. 117:1; Isa. 11:10); Rom. 15:21 (Isa. 52:15); I Cor. 15:27 (Ps. 8:6); I Cor. 15:54, 55 (Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14); II Cor. 6:16 (Lev. 26:12; Ex. 29:45; Ez. 37:27; Jer. 31:1); II Cor. 6:17, 18 (Isa. 52:11; Hos. 1:10; Isa. 43:6); Gal. 3:8 (Gen. 12:3); etc.;

On matters of prediction: Rom. 9:25 (Hos. 2:23; 1:10); Rom. 10:10 (Deut. 32:21); Rom. 10:20 (Isa. 65:1); Rom. 15:3 (Ps. 69:9); I Cor. 1:19 (Isa. 29:14); I Cor. 2:9 (Isa. 64:4; 65:17); I Cor. 14:21 (Isa. 28:11f); Eph. 4:8 (Ps. 68:18); etc.;

on matters of ethical principles and moral precepts: Rom. 7:7 (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21); Rom. 10:5 (Lev. 18:5); Rom. 12:19 (Deut. 32:35); Rom. 12:20 (Prov. 25:21f); Rom. 13:9 (Ex. 20:13ff; Deut. 5:17ff); I Cor. 1:31 (Jer. 9:24); II Cor. 6:17 (Isa. 52:11); Gal. 3:10 (Deut. 27:26); Gal. 3:12 (Lev. 18:5); Gal. 3:13 (Deut. 21:23); Gal. 5:14 (Lev. 19:18); Eph. 4:25, 26 (Zech. 8:16; Ps. 4:4); Eph. 5:31 (Gen. 2:24); Eph. 6:2, 3 (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16); I Tim. 5:18 (Deut. 25:4).

This last reference is of particular interest because the Old Testament legislation to which Paul here refers seems to be one of the lesser precepts given to Israel by Moses. God had said, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." Whether or not the specific prohibition set forth in this precept was still in force in Paul's day he does not say. But he clearly asserts that the ethical principle embodied in it is binding on the church. Guided by this principle the church is to count the elders that rule well to be "worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching" (I Tim. 5:17). "Is it for the ox that God careth," Paul asks the Corinthians, "or saith he it assuredly for our sake?" (I Cor. 9:9, 10). The question is rhetorical. His answer: "Yea, for our sake it was written." From it he draws the conclusion that they who sow spiritual things ought properly to reap carnal things from those to whom they minister (vs. 11).

and on matters of history: Special interest attaches to this last in view of the modern attacks on Bible history. Consequently it warrants a more extensive discussion. A survey of the evidence reveals the following:

(1) Paul accepts the genuinely historical character of Bible history. He knows nothing of myth or saga. His allegorical use of the history of the two sons of Abraham (Gal. 4:22ff) is no evidence to the contrary in view of the overwhelming witness to his acceptance of the true historicity of the Biblical narratives. He accepts as genuine history:

(a) the Biblical account of the origin of the world (Acts 17:24); of man (Acts 17:26; I Cor. 11:8, 9; 15:45, 47; I Tim. 2:14); of sin (Rom. 5:12ff; I Cor. 15:22; I Tim. 2:13 and of death (Rom. 5:12, 15, 17; I Cor. 15:22);

(b) the Biblical account of the life of Abraham; the promises made to him (Gal. 3:8, 16); his faith (Rom. 4:2f), even in the face of severe tests (Rom. 4:18ff); the election of Isaac (Rom. 9:7; 9:13, 16), the promise to Sarah (Rom. 9:9); the generation of Ishmael by Hagar with its sequent complications (Gal. 4:22ff);

(c) the peculiar circumstances of the birth of Esau and Jacob (Rom. 9:10-12);

(d) the Biblical account of the Exodus: Moses' confrontation of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:15, 17); God's leading of Israel by the cloud (I Cor. 10:1, 2); the crossing of the Red Sea (I Cor. 10:1, 2); the forty years' journey (Acts 13:17ff); the sins of the people (I Cor. 10:5, 7, 8, 9, 10); the judgments of God in the wilderness (I Cor. 10:5, 8, 9, 10); the experience of the people with the manna which they gathered (II Cor. 8:15); the giving of the law on the tables of stone (II Cor. 3:7); the transfer of glory to Moses for which reason he veiled his face (II Cor. 3:7ff);

- (e) the conquest of Canaan (Acts 13:19);
- (f) The history of the judges (Acts 13:20);
- (g) Israel's request for a king (Acts 13:21);
- (h) the reign of Saul (Acts 13:21, 22);
- (i) the history of David (Acts 13:22, 36);
- (j) the visit of Elijah to Mount Horeb (Rom. 11:2ff)

(2) Paul accepts the revelational character of Biblical history. This becomes abundantly evident from the writings of the apostle in which he at times draws important theological conclusions from historical events. In Romans 4 he proves from Old Testament history that his doctrine of salvation by faith alone apart from the works of the law is the true and ancient doctrine of salvation. He recalls the Scriptural declaration, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). In this statement alone he finds substantiation for his doctrine. The unassailable proof, however, is furnished by history, viz., that Abraham was declared righteous before "he was in circumcision (Rom. 4:9ff) and before the giving of the law (Rom. 4:13).

Similarly in Romans 9:6ff Paul proves the doctrine of election by pointing to the history of the early patriarchs where the principle of God's sovereign selectiveness operated openly in the election of Isaac and Jacob. Again, in Romans 11:2ff there is an appeal to history to substantiate the doctrine of the covenant faithfulness of God in His saving of a remnant. This instance is the more evidential in view of the fact that Paul does not appeal to the larger movements of Old Testament history but rather to a relatively minor event in that history, the experiences of Elijah when he in discouragement retired to Mount Horeb.

Paul believes that Old Testament history is revelatory also of moral principles. He points the church of Corinth (I Cor. 10:5ff) to the record of Israel's waywardness and God's judgments in the wilderness. Then he adds significantly, "Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (I Cor. 10:11).

Furthermore, the proper conduct of women in the church is controlled by the historical fact that "the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man; for neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (I Cor. 11:8, 9). Similarly the proper place for the woman in the corporate life of the church is also determined by historical facts. "But I permit not a woman to teach," Paul wrote to Tim-

othy, "nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression" (I Tim. 2:12-14).

In yet another place Paul draws conclusions concerning the glory of "the ministration of righteousness" which came in Jesus Christ by recalling the glory which shone on the face of Moses as the mediator of "the ministration of condemnation" (II Cor. 3:7ff).

Moreover, the obligation of the saints and Christian congregations to share their possessions with the needy is discovered by Paul in the fact that when God provided Israel with manna in the wilderness, "he that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack" (II Cor. 8:15).

And whatever may be the correct interpretation of Paul's — to us — strange use of Biblical history in Gal. 4:22ff, it is quite evident that the apostle views the history of the two sons of Abraham as revelational.

This survey of Paul's use of Old Testament history abundantly shows that in his mind, this history is genuinely revelatory and is of *one piece with that revelation of God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit which constitutes the supreme disclosure*. The history of the Old Testament is just as truly a vehicle of divine revelation and speaks with equal authority, although with neither the fulness nor the finality, as the revelation in Jesus Christ. In his own use of Scripture Paul honors the principle which he frequently expressed in various ways but set forth most clearly in Romans 15:4. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

(3) Paul accepts the trustworthiness of Old Testament history. No-where does he call it into question. Wherever he uses it for purposes of instruction he assumes its complete reliability. (See the passages noted under (2) above.)

It must be recognized, however, that Paul's evaluation of Old Testament history is not from the point of view of the secular historian. It is rather from the point of view of an apostle of Jesus Christ whose mission it was to witness to the revelation of God. That is to say, his high evaluation of the Old Testament is not as a history book as such but rather as a written revelation of God which was communicated not only through theophanies, prophetic disclosures, and Spirit-inspired poetry and wisdom literature, but also through a history which was an essential part of that revelation.

That such a written revelation does not, in Paul's mind, require the fulness of historical account nor the precision of detail required by the modern science of historiography is evident from Paul's own use of history. Two examples will suffice. In Acts 13:18-20 Paul employs three enumerations within the space of three verses: the number of years that God nourished Israel in the wilderness; the number of nations whose land Israel inherited; and the number of years in which God "gave them their land for an inheritance." It is noteworthy that in the first and third instances Paul introduces his numbers with an adverb indicating ap-

proximation and that in the second instance he simply takes over the symbolic figure of Deuteronomy 7:1. That the figure of Deuteronomy 7:1 is symbolic of completeness rather than historically precise is evident from the fact that of the many tribal listings only three contain seven. (Deut. 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11) and these omit mention of such tribes as the Ammonites, Moabites and Rephaim. The usual listing gives but five or six (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; Deut. 20:17; Joshua 9:1; 11:3; 12:8; Judges 3:5; Nehemiah 9:8; I Kings 9:20; Numbers 13:29; II Chron. 8:7). An early listing gives ten (Gen. 15:19-21). Evidently approximation and symbolic figures are, in Paul's mind, often exact enough for the purposes of sacred history.

When the apostle employs New Testament history he shows the same attitude toward fulness of detail and precision. Only such detail and such precision interests him as is required by his immediate purpose. In I Cor. 15:5-8 the apostle provides the Corinthians with a list of witnesses to the resurrection, naming them evidently in the order in which the resurrected Lord appeared to them. The list, however, is incomplete for it makes no mention of the Lord's appearance to the women (Matt. 28:9), to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:14ff), and to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13ff). Neither does it record the second appearance of Jesus to the disciples at Jerusalem (John 20:26ff) nor His appearance to the seven at the sea of Tiberius (John 21). And if his statement, "then to all the apostles," has reference to the final appearance at Jerusalem (Acts 1:9-12; Luke 24:50) he does not give sufficient detail for us to be sure. Furthermore he speaks of "the twelve" when in reality there were but eleven, cf. Mark 16:14. We may also note that he once more employs round numbers, cf. "about five hundred brethren."

Nevertheless, because the apostle evidently assumes the complete trustworthiness of all the Biblical narratives of which he makes use in his ministry, we must conclude that he accepted the Biblical record as a wholly trustworthy account of a revelational history even though he demanded of it neither excess nor rigid exactitude of detail.

This leads to a concluding observation. What for Paul is the central purpose of Scripture as a "God-breathed" writing, what the focal point of God's inspiring activity, and what the proper use of Scripture, is indicated by a series of declarations which can be gleaned from Luke's account of Paul's labors and from Paul's own writings. Above all, Paul used Scripture to witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 17:2, 3; 26:22, 23; 28:23; cf. 13:7ff; 17:11). This witness must not be conceived narrowly, however. The Scriptures testify not only of the person and work of Jesus Christ but also of the will of God for those who are in Christ. They "were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4, cf. 4:23, 24); or as the apostle elsewhere asserts, "for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages are come" (I Cor. 10:11). Therefore Scripture must be received as that which is "able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15). It is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the

man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (vs. 16, 17). In his use of Scripture and in his teaching concerning Scripture the apostle always keeps his eye on the central purpose of Scripture. Whatever he says about Scripture must therefore be understood of Scripture as *the revelation of God in writing*.

On what matters, then, does Scripture speak with divine authority and trustworthiness? On all matters which have direct or indirect bearing on the self-disclosure of God which is of one piece, which has come in history, which has been communicated through various means including redemptive history and a "God-breathed" Scripture and which has in view to make men "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." This is to say that Scripture speaks with divine authority and trustworthiness on all things on which it chooses to speak *in so far* as it chooses to speak of them. There are many matters on which Scripture has not chosen to speak, e.g. geometric theorems, cosmology, laws of syllogism, principles of elocution. On such things Paul does not claim that Scripture speaks with authority and trustworthiness. But on all matters on which it has chosen to speak in its inspired communication of the self-disclosure of God, it speaks with absolute authority and trustworthiness, and on these matters in so far as it has chosen to speak of them.

Conclusions:

1. Paul understands Scripture to be the God-inspired, written embodiment of God's special self-disclosure to men which has as its specific purpose to make men "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." That disclosure reveals God's will, His acts, His promises, His covenants, His purposes, and is made in history by means of historical events, theophanies, miracles, verbal communications, and special influences of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men.
 2. Paul claims for Scripture complete divine authority. What Scripture speaks, God speaks. Through the special divine activity of "spiration" God becomes the supreme author of all of Scripture. Before this authority men must bow unquestioningly.
 3. Paul claims for Scripture complete trustworthiness. Through it the God "who cannot lie" speaks to men. What God says to men through Scripture is to be believed implicitly.
 4. Paul claims for Scripture complete divine authority and trustworthiness on all matters on which Scripture chooses to speak in so far as it chooses to speak of them.
- B. II Peter 1:19-21 "And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; where unto ye do well to take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake FROM God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

1. Relevant Observations:

- a. Peter's purpose is that the Christians may be "established in the truth" (vs. 12) which is the "Power and coming of our Lord Jesus

Christ" (vs. 16) of which the apostles had been eye and ear witnesses (vs. 18) and by which the apostles had had confirmed to them the word of prophecy (vs. 19) whereunto the believers do well to take heed, bearing in mind that no prophecy is of private (personal or subjective) interpretation. Scripture must be interpreted according to God's revealed plan. For no prophecy is of human initiation; it originates from God. And if we may take our key from vs. 12-16, prophecy must be interpreted as it relates to the "power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

b. Vs. 21 begins with "for" (gar), linking it with the preceding in the sense that it is the basis or confirmation of the foregoing. The readers do well to "take heed" because prophecy is of divine origin. Although vs. 19-21 may not give a comprehensive statement as to the nature of Scripture, they clearly indicate Peter's view that Scripture must be heeded because it is from God.

That Peter in this way honored Scripture can be demonstrated from his own use of Scripture as we find it in his epistles and preaching (cf. Acts).

- 1) Scripture must be "heeded":
 - in matters of doctrine, cf. I Peter 1:24 (Isa. 40:6), I Peter 3:10 (Ps. 34:12f), I Peter 5:5 (Prov. 3:34), II Peter 2:22 (Prov. 26:11), Acts 2:25-28 (Ps. 16:8-11), Acts 4:11 (Ps. 118:22);
 - in matters of promise, cf. I Peter 2:6 (Isa. 28:16), Acts 2:35 (Ps. 110:1);
 - in matters of prediction, cf. I Peter 2:7 (Ps. 118:22), I Peter 2:8 (Isa. 8:14), Acts 2:17-21 (Joel 2:28, 32), Acts 3:22 (Deut. 18:15, 19);
 - in matters of moral precepts I Peter 1:16 (Lev. 11:44), I Peter 2:21ff. (Isa. 53:9); Acts 1:20 (Ps. 69:25, Ps. 109:8).

2) Scripture is from God:

I Peter 1:10-12 teaches clearly that the prophets possessed the "Spirit of Christ" by which they predicted the sufferings of Christ. The prophets were given truth by revelation, and Peter's readers had come to know this truth through "them [the apostles] that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven" (vs. 12).

Whether it may be concluded that Peter is here also making a claim of divine origin for the New Testament writings, including his own, is not certain, but certainly he does for the message the apostles proclaimed. It is in any case plausible to conclude that the apostolic writings are included in his purview since he complains (II Peter 3:15, 16) that the steadfast wrest the writings of Paul "as they do the other Scriptures" thereby implying that Paul's writings are in a similar category with "the other Scriptures." Again in I Peter 1:25 he links the "word of the Lord which abideth forever" (Isa. 40:8) to the "word of good tidings" which was preached to the believers.

c. Vs. 21 clearly teaches that as God's revelation comes to man there is human activity as well as divine:

1) "men spake" (elafsan). Trench, in his *Synonyms of the New Testament*, contrasts *laleo* with *lego*, and indicates that although *laleo*

must not be understood in the New Testament in the contemptuous sense of "chatter," as Plato defined it, yet *laleo* is used to emphasize audible, articulate speech while *lego* emphasizes the words uttered and "that these correspond to reasonable thoughts within the breast of the utterer" (#268).

From the usage of the word *laleo*, and from the immediate context in which Peter affirms that "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation" because "no prophecy ever came by the will of man," we must infer that the prophecies of Scripture were initiated by the Spirit of God.

Caution should be exercised, however, that the human activity in the process of revelation be not deprecated. The specific force of *laleo* itself does not permit of depriving the utterer the understanding of his own message. Furthermore, it must be noted that the word *laleo* is used even of God and Jesus. A third consideration which forbids deprecating the human role which the authors played is the fact that *anthropoi* is the subject of the sentence not only, but is placed grammatically in the position of emphasis. This is underscored in the Expositor's Greek New Testament as follows: "It is of much significance for the interpretation of the whole passage that *anthropoi* occupies a position of emphasis at the end of the sentence, thus bringing into prominence the human agent" (cf. *in loco*).

"Men spake from God." Since there is variant reading, "holy men of God," which is not without authority, we ought not rest too great weight of argument on these words. Let it only be noted that either reading implies authority and official status on the part of the men and their message.

2) "Being moved by the Holy Spirit," clearly speaks of the activity of God in the giving of prophecy. Yet it is difficult to determine precisely what that activity is. It is noteworthy that the word *feromenoi* is used and not *feromenoi*. The former is from *fero* which denotes a more or less intermittent action; while the latter is from *fero*, which denotes a more continuous action (cf. Trench *op. cit.*). Neither is *agomenoi* used which describes the general leading of the Spirit exercised over all Christians (cf. Rom. 8:14). Again, neither is *didasko* employed which would suggest the idea of transmitting knowledge (cf. I Cor. 2:13).

"Being moved" suggests the idea of being borne along. In Acts 27:15, 17 this verb appears again in the passive voice where it is interpreted in the somewhat figurative sense of being driven. Since *feromenoi* in this passage is passive it ought to be understood in the sense that men were driven by the Spirit to speak. They were energized by the Spirit and under a divine compulsion to utter the Spirit's message. The word *feromenoi* taken by itself would not teach that the content of the message was given by the Spirit, but in this passage it bears this connotation since we are told that "no prophecy ever came by the will of man."

d. This is the only instance in the New Testament in which the word *fero* is used with the Holy Spirit. This indicates that Peter has in mind a very singular activity of the Spirit. It is Peter's way of describing the manner in which the Holy Spirit influenced the prophets to speak their

message. It may be of interest to note that *fero* is used in the LXX with the Holy Spirit in the compound form *epifero* in Gen. 1:2, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Here also a very special act of the Holy Spirit is suggested. A rather significant parallel therefore can be observed between Gen. 1:2 and II Peter 1:21.

e. The expression, "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit," has implications for the relationship between inspiration and infallibility. To understand what these implications are one must examine Peter's statement in the light of the larger context of Scripture.

"Being moved by the Holy Spirit" is an activity which must be distinguished from that general endowment of the Spirit which qualifies men for office and from that leading of the Spirit which is common to all believers which activities of the Spirit did not and does not make men immune from sin and error, cf. the lives of Joshua, Jephthah, Samson, Saul, David, and Peter (Gal. 2:13). The specific word chosen by Peter carries in it the thought of a more complete mastery of the human object. Its force is evident from its use in Acts 27:15, 17 where we read that the storm-tossed ship was so "driven" by the wind that there was no power in the ship to resist or even to set a course. What the effect of this influence was on the prophets can be learned from a study of the claims and ministry of the prophets.

1. A first observation which demands our attention is that although the prophets do not claim for themselves the influence of the Spirit of God, with the exception of Ezekiel (2:2, 3:24, 8:3, 11:1, 11:5, 11:24, 43:5) and possibly Micah (3:8), Zech. 7:12 does speak of "words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit by the former prophets." Chronologically all the Old Testament prophets except Malachi (and possibly Joel) are to be included in Zechariah's category "former prophets." We may therefore conclude that Moses, Samuel, David, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and the major and minor prophets are those who spoke "words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit." Zechariah even indicates that the influence of the Spirit upon the prophets extends to the very words of the message. This is consistent with the Biblical description of a prophet as seen by relating Ex. 7:1, "and Aaron thy brother shall be the prophet," with Ex. 4:15, "And thou shalt speak unto him [Aaron], and put the words in his mouth." Note also Jer. 1:9, "Then Jehovah put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and Jehovah said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth."

2. A second observation is that "being moved by the Holy Spirit" must be understood as an intermittent activity of the Spirit upon the prophet and not as an abiding quality of the prophet. This is consistent with the general use of *fero*. The intermittent nature of this unique influence of the Spirit is pointed up by the example of the prophet Nathan who on one occasion sought to speak for God while relying on his own personal judgment in advising David to proceed with the construction of the temple. God's correction of Nathan's former declaration illustrates the fact that Nathan was not always speaking in the Spirit and that only when the Spirit was upon him was he moved to speak the word of God.

It further illustrates that prophecy came not by the will of man, but by the will of God. This illustration, moreover, confirms the trustworthiness of Scripture since from it we can learn that if a prophet misspoke himself the Lord did not leave the matter unattended. It is noteworthy, however, that there appears no other instance where the Lord "corrects" his prophet's utterance.

3. Another important effect that "being moved by the Holy Spirit" had upon the prophets was that they were filled with courage and power. They, e.g., Elijah and Isaiah, stand fearlessly before hostile kings; they, e.g., Amos, preach boldly to unresponsive audiences. Sometimes they are compelled to speak even at the cost of their lives. Thus the dynamic of *feromenoi* is demonstrated in the ministry of the prophets. They had an implicit faith in their message and they were willing to risk their lives for it. They knew that what the Lord had spoken was indubitable truth and commended the total acceptance and submission of the people.

4. A fourth observation which must be made is that the message of the prophets was endowed with a singular power. The claim of the Lord in Isa. 55:11 "so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please . . ." is realized constantly. In some instances it converts, in other instances it hardens, but it always prospers in the thing whereunto the Lord sent it.

A final observation is that the message of the prophets manifests a remarkable unity. This is particularly striking since it appears that there is little or no collaboration among the prophets. They arise in different generations, and in different localities. Yet they always speak the same message, "Seek ye the Lord." They always denounce the mind of the flesh.

We conclude, therefore, that although the prophets do not generally claim to speak under the direct influence of the Spirit there is a strong prophetic witness to the Spirit's activity in the ministry of the prophets, cf. Ezekiel and Zechariah, an activity which did not necessarily exempt the prophets from sin and error in other areas of life but which did "move" them to proclaim the "words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit." This indicates a divine revelation and a transmission of that revelation which is completely authoritative and trustworthy.

2. Pertinent Questions:

a. Is Peter restricting his discussion to the strictly prophetic element of the Old Testament?

The following considerations may indicate that Peter's words could be understood as referring solely to the prophetic element.

1) The word "prophecy" is used repeatedly (vss. 19, 20, 21).

2) The preceding context deals with the history of salvation which the prophets had predicted.

More weighty considerations, however, would indicate that Peter intends to include the entire Old Testament under the term "prophecy":

1) It was natural that Peter would speak of the "word of prophecy" since he is indicating in the context that the coming of Christ had been predicted. This prediction is found in the prophets' elements of the Old Testament.

2) The predictions of Christ's coming are not found exclusively in the books of the prophets, and Peter refers to at least one prediction which is found in the book of Psalms (cf. I Peter 2:7).

3) Peter urges his readers to "take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place" which suggests more than the writings of the prophets. It implies taking heed to the moral teaching of the Old Testament and lessons of Old Testament history as well (cf. II Peter 2:1ff).

It is to be concluded then that Peter's use of the word "prophecy" ought not to be understood in the restrictive sense, but *pars pro tota*. The force of Peter's words is that the whole of the Old Testament came not by the will of man, but from God.

Yet even if the term "prophecy" as used by Peter be understood to refer to the Old Testament prophecies alone, as some prefer to understand it, it is of minor consequence. The honor and esteem which the Jews generally gave to the rest of the Old Testament, particularly the writings of Moses, were certainly as high as any that they accorded to the writing of the prophets (cf. Luke 16:29-31). It ought to be observed, furthermore, that Peter makes free use of historical sections and obviously accepts them as history with revelatory and normative value. For example:

1) In his epistles he obviously accepts the historicity of Abraham and Sarah (I Peter 3:5f), the deluge of Noah (I Peter 3:20, II Peter 3:5, 6), the false prophets of the Old Testament (II Peter 2:1), Noah (II Peter 2:5), Sodom and Gomorrah (II Peter 2:6), Balaam and the speaking ass (II Peter 2:15f).

2) In his preaching as recorded in Acts he indicates that he accepts the historicity of the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16), of David (Acts 2:29), of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Acts 3:13), and Moses (Acts 3:22).

b. Recognizing that men were the agents by which God communicated his message, and that the role of these men was significant, as pointed up by the emphatic position given *anthropoi* in the sentence, what may be deduced from this passage as to the effect of the human activity upon the finished product of Scripture?

1) The Bible is intensely human for it is written in human language. It has no esoteric style or vocabulary. It employs commonly understood rhetoric. The prophets spoke in the vocabulary and thought patterns of their time.

2) This humanness bears a varied character as exemplified by the fact that the books of Scripture differ greatly in style, vocabulary, idiomatic expression, cultural outlook and influence.

3) In the main it can be said that although the Spirit moved the prophets to speak, the message they spoke was not exclusively God's message. It became their message also. The prophets were indignant con-

cerning the sins and injustices they were called upon to denounce. They were sorrowful about the message which announced judgment and doom on Israel. They rejoiced in the message of salvation and reconciliation.

4) Peter gives no hint of a "ready-made" Scripture which fell from heaven as the Moslems and Mormons claim for their holy writings. Our Scriptures have come to us by the voice and hand of man.

c. What may be deduced from this passage as to the effect of the Spirit's activity upon the finished product of Scripture?

1) The prophets' speaking (and its inscription) was not of a common or ordinary character. Their speaking is to be distinguished, not only from the ordinary speech of men, but even from the official teaching of the law by the priest in the temple. The uniqueness of their message is suggested by the word *feromenoi*, "moved," since this verb is used to describe a special and extra-ordinary activity of the Spirit (cf. re. Gen. 1:2 above). Although they speak in the language of men, there is an intensely divine stamp upon the message. They accurately predict the fate of evil nations and the punishments of wayward Israel. More amazingly they predict the coming and sufferings of Christ announcing the salvation of Israel through him.

2) Since the prophets were "moved by the Holy Spirit" it is natural that Scripture should be considered the Word of God, the ultimate in normative authority.

3) Since the prophets were "moved by the Holy Spirit" Peter manifestly believed that their message was the bearer of divine power, so as to assure its fulfillment, cf. Isa. 55:11. We should observe then that Peter is emphasizing here the reliability of the Scriptures of which this dynamic is an essential element. We may conclude then that because of the influence of the Spirit of God upon the prophets, their message is completely trustworthy.

d. Is it to be assumed that Peter's claim concerning what "men spake" may also be applied to the inscription of their words?

Yes, for Peter's direct reference is to Scripture seeing that it is only by way of the inscripturated message that the prophets could speak to Peter and his readers.

3. General Conclusions from II Peter 1:19-21.

a. Peter's claim that "no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" clearly indicates that the Scriptures have their origin in God. In this sense the Bible is wholly divine.

b. Men were the agents of the Holy Spirit in the production of the Scriptures. Hence Scripture was written in human language, *by* as well as *for* men. In this sense the Bible is fully human.

c. The activity denoted by the word *feromenoi* is a singular one, and must not be confused with the general endowment of the Spirit. The prophets were impelled (and in some instances were compelled, e.g. Jonah) to speak, and their message was the very "words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit."

d. Peter's own use of Scripture demonstrates that he accepted it as completely trustworthy and authoritative on that which it speaks. Nowhere is the reliability of Scripture brought into question. It is everywhere assumed.

e. What Paul says positively, "all Scripture is inspired" (II Tim. 3:16), Peter says even more forcefully in a negative statement, "no prophecy ever came by the will of man. . . ." Paul makes an all inclusive statement, "All Scripture . . ." and says that in its entirety it is the product of inspiration. Peter makes an all exclusive statement, "No prophecy ever came by the will of man," by which he teaches that there is no Scripture, but it has come from God. Paul speaks of inspiration; Peter speaks of men being moved (or driven) by the Holy Spirit. Both make it clear that the uniqueness of Scripture lies in its divine origin and that *therefore* bears divine authority and divine trustworthiness.

C. *Matt. 5:18*: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." *Luke 16:17*: "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall."

1. *Relevant observations*:

a. Jesus here makes a claim concerning "the law." What is included in this "law"? Does Jesus have reference merely to the moral, civil, and ceremonial legislation of the Old Testament? Does He have in mind the five books of Moses which were commonly called "the law" by the Jews? Or does He refer to the whole Old Testament Scripture which was sometimes called "the law"? (I Cor. 14:21; John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25 etc.).

The succeeding context would suggest the first in view of the fact that Jesus speaks of "righteousness" and proceeds to give a commentary on the moral precepts of the law which He sets over against the official commentary of Judaism. However, it must not be overlooked that the discussion is introduced with the declaration, "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." At this point, at least, both law and prophets are in Jesus' purview. Neither may it be overlooked that at the conclusion of vs. 18 Jesus indicates as the temporal *terminus ad quem* of His claim for "the Law," "till all things be accomplished." This would strongly suggest that "the prophets" are still in His purview at this point. It is safe to conclude, therefore, that by "the law" in vs. 18 Jesus was speaking of the whole Old Testament Scripture. In fact, any other conclusion would be hazardous in view of insufficient evidence to the contrary.

The similar statement found in *Luke 16:17* is also preceded by an introduction which indicates that not the law narrowly conceived but the whole Old Testament is in mind, cf. vs. 16: "The law and the prophets were until John."

b. The claim made concerning Old Testament Scripture is that "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished" (*Matt. 5:18*); rather that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall" (*Luke 16:17*).

c. It can hardly be supposed that Jesus is here talking about text transcription. This is not His universe of discourse. Consequently He obviously uses the expression "one jot or one tittle" figuratively. His meaning is not that the smallest detail of the text of Scripture will never be lost or changed, but rather that not even the smallest detail of the message of Old Testament Scripture shall fail.

d. His claim is that the message of Old Testament Scripture is characterized by an indefectible authority and trustworthiness. Its message, even to its smallest detail, shall stand unchangeable and with abiding authority. Not one tiny particle of that message can "fall." Its message in its whole extent and in all its parts is "infallible." It is its message and not the inscripturation of that message for which Jesus here makes a claim.

e. Nevertheless, that message, in its whole extent and in all its parts, even to the smallest and least significant detail, is known only by way of its inscripturation. This is what the particular figure employed by Jesus calls forcefully to our attention. If it had been a spoken message that He had had in mind He would have had to say, Not one syllable or voice inflection shall pass away. Instead He speaks of "jot" and "tittle." The thought cannot be escaped, therefore, that Jesus here assumes that the message of Old Testament Scripture, the message which shall "in no wise pass away" and which cannot "fall," was accurately expressed in the sacred writings down to their very "jots" and "tittles." He that would know that message must heed every "jot" and "tittle" and must have confidence in it because the message it conveys "shall in no wise pass away."

f. Jesus' own use of Scripture illustrates the point thus made. When answering the Sadducees who questioned Him about the resurrection He said, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scripture, nor the power of God. . . . But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." *Matt. 22:29, 31, 32*, cf. *Mark 12:24, 27*. The Sadducees had failed to give due consideration to the tense of a verb.

g. But since the primary subject of Jesus' discourse in *Matt. 5:18* and *Luke 16:17* is the message of Scripture rather than the written text as such, it must be asked what that message is for which He claims indefectible authority and trustworthiness. It is expressly that which Jesus came "to fulfil" and that which shall surely "be accomplished." In other words, it is all that which Scripture says shall be fulfilled and all that which Scripture says must be accomplished, and these to the minutest detail. To these things Jesus makes obvious, though indirect, reference when He calls Scripture "law and prophets." Law and prophecy are precisely the things which can be "fulfilled" and "accomplished." This message possesses the character of absolute authority and trustworthiness.

h. The authority and trustworthiness of this message of Scripture is such in the eyes of Jesus that it stands sovereign over history, even over

His own participation in history. When His disciples would resist He arrest He restrains them with the words, "Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Matt. 26:53, 54. Then turning to the mob which stood against Him He reminds them that He is subject not so much to their power and perversity as to the Scriptures of the prophets. "All this is come to pass," He said, "that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" vs. 56. So it was throughout His earthly career. That which He came to do and that which was done to Him was all directed by the Scriptures. There was no fortuity in events. There was rather the "need" that all things "be fulfilled . . . which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms concerning (him)" Luke 24:45, cf. v. 46. Jesus speaks of Scripture as though it were the very counsel of a sovereign God to which all is subject. He views Scripture, therefore, as bearing the authority of a wholly reliable disclosure of the will and purpose of God. Its message is trustworthy and cannot fail of being fully realized in history.

i. The claim which Jesus makes for the message of Scripture has an instructive parallel in the claim which He makes for His own words. In the course of His eschatological disclosures He paused to say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" Matt. 24:35, and parallels. In saying that His words shall not pass away it is evident that Jesus was not speaking of verbal utterances as such. Most of these were not recorded and so have not been preserved. Jesus spoke rather of the message which His words conveyed. That message, He claimed, would not fail. Every word of it would stand, that is, every part would be fulfilled.

This is in all its essential points the same claim that Jesus makes for Scripture. As His words "shall not pass away" even though heaven and earth depart, so not one jot or one tittle "shall . . . pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." Although the Lord nowhere makes an explicit comparison between His words and those of Scripture, it is apparent that He views the words of Scripture as being equally authoritative and equally trustworthy with His own.

This is the more significant in view of the fact that Jesus Himself spoke by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Dr. A. Kuyper has well reminded us that "the representation . . . that Christ knew all things without inspiration spontaneously . . . is nothing less than the denial of the incarnation of the Word. The consciousness of God and the Mediatorial consciousness of the Christ are not one, but two, and the transfer of Divine thoughts from the consciousness of God into the consciousness of the Christ is not merely inspiration, but inspiration in its highest form . . ." (*En-cyclopaedia der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, Vol. II, pp. 492f). Jesus made it plain that the words He spoke were not His words but the Father's, John 14:10, 24; 7:16. Furthermore, He spoke the Father's words through the Spirit. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure" John 3:34. As One who

has received the Spirit He fulfilled His prophetic ministry. Because of the influence of the Spirit His words are "the words of God." In Him the prophecy was fulfilled which said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. . . ." Luke 4:18, cf. Matt. 12:18.

Jesus, it is true, received the Spirit without measure. By that token He is the "Chief Prophet." But the Spirit He received was the same Spirit of inspiration by which the authors of Scripture wrote. Therefore Jesus did not hesitate to build the edifice of His own prophetic ministry on the foundation of the Old Testament. He spoke as one who had authority in Himself to speak forth the word of God, but at the same time He accepted the full divine authority of Scripture and submitted to it. Although His was "inspiration in the highest form," He accorded to Scripture the same respect which He demanded for His own words.

Conclusions:

1) Jesus' express claim in Matt. 5:18 is that the message of Old Testament Scripture, a message which is characterized as "law and prophets," a message which shall be "fulfilled" and which must be "accomplished," is of absolute authority and of absolute trustworthiness and stands, as respects these two qualities, on an equal plane with His own words.

2) This authoritative and trustworthy message is inerrantly conveyed by the very jots and titles of Scripture so that it can properly be identified with Scripture.⁽⁶⁾

3) The absolute authority and trustworthiness claimed by Jesus for the message of Scripture, and which by identification of that message with Scripture carry over to Scripture itself, and are applied to Scripture as the conveyor of that message, not to Scripture as an encyclopedia of human knowledge.

D. *John 10:35* "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), say ye of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

1. Relevant observations.

a. The key word, *luthénai* which is usually translated here "broken"⁽⁶⁾ has three meanings which cover most of its 34 occurrences in the New Testament: (1) to release or loosen from anything that binds (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; 21:2; Mark 1:7; 11:2, 4, 5; Luke 3:16; 13:15, 16; 19:30, 31, 33; John 1:27; 11:44; Acts 2:24; 7:33; 13:25; 22:30; I Cor. 7:27; Rev. 1:5; 5:2; 9:14, 15; 20:3, 7); (2) to transgress a moral precept (Matt. 5:19; John 5:18; 7:23); (3) to destroy anything, to break it up, to disintegrate it (John 2:19; Acts 27:41; Eph. 2:14; II Peter 3:10, 11, 12; I John 3:8; cf. Acts 13:43).

⁽⁶⁾ This is not to question the legitimacy of textual criticism as an area of Scriptural investigation. On the contrary, it highlights its importance.

⁽⁶⁾ So in Authorized Version, American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, Berkeley Version. William's translation has "made null and void."

It is difficult to fit the usage of John 10:35 into any one of these three rather well defined meanings. Jesus can hardly have meant that Scripture cannot be transgressed. Men can and do transgress its precepts. The idea of destroying as expressed in the passages listed above under (3) hardly seems to fit either. Jesus is not saying that no one or nothing can break up and so destroy Scripture. Nor does the idea of loosing or releasing seem to apply since there is nothing in the context to suggest binding, as though Scripture is so bound to something that it cannot be released. The other instances of the usage of *luthénai* are then not of much help in determining the precise meaning here. We are forced to determine that precise meaning on the basis of its immediate context.

The episode which occasions Jesus' statement is the offense of the Jews on hearing the striking claim of Jesus, "I and the Father are one" (vs. 30). In anger they took up stones to stone Him, but hurled first the charge, "Thou, being a man, makest thyself God." To that our Lord replied, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken) say ye of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

The specific point at issue between Jesus and the Jews here is not whether or not Jesus is the Only-begotten Son of God. It is rather whether or not Jesus blasphemed when He said, "I am the Son of God." The Jews say, yes. If a man calls himself God, or even if he calls himself the Son of God, thus making himself equal with God, cf. John 5:18, he has blasphemed and has made himself worthy of death. Jesus said, no. Even the Scripture calls men "gods" and does so very directly, saying "I said, Ye are gods." (7) Having made that defense Jesus reinforces it with the statement: *kai ou dunatai luthénai n graphé*. This proves His point, He says, that He cannot be charged legally with blasphemy. He has done no more than Scripture itself has done. "And the Scripture cannot be broken."

It must be noted that Jesus does not here quote a prophecy of which He sees the present moment to be a fulfillment, and then add parenthetically that no prophecy of Scripture can fail of fulfillment. Nor does He refer to a commandment and then observe that no commandment of Scripture can fail of fulfillment. On the contrary, Jesus quotes a Psalm in which the judges of Israel are warned that they themselves have a Judge. Although they stand in the place of God (Deut. 1:17; 19:17; II Chron. 19:6) so that they are even called "gods" they must judge their fellowmen as those who will themselves be judged.

The passage, then, to which Jesus refers, does not say that men will be gods, nor even that they actually are gods. It says only that *in some sense* men can appropriately be called "gods." The language is figurative. But it proves that one does not blaspheme merely by calling a man the Son of God for Scripture goes farther when it calls human judges "gods."

(7) He refers to Psalm 82 where Scripture actually calls men "gods" twice, vs. 1, 6.

When, then, Jesus says, "And the scripture cannot be broken [luthénai] what does He mean by *luthénai*?

The verb is passive in form and ought to be understood as passive in idea. It says that there is something that cannot be done to Scripture. The basic idea of the verb seems to be "to loosen" or "to release from that which binds." By extension it comes to mean "to disintegrate" and then "to destroy." When applied to moral precepts it comes to mean "to break their authority or binding character," not that this actually can be done, but it can be attempted and every act of disobedience is just such an attempt (Mark 7:13).

It would seem that it is this last idea which Jesus expresses here, but with a unique application. As noted above, we do not have here a claim about Scriptural precepts, that they cannot be broken, but about Scripture itself, that it cannot be broken. Jesus affirms that what is written is binding on us to accept. We cannot break its binding force. What is written stands and it cannot be made to fail. It is secure against attack or criticism. What is written is written, and it cannot be annulled or the force of its words cancelled.

No doubt this is the same thought expressed by interpreters in a variety of ways. Calvin (*sub loco*) and John Murray (*Infallible Word*, p. 26) both interpret Jesus as meaning that "Scripture is inviolable." Marcus Dods (*Expositors' Greek Testament, sub loco*) paraphrases Jesus' words thus "Scripture cannot be denied or put aside." Lenski (*sub loco*) understands Jesus to say that "Scripture stands immutable, indestructible in its verity." Warfield (*op. cit.*, p. 139) takes Jesus to say that "it is impossible for the Scripture to be annulled, its authority to be withstood, or denied."

b. It must be asked, secondly, concerning what Jesus makes this claim. He makes it concerning "scripture." "Scripture." He says, "cannot be broken." By "scripture" He means:

1) a body of literature, and that body of literature in its entirety and as a unit. He raises no question about the extent of Scripture. His claim presupposes that there is a commonly recognized body of writing to which he can refer simply as "scripture." Of that whole body of writing, made up of many parts, containing a great variety of literary styles, and covering a wide range of subjects, He declares that it "cannot be broken."

2) a body of literature which possesses a unique character, standing discernibly apart from all other literature. It is unique in that it was written by men "in the Spirit" (Matt. 22:43), speaks with divine authority (see the above discussion of Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17), and discloses God's plan and purpose of redemption centered in the person and work of Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). He speaks of a body of literature, therefore, which is so unique that it cannot ultimately be evaluated by the canons of any other body of literature but only in terms of itself. Concerning such a body of literature Jesus said, it "cannot be broken." It is inviolable.

c. Moreover, Scripture is inviolable not only in its teaching but also in its literary framework. In the passage under consideration the point

at issue between Jesus and the Jews is not a matter of doctrine, or of prophecy, or of historical fact, or of moral precept. It is rather, as we have seen, a question of propriety of language, or, more strictly, a question of the legality of using a certain mode of expression. It was the question, can a man call himself the Son of God without blaspheming? Jesus reminds the Jews that Scripture calls men "gods." Concerning that language Jesus asserts, "And the scripture cannot be broken." But the passage in Psalm 82 quoted by the Lord is not simple didactic prose; it is a poetic form of speech. It does not mean to say that men actually are "gods," but only that in the office of judge they stand in the place of God.

Elsewhere Jesus has claimed that the teaching of Scripture is inviolable. By identifying the message of Scripture with the text of Scripture, even to its jots and tittles, He has indirectly made a claim also regarding the trustworthiness of Scripture as a vehicle for communicating that message. Here He makes a claim concerning the literary form in which that message is cast and through which it is communicated. He claims that this literary form is also inviolable. If this seems to be too large a conclusion, let it be remembered that our Lord makes here a sweeping claim concerning Scripture and then applies that claim to a relatively insignificant matter. From this we must draw large conclusions. The more sweeping the claim and the more minute the application, the larger the conclusion at which we must arrive.

If Jesus had made this claim for Scripture with reference to some matter of faith or practice or prophecy or history, His statement would only have reinforced His other statements examined above, but would have added nothing essentially new. Now, however, He has made a further claim. Speaking of a matter which has to do merely with the *literary form* of Scripture—the fact that by a figure of speech men are called "gods"—He declares Scripture inviolable.

The only way to escape the force of Jesus' words here is to assume that Jesus is employing irony in an *ad hominem* argument. And it is true that there is an obvious *ad hominem* element in Jesus' reply to the Jews. Their quickness to accuse Him of blasphemy is prompted by their hopelessly legalistic conception of morality. Because He senses the presence of that legalistic mind Jesus chooses not to argue the fundamental point with them, whether or not He is indeed the Son of God, but rather the fine legal point whether or not, according to the Judaistic conception of the law, He has actually blasphemed.

However, to assert that Jesus was speaking merely *ad hominem* in His parenthetical remark concerning Scripture would seem to be a deliberate effort to escape the force of His words. In view of Jesus' own respect for Scripture as revealed by His reverent use of it, it is far more in character to understand Him as expressing a truth here on which He and the Jews both stand. Although often critical of their legalism, Jesus nowhere else censures their view of Scripture. There is not sufficient reason to suppose that He does so here.

But then we are faced with a very high claim for Scripture. Not only does Scripture carry absolute authority and absolute trustworthiness regarding its message (see above under Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17) but it is also *inviolable in its literary form*. This does not mean, of course, that grammarians and linguists cannot find language irregularities in Scripture. Nor does it mean that all of Scripture is of equal literary quality. The point is rather that as a vehicle for communicating the inspired message of God the literary framework of Scripture is inviolable and at no point can its force be annulled. Such is Jesus' claim.

This is really no more than we might have expected. A written message that possesses absolute authority and absolute trustworthiness as to its message, a message indicated by the very jots and tittles of its script, needs an inviolable vehicle of communication. It were strange indeed if a wholly divine message were not clothed in an inviolable literary framework. And what we might have expected, Jesus explicitly claims.

2. Conclusions:

- 1) Scripture, when evaluated as a unique instrument fashioned for a specific purpose, i.e. to provide a permanent, literary embodiment of the redemptive self-disclosure of God to men within history, is inviolable. It is secure in its truth-character against all the tests of time.
- 2) The quality of inviolableness applies also to the literary framework of Scripture as the vehicle for the transmission of God's message to men.

III. DOCTRINAL IMPLICATIONS OF SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONY

With the results of our study of Scripture's self-testimony before us it is necessary to correlate our findings and work out their relevance for the specific problem at hand, i.e. the relation between inspiration and infallibility, and the nature of Scriptural infallibility.

It would, however, be helpful first of all to examine the word "infallible" in order, if possible, to clarify its historic meaning in the theological context in which it is here being employed. Such an examination is the more necessary because of the mentality of our times which is geared more to the mathematical and descriptive sciences with their unique kind of exact precision.

The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles, 3rd edition, 1955, gives two related meanings for "infallible": "incapable of erring" and "not liable to fail," in that order. The first meaning is dated late Medieval and the second, 1526. Evidently it is a word of hoary age in the English language and of relatively stable meaning. Its stem springs from the Latin verb *fallo* which means among other things "to deceive," and "to make a mistake." With the prefix "in" it comes to mean "non-deceiving," and "non-erring."

Of special interest to us is the fact that the word "infallible" appears in the English translation of the Belgic Confession of Faith of 1561, Art. VII, where it stands in the phrase "this infallible rule" (*caste reigle infallible*). The context indicates its meaning tolerably well. The

"infallible rule" stands in contrast with the writings, customs, traditions, persons, councils, decrees, and statutes of men which are of incomparably lesser value because "all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself." Men are deceivers and vain, i.e., they are prone to falsify, to err, and to fail. The "infallible rule" possesses just those qualities which are not to be found in the works of men. It does not deceive; it does not err; it does not fail. It does not do so because of its infallibility.

In the King James Bible of 1611 "infallible" appears but once. The lone passage is Acts 1:3 where Luke speaks of the risen Christ who "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them [the disciples] forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." The phrase "infallible proofs" translates the Greek *tekmeriois*. This word is found only here in the New Testament but its meaning is not in doubt since it is a word of antiquity. The context of the Lukan passage also makes the author's idea clear. He is speaking of "that from which something is surely and plainly known; an indubitable evidence" (Thayer). On the basis of this word the 17th century English translators plainly intended to characterize the "proofs" of Jesus' resurrection as non-deceiving and non-failing. Thus their meaning is remarkably close to that of de Bres in the Belgic Confession.

The Canons of Dordt of 1618, '19, employs the concept infallible no less than six times, twice adjectively and four times adverbally. It speaks of "the infallible fruits of election" (*fructus electionis infallibiles, de onfeibare vruchten der verkiezing*), I, Art. 12, where the emphasis certainly is on the unfailingness of the fruits. A similar stress on unfailingness is to be found in four of the remaining five passages. In II, Art. 8, we read of bringing the elect "infallibly to salvation" (*ad salutem infallibititer perducendos, onfeilbaar tot de zaligheid te brengen*); in III and IV, Art. 12, of regenerating "certainly, infallibly, and effectively" (*certo, infallibititer, et efficaciter; zekertijk, onfeilbaarlijk en krachtiglijk*); in III and IV, par. 8, of bending man's will to faith and conversion "patently and infallibly" (*ad fidem et conversionem patenter et infallibititer flectat; krachtiglijk en onfeilbaarlijk zoude buigen tot geloof en bekeering*); and in V, par. 8, of continuing "infallibly . . . in faith" (*infallibit . . . in fide perseverentia; in 't geloof onfeilbaarlijk zouden volharden*). The sixth passage reads: "If the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of their infallible pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable," V, Art. 10. Here the revelant passage appears in the original Latin: *infallibile aeternae gloriae artha*, and in the Holland: *onbedrieglijk pand der eeuwige heerlijkheid*. It is interesting to note that at this point the Dutch translators discarded the usual "onfeilbaarlijk" and employed "onbedrieglijk." This shift is significant since *onbedrieglijk* stresses the idea of non-deceptiveness in distinction from *onfeilbaarlijk*, the latter expressing more the idea of unfailingness. Obviously the Dutch fathers understood the Latin *infallibile* when applied to "pledge" in the context as stressing non-deceptiveness. The "pledge of

eternal glory" here spoken of would not deceive or mislead the elect. Two emphases then are clearly recognized by the Synod of Dordt in the Latin concept *infallibile*, that of non-failingness and that of non-deceptiveness.

The idea of security against failure stands foremost in chapter XVI, ii, of the Westminster Confession of 1647. In speaking of the perseverance of the saints, it declares for "the certainty and infallibility thereof."

When the Westminster divines spoke of "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture," I, ix, they obviously had in mind the thought of non-deceptiveness. They said, "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." They probably did not intend to say that Scripture unfailingly interprets Scripture, which would be tantamount to saying that there is no passage in Scripture of which the meaning cannot be fully discovered by a careful scrutiny of Scripture. But they surely intended to say that the only reliable, undecieving interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. Scripture will not mislead or err in interpreting Scripture. In this Scripture stands alone among the interpreters of Scripture.

The Westminster Confession speaks elsewhere of God's "infallible" knowledge which, because it is also "infinite" and "independent upon the creature," makes all things open and manifest in God's sight so that "nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain," II, ii. Certainty and non-contingency give us the key to "infallibility" as here employed. "Infallible" knowledge is not so much complete knowledge, an idea conveyed by the word "infinite." This knowledge is rather reliable, non-failing and therefore inerrant. The idea of non-failingness gets strong emphasis in view of the main force of the sentence, which speaks not so much of the knowledge of things as of events. The same is true in the chapter on Providence, V, where God's "infallible fore-knowledge" is spoken of, and where it is said that "all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly," according to the decree of God.

In Chap. XVIII, ii and iii the Westminster Assembly spoke of "an infallible assurance of faith." This infallible assurance stands contrasted with the "fallible hope" of unregenerate men, a hope which "shall perish." They who possess "infallible assurance" "may . . . be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace." And "this certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope." An infallible assurance is one, therefore, which does not deceive and does not fail. It is certain. It cannot be in error.

What the Westminster divines meant by "the infallible truth" of the Word of God, I, iv, can therefore be established by their frequent use of the term in these other contexts. The truthfulness of Scripture is such, they affirm, that it does not falsify or deceive, does not err, and cannot fail.

We turn finally to the "Report of the Committee on Inspiration" to the Fourth Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1958. In this report the infallibility of Scripture is frequently asserted. However, when the authors of the report turn to a discussion of infallibility they speak simply of "inerrancy." Although their fifth conclusion affirms that Scripture is the "infallible and inerrant" word of God, it would appear that they thought of infallibility primarily in terms of inerrancy. According to this report, an infallible Scripture is a Scripture that does not err.

The above survey of the biblical and confessional use of the concept of infallibility leaves us with little doubt as to its connotations when applied to Scripture in the historic manner. It bears three distinct but closely related ideas. It says of Scripture that it is non-deceiving, i.e. non-falsifying; that it is inerrant; and that it is non-failing. To restrict infallibility to inerrancy as the Report on Inspiration appears to do would seem to be an impoverishment of the historic meaning. It ignores the idea of non-deceptiveness and non-failingness. Perhaps the most nearly equivalent term available to us in the English language is trustworthiness. Admittedly this suggested equivalent looks at the idea from the other side in much the same way that effect looks at an event from the opposite side of cause. But granted that this be so it nevertheless recommends itself to us because it not only encompasses the three ideas discovered in the historic meaning of infallibility but also properly signals the positive truth which the negative statements forcefully highlight and simultaneously suggests the attitude which ought to be accorded the Scriptures. Scripture, because it does not deceive, does not err, and does not fail, is therefore wholly trustworthy and commands implicit trust.

We return now to the correlation of our exegetical findings and a discussion of their relevance to the problem of the relation of inspiration and infallibility with its related question: How must we understand infallibility when applied to Scripture?

It has been said that "inerrancy is but an inference drawn from the fact that all Scripture is inspired of God" (Report on Inspiration). While not entirely above criticism (see above), this statement expresses an important truth. It fails to indicate, however, who it is that draws this inference. That theologians have done so is beyond dispute. That the Reformed Churches have done so also is obvious from a reading of the historic Reformed Creeds. Yet if it be only an inference drawn by theologians and church assemblies it has but limited value. It goes without saying that good and necessary inferences may legitimately be drawn from Scriptural teaching, yet it would be presumptuous for us to assume that the ways of God with men — of which revelation is certainly one — must necessarily conform to the patterns of human reason. Not that we are to suppose the presence of the irrational in God's ways, but we are to remember that God's thoughts are not our thoughts neither our ways His ways. His ways and thoughts are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than earth. If, on the other hand, the inference from inspiration to inerrancy, or infallibility in the larger sense, is drawn by

Scripture itself, then we are on solid ground. Then the inference has been legitimized by revelation itself.

An examination of Scriptural testimony discloses that this latter is indeed the case. Both Jesus and His apostles accept and assert the complete trustworthiness of Old Testament Scripture on the grounds that this written word was "God-breathed" (Paul), that it was written under the "moving" of the Holy Spirit (Peter), and that by means of it men spake "in the Spirit" (Jesus). Old Testament Scripture is made up of human words, but because of the sovereign activity of God operative in its production this Scripture is the Word of God adorned with divine authority and trustworthiness. Of supreme significance is the fact that Jesus, who Himself spoke by the Spirit, ascribed an authority and trustworthiness to the Old Testament equal to that of His own teaching and Himself bowed submissively to its authority.⁽⁸⁾ Moreover, He did not take it upon Himself to preserve in writing His gospel of the kingdom but entrusted that writing to His appointed ambassadors whom He endowed with the Spirit. Their Spirit-taught witness and His Spirit-taught witness as transmitted by them, was to be the Word of God of the new covenant. The common denominator between the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles which makes their words of equal authority and trustworthiness is the Holy Spirit who "leads into all the truth." The inference from inspiration to infallibility is indeed legitimized by revelation itself.

But how must we understand infallibility as applied to Scripture? As we have seen, infallibility connotes non-deceptiveness, inerrancy, and non-failingness, i.e. all those qualities which make for complete trustworthiness. How are these to be understood as ascribed to Scripture?

At this point great care must be exercised. The authors of the Report on Inspiration have wisely said, "The concept of inerrancy must not, however, be arbitrarily framed; it must be derived from the Scripture itself. We may not impose upon the Bible preconceived notions of inerrancy." The same applies equally to infallibility in the larger sense. In drawing our inference regarding infallibility we must be careful neither to conclude too little nor too much. To do the former would be to take away from the words of Scripture: to do the latter would be to add; and against both we are solemnly warned (Rev. 22:18, 19).

Initially we may say that infallibility as an inference drawn from inspiration is to be ascribed to Scripture only in accord with the extent, nature, and purpose of inspiration.

The extent of inspiration, we affirm, is both plenary and verbal. It reaches to the whole of Scripture and to all its parts. We must therefore assume that Scripture's trustworthiness extends to every word. However, inspiration with its sequent divine trustworthiness does not apply to each word, each "jot and tittle," considered in isolation. Warfield has well said that "no one supposes that the mere grammatical forms separately

⁽⁸⁾ How futile then is the attempt of the Form Criticism school to determine the exact words of Jesus and to give them an authority higher than the rest of Scripture!

considered are inspired: the claim concerns words in their ordered sequence — in their living flow in the sentences . . ." (op. cit. p. 425). Words must get their meaning from their usage in their respective contexts else they can be made to do violence to the author's intent. By the same token we may not lift any portion of Scripture, however large or small, out of its original context in the larger body of inspired literature and still claim for it, in its artificial isolation, divine trustworthiness. That is to say, we can distil from the doctrine of plenary, verbal inspiration only that Scripture possesses a divine trustworthiness on matters concerning which it speaks, not on matters on which certain passages, in isolation, may seem to speak, nor yet on matters on which men, by improperly handling Scripture, may seek to force Scripture to speak.

It must be observed, however, that this does not allow us in any way to eliminate certain troublesome words or statements from Scripture on the grounds that they are superfluous to the Holy Spirit's purpose and hence participate to a less degree in inspiration. Much less may we suppose that some words lie altogether outside of divine inspiration, i.e., that they appear only by "permission." Any kind of selective elimination would be, to say the least, extremely hazardous in view of the fact that we possess no criterion for selectivity. But, more to the point, it cannot be justified on the basis of the doctrine of verbal inspiration, which demands that every word be accepted as an inspired word in the context in which it stands. "Inspiration," and more precisely "spiration" (*theopneustos*, II Tim. 3:16), is a concept which denotes positive action. It hardly allows for passivity. A word may contribute an idea more or less incidental to the author's main purpose. Yet every word remains an inspired word and must be supposed to have a purpose even when that purpose may be difficult to discern. So all the words of Scripture, speaking in their "ordered sequence," are to be received as wholly trustworthy.

As to the nature of inspiration, we begin with the assumption that it is organic. Although this view is often misconstrued, we do not take the time here to expound it at length. Suffice it to say that we mean by this characterization that the Holy Spirit did not suppress the personalities of the human writers of Scripture "but rather that he sovereignly prepared, controlled and directed them in such a way that he utilized their endowments and experiences, their research and reflection, their language and style" (Concl. 3, Report on Inspiration). Yet He so moved them that what they wrote is the very Word of God. On the one hand this does not give warrant for speaking of a fallible human witness to divine revelation, for such would be a denial of any distinctively positive effect of inspiration on Scripture. It is precisely the act of divine inspiration that secures for Scripture its divine trustworthiness. On the other hand the organic nature of inspiration precludes defining infallibility in terms of purity of literary style, pedantic regularity in grammatical construction and orthography or monotonous uniformity in literary skill. It warns us further not to expect that the human authors wrote from the vantage point of omniscience and full

comprehension. They were men whose knowledge did not run ahead of their day until they were acted upon by the inspiring Spirit of God, and then their knowledge advanced only in those matters on which God would have them speak with authority.

Finally, there is the purpose of inspiration. That purpose, the churches recognize, was to constitute Scripture a trustworthy "rule of faith and practice." It was, therefore, to constitute Scripture a self-revelation of God possessing an authority and a trustworthiness greater than that which can be claimed for any merely human witness, i.e., with an authority and a trustworthiness that is divine. Authority and trustworthiness, to be sure, are not identical. Institutional authority, for example, does not depend on trustworthiness. Yet in the realm of witness, authority and trustworthiness are inseparable. Here authority extends only so far as trustworthiness, and in the inspired writings trustworthiness must be supposed to extend as far as authority. That leads us to a helpful conclusion. As an inspired "rule for faith and practice" Scripture must be supposed to speak with divine trustworthiness on all matters — matters of fact (historical, phenomenological, theological, psychological, or whatever), matters of experience, morality, promise, prediction — on which Scripture claims to speak authoritatively. And the area of Scripture's authoritative speaking cannot be limited or restricted in any way except by the actual speaking of Scripture.

The infallibility of Scripture, then, which is to be inferred from the extent, nature, and purpose of inspiration is a trustworthiness which attaches to all the words of Scripture in their "ordered sequence" and which extends as far as the authority of Scripture extends. It is a *divine* trustworthiness in view of the fact that inspiration (God-breathedness) constitutes these human writings the very Word of God. It is a trustworthiness which allows for but is not compromised by the limited knowledge and limited comprehension of the human writers and by their varying degrees of literary skill.

* * * * *

In drawing these conclusions from the Scriptural doctrine of its own divine inspiration, four relevant facts concerning Scriptural revelation are to be kept in mind:

1. Scriptural revelation is genuinely historical and conceptual. It is a fact-word revelation. God has disclosed Himself in history by means of history. His providential control of all history constitutes a divine witness (Acts 14:17) confronting all men and rendering them "without excuse" if they do not acknowledge "his everlasting power and divinity" (Rom. 1:20). But this general revelation was as ineffectual unto the salvation of fallen man as was the general creative and providential activity of God. God's redemptive purposes called for redemptive acts in history and for a corresponding redemptive revelation in history. Scripture is the inspired record of those redemptive and revelatory acts of God together with the revelatory word which signaled and interpreted them, and apart from which they possess no genuinely revelatory or saving efficacy. The redemptive and revelatory acts of God

meet fallen man on the historical plane on which man languishes in his sins. The revelatory words of God speak to fallen man in the language of his human intercourse. These things are everywhere evident in the Scriptural witness to God's acting and God's speaking, but nowhere more clearly than in the Scriptural witness to the incarnation. This is not to deny that divine revelation is personal. It is only to affirm that the divine Person has chosen to disclose Himself to human persons by means of divine acts and divine words which speak to man in such a manner that he, with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, can apprehend the otherwise incomprehensible and thus enter into personal communion with God.

2. Scripture was not addressed to some non-existent universal man but to a certain people living in a certain era of time, and experiencing the changing circumstances normal to the living fluidity of history. Although communicating a divine self-disclosure intended for and valid for all men everywhere and in all ages, it was actually addressed to Israel and the apostolic church. Without distorting its message it adapted itself to the conditions and the culture of that chosen people. In fact, only by such adaptation could the revelation be communicated to any people without distortion. Each separate communication necessarily took account of the people to whom it was addressed and of the historical and cultural situation of that people at the time of the communication. To be sure, revelation, and the redemptive acts of God to which it attached itself, became increasingly dominant as a moulder of that historical and cultural situation. And back of these redemptive influences stood the all-pervasive providence of God sovereignly forming that historical and cultural situation. Nevertheless, the people whose history and culture were so formed was a people of a certain time, place, tradition, sense of values, and religious perspectives, having its own canons of conduct, wisdom, learning, history, etc., specifically, scriptural revelation necessarily reckoned with the fact that the people addressed was a people of a practical rather than a speculative turn of mind, a people in transition from the pastoral, nomadic life to the life of the settled community, a people scientifically naive when judged by modern standards, and a people influenced by a great variety of cultures as a result of a checkered history which brought it out of the cultural circle of Mesopotamia into the cultural circle of Egypt and settled it finally at the juncture of these two great cultural centers where it eventually came also under the influences of the cultures of Greece and Rome. A true exegesis of Scripture gives due weight to this necessary adaptation. At the same time it rejects all efforts to "demythologize"⁽⁹⁾ the Bible, recognizing that such efforts divorce redemptive truth from redemptive and revelatory fact, seeking vainly to maintain the former while ignoring if not denying the latter. All attempts to separate the so-called "kerygma"⁽¹⁰⁾ of Scripture from Scripture's historical framework result in a complete loss of revelatory content since the "kerygma" of Scripture is a witness to God as He discloses Himself in redemptive and revelatory acts.

(See notes 9 and 10 on page 155)

3. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit has made use of several kinds of literature in His authoritative communication of God's truth, and these must be explained according to the standards of the several kinds. To suppose that the demands of trustworthiness are such as to restrict the Holy Spirit to one form of literature is as absurd as to suppose that, while employing many literary forms, the Holy Spirit, in order to speak with divine trustworthiness, must be governed in His speaking by the canons of that one form which is most direct and most minutely precise. When, therefore, the Spirit-inspired Scripture speaks prophetically it must be explained according to the canons of sacred prophecy; when it speaks poetically it must be explained according to the canons of sacred poetry; when it speaks chokmatically (e.g. Proverbs), it must be explained according to the canons of sacred chokma; when it speaks apocalyptically (e.g. Revelation), it must be explained according to the canons of sacred apocalypse; and when it speaks historically it must be explained according to the canons of sacred history. In each instance we must suppose that the Spirit speaks with divine authority and trustworthiness even while speaking according to the canons which pertain to the specific genus of literature employed. There are, after all, as has been well said, "vague ways of speaking that are truer than strict facts would be. When the Psalmist said, 'Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law,' he did not state the fact, but he stated a truth deeper than fact, and truer."

4. Finally, Scriptural revelation is truly progressive. That which is "latent" in the Old Testament is "patent" in the New. This progression is one, therefore, which must be carefully distinguished from that which is manifested in the history of human efforts in such areas as philosophy, science, and social structuring. These fallible, human efforts have found with embarrassing frequency that progress is possible for them only by abandoning old, discredited theories and ideas. The progressiveness of scriptural revelation is a progression from dimness to clear light; from prophecy and promise to fulfillment; from shadow and type to substance; from preparation to realization. It is a progression within unity and continuity. It is a progression which makes the "old" truly old and the "new" truly new without discrediting the Old or isolating

(9) Rudolph Bultmann, the German theologian with whose name "demythologizing" is usually associated, teaches that in the gospels we find a mixture of history and myth. The task of the theologian is to separate the one from the other. His conclusion is that the pre-existence, incarnation, resurrection, ascension and second coming of Christ all belong to the mythological aspects of the gospel. Of these, then, the Bible must be "demythologized." What remains in the gospels of historical value is the crucifixion and the Church's faith in the resurrection. The true purpose of the gospel message was not to describe supernatural events that take place in space and time, but rather to announce the coming of God to man and the radical change that this coming makes in man's existence (G. C. Berkouwer, *Het Werk van Christus*, pp. 44, 45; Baker, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. II, p. 780; P. E. Hughes, *Scripture and Myth*, p. 5).

(10) Greek for "message," "proclamation," "preaching" (R. Bultmann, *Schriftuurlijk Schriftgezag*, p. 224, ff; P. E. Hughes, *idem*, p. 5).

the New. Because of it the differences between Old and New are very real without destroying the unity and continuity of the revelation or allowing for conflict and disagreement.

* * * *

These conclusions regarding the infallibility of Scripture are remarkably confirmed by the Scriptural studies undertaken above. Jesus, Peter, and Paul are in complete agreement regarding the nature and extent of Scriptural infallibility. All Scripture, to its very "jots and tittles" is from God. The divine act of inspiration has communicated to all a divine quality which causes them to bear in themselves a divine authority before which men ought to submit and a divine trustworthiness which men ought to accept. There is no question of selectivity and there is no thought of greater or lesser degrees of inspiration, authority or trustworthiness. Moreover, it speaks with authority on whatever it chooses to speak. And when it speaks with authority it speaks with complete trustworthiness. To be sure, Scripture does not range encyclopedically over the whole spectrum of human knowledge. There is a central point of focus. Its purpose is to make men "wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." Therefore it centrally and pervasively witnesses to Christ and the way of salvation which God has both wrought and supremely revealed in Him. It is for this purpose and for this purpose only that Scripture makes use of Scripture, and it is from this perspective and this perspective only that Scripture makes claims for itself. Scripture presents itself solely as a divine self-revelation of God for redemptive purposes. But in communicating this redemptive self-disclosure of God Scripture claims to speak authoritatively and infallibly on all matters on which it finds necessity to speak. From the point of view of its revelatory purpose Scripture is inviolable even in its literary framework. "The Scripture cannot be broken."

The question whether or not the word infallibility adequately conveys Scripture's claim to its own trustworthiness can be confidently answered in the affirmative. Remembering that in the historic theological context it has connoted the ideas of non-falsifying, non-deceiving, inerrant, and non-failing, therefore of divine trustworthiness, the Church need not hesitate to ascribe infallibility to Scripture. As we have seen, these are precisely the claims for itself which Scripture makes and this is precisely the kind of confidence which Scripture manifests towards itself. Scripture never finds it necessary to correct Scripture or even to caution against an over enthusiastic confidence in Scripture, although Scripture does record Christ's warning against a *false* confidence in Scripture (John 5:39, 40). Whenever Scripture reflects on Scripture it is in such terms as manifest complete reliability and whenever Scripture uses Scripture it does so with the utmost assurance that Scripture is wholly trustworthy.

When applied concretely to Scripture this understanding of infallibility means that because God is a God who "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2), who does not change (Mal. 3:6) and whose word abides forever (Isa. 40:8), we must confidently expect that the precepts of Scripture are

perfectly consistent with each other, mutually compatible, and wholly trustworthy as indicators of the will of God for men; that Scriptural doctrines partake of the same consistency, mutual comparability and trustworthiness; and that the promises and predictive prophecies of Scripture possess the same qualities. With respect to historical, psychological and phenomenological facts it means that we must confidently expect that Scripture possesses such "accuracy" and such "consistency" as is required by the Spirit's purpose for speaking of such facts. Scripture does not mention facts merely to memorialize isolated facts. It rather includes them in order to communicate with absolute authority and trustworthiness the self-disclosure of God. At this point we must be careful, therefore, to apply such words as "accuracy," "inerrancy" and "consistency" in no other way than the nature of Scripture allows. By "accuracy," "inerrancy" and "consistency" we should not in the first instance mean that the historical, psychological or phenomenological statements of Scripture conform precisely — as we today understand precision — to event, or circumstance or nature or parallel statement, but that they completely fulfil the Spirit's purpose for making these statements. This purpose, one must hasten to add, can only be discovered by a diligent and believing exegesis of Scripture. It is not to be posited before interpretation begins, but is to be learned solely from the Scripture itself.

If in any given passage that purpose requires precise conformity to event, circumstance, nature, or parallel statement, then a further kind of accuracy obtains. Many examples of such accuracy come readily to mind: Gen. 21:5, "And Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born"; Gen. 31:10b, "... the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were ringstreaked, speckled and grizzled"; Ex. 3:2b, "the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed"; Amos 1:1, "The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake"; Matt. 1:25, "... and he knew her not till she had brought forth a son . . .", etc. In fact it may be supposed that a substantial number of Scripture possess such accuracy since in substantial parts of Scripture the intent and purpose of the Holy Spirit requires it.

But if the purpose of the Spirit in making historical, psychological, or phenomenological statements does not require "photographic" precision, if it requires only the precision of the "portrait", we may demand no more. When, for example, Moses wrote that the hare and the coney "chew the cud" (Lev. 11:5, 6; Dt. 14:7); when Jesus said that God "maketh the sun to rise" (Matt. 5:45); when the prophets said of Solomon that he "made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones" (I Kings 10:27); when Moses said to Israel, "Behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Deut. 1:10); when Matthew wrote that "Joram begat Uzziah" (Matt. 1:8); when Jesus said "for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40); when

Jeremiah confessed "there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9); when Jehovah said of Leviathan "His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth forth from his mouth" (Job 41:21); we have no occasion for speaking of "inaccuracy", "error", or "inconsistency", even though these statements do not speak with pedantic precision, since the contexts in which they appear do not require of them precise conformity to event, circumstance, nature, or parallel statement. At the same time, such historical or phenomenological statements fully serve the Spirit's purpose and faithfully convey the Spirit's intended meaning. *From the point of view of their respective contexts and the purpose of Scripture they are wholly accurate so that through them the Spirit speaks with absolute authority and absolute trustworthiness.* To speak of "inaccuracy", "error", or "inconsistency" is to speak unscripturally of Scripture and can be done only when Scripture is subjected to criteria which are not appropriate to Scripture. Whether or not the presently accepted text of Scripture is exact is quite another matter and belongs to the science of textual criticism.

What now of the so-called "problem passages" of Scripture in which Scripture seems to be inconsistent with itself, or contradictory, or outright erroneous? This is the not inconsiderable question which must still be faced. Let it be remembered, however, that the number of "problem passages" is not nearly so great as is sometimes claimed. Most difficulties evaporate before a careful and reverent study of the text. There remain, nevertheless, some problems which stubbornly resist all efforts at solution. It is with these that we are here concerned, and the question persists, what of them?

This is first of all a question of methodology. The question has been put somewhat as follows: is it more proper to handle the phenomena of Scripture, among which the problem passages appear, inductively with a view to formulating a doctrine of Scriptural infallibility which is in harmony with all the discovered "facts," or is it more proper to formulate the doctrine of infallibility from the self-testimony of Scripture alone and then approach the phenomena of Scripture with an a priori commitment to that doctrine?

It must be observed that this question does not confront us with a choice between radically antithetical approaches to Scripture. It is recognized that every obedient student of Scripture must begin with the a priori of faith, that is, with the presupposition of faith that Scripture is the only trustworthy authority on Scripture. It recognizes, further, that within the a priori of faith the believing student of Scripture must always study Scripture inductively in order to discover its message. The only question under consideration is, how far must our inductive study of Scripture extend in order to discover the nature and extent of Scriptural infallibility? Is this study to limit itself to the self-testimony of Scripture, both direct and indirect, or must it also extend to the phenomena of Scripture, including the problem passages? Must we wait with formulating the Scriptural doctrine of its own infallibility until we have examined all of Scripture so that our doctrine of infallibility may take account of all our "finding," or are we more obedient to Scripture

by listening only to the express claims of Scripture, both direct and indirect, and letting these claims control our study of the phenomena?

It may seem that the answer to this question is quite obvious. Our scientific-mindedness is inclined immediately to say that all the givens of Scripture must be canvassed if Scripture is to be taken seriously. Only so can a doctrine of infallibility be composed which is truly *Scriptural*. So obvious does this appear that many have pleaded for just this kind of study, suggesting that any other approach fails to do justice to the facts of Scripture and may lead to a concept of infallibility which would ultimately prove untenable.

There are, however, decisive considerations which point in another direction. Pre-eminent among these is the fact that Scripture has an explicit doctrine of its own infallibility. Infallibility is not merely an inference drawn from an examination of the phenomena of Scripture. It is rather an explicit claim of the Scripture for itself. Nor is it an obscure doctrine locked away in some difficult and unstressed passage. To the contrary, when one considers the number of passages in which Scripture's confidence in Scripture is demonstrated he discovers that this is one of the best attested of all the doctrines of Scripture. In view of this obvious fact, it remains for faith to listen obediently to Scripture's own testimony to its infallibility. Faith does not presume to know better than Scripture. It does not and it may not withhold judgment as to Scripture's infallibility until it has itself examined all the phenomena of Scripture. Neither does it nor may it allow its inferences drawn from the phenomena of Scripture to modify Scripture's doctrine of its own infallibility. It may no more presume to rest on its own independent judgment here than it may do so in respect to the sinlessness of Jesus. The doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus rests solely on the explicit teaching of the Bible and in no degree on our examination of the life of Jesus. Even so, our doctrine of Scriptural infallibility must rest solely on Scripture's own claims. To be sure, Scripture illustrates and elucidates this doctrine of Scripture. Scripture does not claim one thing for itself and then manifest something quite different. Nevertheless, our faith in the infallibility of Scripture does not rest on our discovery of its infallibility. It rests simply and solely on Scripture's claims. The same principle which applies in the formulating of other Scriptural doctrines applies here. Although this may seem like reasoning in a circle, it is no more so than is our faith in the deity of Christ which rests primarily on His self-testimony.

Moreover, to suppose that the fact of infallibility is to be learned from the self-testimony of Scripture but that the nature and extent of infallibility is to be learned only by way of an exhaustive examination of the phenomena of Scripture is to misunderstand the nature of Scripture's self-testimony. It is to suppose that Scripture teaches but a formal, abstract concept of infallibility, the specific content of which must be derived from an inductive study of the total body of Scripture. Ultimately this leads to a total dependence on fallible human investigation. Scripture's self-testimony, however, is specific. It claims an infallibility which is definite and recognizable. It does not lay itself open to the damage-

ing conjectures of our vaunted "scientific" investigations. It does not leave its infallibility to be defined by us but lays its own claims authoritatively upon us.

Furthermore, to suppose that the formulation of the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility awaits our exhaustive investigation of the phenomena of Scripture so that it can be adjusted to all the "facts" of Scripture leaves us with but two alternatives both of which are equally abhorrent to faith. Either the Church must rashly claim that her knowledge approaches omniscience so that she possesses all the relevant facts, even with respect to the problem passages, or else she must sadly acknowledge that although the Scripture teaches its own infallibility she must hold her confession of this doctrine in abeyance since she does not possess sufficient information to know what the infallibility of Scripture might be.

It becomes evident, therefore, that the faith of the Church is to be formed by the self-testimony of Scripture concerning its own infallibility, a testimony which is clearly to be heard in Scripture's express claims and in Scripture's many demonstrations of confidence in itself. This is not to say that the believer, having obediently heard that testimony, no longer meets with problems in Scripture. It does mean, however, that these problems do not arise out of the vagueness of the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility. They arise rather at the point of the application of this doctrine to the almost infinite variety of the phenomena of Scripture. And it is precisely at this point that the believing interpreter will move humbly and cautiously lest he do violence to Scripture, which is, he professes, the very word of God written.

IV. THE WITNESS OF THE CREEDS

Before we begin our study of the doctrinal standards of the Church, one specific question should be considered: why were these confessions formulated? We raise this question at this point not to inquire into the immediate causes which occasioned these confessions, but to state the relationship between them and the inspired Word of God.

In the days of the Reformation already certain sects and religious groups because of their Biblicism deemed the framing of confessions superfluous or even dangerous. The Anabaptists and the Arminians, like the Reformers, exalted the Bible, but, unlike the Reformers, downgraded the creeds. In more recent years the Puritans, the Congregationalists and the Fundamentalists have shared this devaluation of creeds and have advocated instead a simple lay religion built up directly from the Bible.

This anti-creedal view, often accompanied by a preoccupation with soteriology and eschatology, has frequently resulted in a fragmentary selection of Bible passages calculated to sustain certain cherished doctrinal positions.

Contrary to this trend which resulted in the increase of sects and independent ecclesiastical groups, the Reformed Churches drew up their forms of unity. That is, out of respect for the Bible the Reformed

Churches formed their creeds. They did not want merely to quote a number of texts from the Bible, nor did they regard the Bible as a collection of many separate truths. Rather, they spoke of the doctrine of the Bible as a whole and of the unified truth of the Bible. Therefore, being well-versed in Scripture, they carefully formulated in their confessions a summary of Christian doctrine.

Our conviction that the Reformed Standards are in harmony with the Word of God is clearly expressed in the Formula of Subscription of the Synod of Dort as follows: "We heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God."

"We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writing."

The Conclusion of the Canons of Dort exhorts all fellow-ministers in the Gospel of Christ "to regulate by the Scripture, according to the analogy of faith (*secundam fidei analogiam*) not only their sentiments, but also their language." The concept "analogy of faith" is derived scripturally from the Greek text of Romans 12:6. In commenting on this passage Calvin says: "(Paul here speaks of) the principal parts of religion with which all doctrine should be in harmony." Following Calvin's lead, Reformed theologians have generally interpreted this "analogy of faith" in terms of the "analogy of Scripture," confessing thereby that Scripture embraces a unity of doctrine which excludes inner-contradictions.

Behind the formulation of the Reformed Confessions lies this deep conviction concerning the unity of Scripture. The task of the Church is to confess and proclaim, maintain and defend this Scriptural unity of doctrine.

* * *

Synod has charged our study-committee with the mandate to study the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of our Creedal Standards (*Acts*, 1959, p. 73). Among these Standards only the Belgic Confession deals directly with the written Word of God (Articles III-VII); the Heidelberg Catechism does deal indirectly with this subject in answers 21, 25, 95, 96, 117, 123; the Canons of Dort do the same in I, Art. 14; I, Art. 17; I, par. 3; III and IV, Art. 12; V, Art. 10.

The main part of this section of our report will consist therefore of an analysis of relevant articles of the Confession. It will be followed by some consideration of the pertinent parts of the Catechism and Canons.

In our method we shall employ a *strictly* historical orientation, that is, we shall try to understand the Creeds in no other manner than was meant by their framers and was understood by the Churches which originally accepted them as their Standards. As for the Belgic Confession, it is a well-known fact that de Bres, in preparing this Creed, made

use of the Gallican Confession of 1559, the first draft of which was made by John Calvin. It is obvious, therefore, that the writings of Calvin, especially his Institutes, may be helpful in understanding the true meaning of the Belgic Confession.

Analysis of Art. III-VII of the Belgic Confession

Art. III. *The written Word of God.*

"We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that *men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit*, as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures."

a. This article clearly distinguishes between the Word of God as it was originally spoken and the Word as it was afterwards committed to writing. There was first an oral revelation which we cannot hear any more, and there is a written revelation which we can still read. However, this distinction does not clear the way for the idea of two separate revelations, the first of which has more value and is more direct than the other one. God commanded His servants to commit His revealed Word to writing. The written Word is none other than that which God had revealed, when men spoke "from" Him, being moved by the Holy Spirit. God Himself first uttered the ten commandments, and then "wrote with His own fingers the two tables of the law." Of course God has spoken much more through His prophets and apostles than we read in Scripture. But the speaking of the men of God resulted in Scripture, as appears most clearly in the context of the Petrine passage:

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

b. This article does not speak in so many words of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Only of the word first *spoken* by men is it said that its authors were moved by the Holy Spirit. We read further that this word is committed to writing "from a special care, which God has for us and our salvation." Finally the example is given of God's "writing with His own hand the tables of the law."

Why does this article not present an explicit exposition of the doctrine of inspiration? The answer is that such an exposition seemed to be superfluous at that time when Christians generally accepted this doctrine without dispute. Calvin, in explaining the *locus classicus* 2 Tim. 3:16, begins by saying: "This is the principle, that distinguishes our religion from all others, viz. that we know, that God has spoken to us, and that we are most certainly assured, that the prophets did not speak according to their own knowledge, but only proclaimed as instruments of the Holy Spirit what they had received from above." In his Institutes he explains, that God spoke to the fathers through the prophets, and then he continues: "But when God determined to give a more illustrious

form to the Church, He was pleased to commit and consign His word to writing, that the priests might there seek what they were to teach the people, and every doctrine delivered be brought to it as a test." Even the historical details were "dictated by the Holy Spirit" (IV, viii, 6). And the apostles were "sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit" (IV, viii, 9). Calvin stresses the point, not as a special Calvinistic doctrine, but as a principle of the Christian religion, that the Scriptures are from God and that the Holy Spirit is their primary Author. That, however, does not mean that he advocates a kind of mechanical theory of inspiration. His expressions "dictation" and "amanuenses" stress the activity of the primary Author, but he does not deny personal participation and contribution of the secondary authors. "Whether you read David, Isaiah, and others of the same class, whose discourse flows sweet and pleasant; or Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah and Zechariah, whose rougher idiom savours of rusticity; that majesty of the Spirit, to which I adverted, appears conspicuous in all" (I, viii, 2). Calvin does not solve the mystery which lies at the bottom of the distinction of the divine and the human activity, nor does he sacrifice the one on the altar of the other.

As for Guido de Bres, it may be said that he has the same reverence for the written Word of God as for the spoken Word, and he approvingly quotes Augustine: "In my opinion Scripture has such a value that I firmly believe that none of its authors made a mistake in writing. And, if some parts of it might seem to be in conflict with the truth, then I hold, that an error has crept into the manuscript or that the translation is not quite correct or that I don't understand it" (cf. Polman, *De Nederlense Geloofsbelijdenis* I, p. 179).

The "special care," of which Art. III speaks, is elucidated by the words of Calvin and de Bres. It consisted of a special act of God who made His written Word even "more illustrious" than His spoken Word, thus safeguarding its character as an abiding authority. This act of God resulted in a book, to which every doctrine is to be brought as to a test, and of which "none of its authors made a mistake in writing."

c. The necessity and the holiness of the written Word of God finds its highest expression in the words: "And He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law." The Bible itself stresses this point; it is stated in Ex. 24:12 and repeated in Ex. 31:18, 32:16, 34:1, Deut. 4:13 and Deut. 9:10. In the last place we read: "And Jehovah delivered unto me the two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which Jehovah spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly."

The example recorded here is exceptional only in the mode in which the oral Word of God became inscripturated. It is but the clearest indication of that substantial identity of the oral and the written Word which obtains throughout Scripture. All of God's written Word is to be considered as equal to the spoken Word.

d. Finally this article calls "such writings holy and divine Scriptures." Holy Scriptures means: Scriptures *separated* from all other scriptures.

Divine Scriptures means: Scriptures from God. Calvin gives this explanation: "Since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign His truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognised, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them" (I, vii, 1).

e. Since Heinrich Heppé in 1861 wrote his *Reformed Dogmatics*, set out and illustrated from the sources many theologians have become accustomed to make a sharp distinction between the earlier and later Reformed theology, especially with regard to the doctrine of the Word of God. One of them is Karl Barth, who wrote the "foreword" to the 1935 edition of Heppé's book in which he praised this work abundantly, especially in its appraisal of the doctrine of Scripture. "Heppé has done me the service, which he can and will do for others, of bringing me to understand the special direction in which dogmatic science has proceeded in the early Reformed Church."

Because Heppé's work continues to have a great influence today, especially in Neo-Orthodox circles, we should consider briefly his historical analysis. He begins by stating the assumed fact, that the older Reformed theology distinguished between the "Word of God" and "Holy Scriptures." "By the first term they meant all that God had spoken to the fathers in diverse ways and in latter times by His Son. It was therefore taught by Calvin and his immediate successors in Church teaching, that the Word of God, i.e. the manifold revelations or words in which God had spoken to men, were transmitted orally at the start and that it was only later that they were recorded. According to this account, then the 'Word of God' was the word spoken by God to individual men. The later dogmaticians on the contrary, separating the idea of inspiration from that of revelation, unanimously teach that the Word of God rests not upon God's personal acts or revelation but upon the manner of their recording, upon inspiration. On this view the 'Word of God' is the Word brought to record by inspiration, whereby the concepts 'Word of God' and 'Holy Scripture' were identified" (Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Engl. transl. 1950, p. 15). Heppé thus declares that according to Calvin the Scripture is the "original document of revelation" but the later dogmaticians identified it with revelation itself.

Abraham Kuyper already warned against Heppé, whom he called an Arminian and a Socinian (J. C. Rullmann, *Kuyper-Bibliographie* II, p. 271). Kuyper refuted his idea that Calvin taught an inspiration of the spoken Word only and not of the written Word. Other Reformed theologians have followed Kuyper. They were right; there is no contrast such as Heppé suggests between the older and the later Reformed theologians on the inspiration of the Holy Scripture. A study of the early creeds of the Reformation will make this clear. The oldest Reformed Confession begins with these words: "The holy, divine, biblical Scripture, which is the Word of God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit" (First Helvetic Confession, 1536, art. 1). And the first article of the Second Helvetic Con-

fession (1566) reads: "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 spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures."

f. The Gallican Confession of Faith declares the same in these words: "God reveals Himself in His Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures" (1559, Art. II). This conviction is also set forth in the Second Helvetic Confession, Art. II: "Therefore, in controversies of religion or matters of faith, we can not admit any other judge than God himself, pronouncing by the Holy Scriptures [italics ours] what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what is to be avoided."

Our conclusion is that in the early decades of Reformed confessional development the universal conviction was that expressed by the chapter heading of Art. I of the Second Helvetic Confession:

"Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God."

Article IV. Canonical Books of the Holy Scriptures

"We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged. These are thus named in the Church of God. The books of the Old Testament are the five books of Moses, etc. . . ." The following points should be noted:

a. De Bres is obviously concerned here with the canonical status of these "two books." Both the Old and the New Testament are called "canonical." This was and is of importance over against the teachings of the Anabaptists and others, who, while acknowledging the scope of the canon as traditionally accepted by the historic Christian faith, thus confessing both the Old and the New Testament as the Sacred Scriptures, nevertheless minimize the value of the Old Testament.

b. However, there were others in Reformation times who affirmed the uniform revelational quality of all that belongs to the Scriptures, but challenged the traditionally accepted limits of what rightfully belongs to it. Facing this new crisis in the Christian canonical commitment the church fathers of Article IV took their stand. Though in rethinking their thoughts we cannot always speak with complete certainty on every point of interpretation, yet it does seem clear that this article addresses itself primarily to the question: In which books are the holy Scriptures contained? In Reformation times Christians generally were agreed that whatever belongs to the Scriptures should be received as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, and should by that token be received as the Church's canon for faith and life. One of the underlying burning issues of the day was, however, which books deserve such recognition. On this point Calvinists differed with Roman Catholics, who enlarged the canon to include certain apocryphal books, and Lutherans, who tended to reduce the canon by questioning the canonicity of some New Testament

books. In answer to both violations of the canon, the Confession takes its stand in favor of the traditionally accepted limits of the canon. Against these "two books" — further designated as "the Old and the New Testament" and as "canonical books" — in their canonical status, against the divinely appointed limits of this closed and well-delineated canon, against the unique and exclusive place of these enumerated books in the canon, nothing can be alleged. Here the Confession reaffirms that canonical commitment which forms a sustained and fundamental part of the Christian faith from earliest times.

This interpretation is supported by the following internal evidence. The subordinate clause, "against which nothing can be alleged," has as its antecedent these "two books," "the Old and the New Testament," the "canonical books," as is clear from the French text of Article IV: "auxquels il n'y a rien a repiquer."⁽¹¹⁾ This plurality of books suggests the question: Which books? The use of the word "contained" also points in the direction of a formal rather than material approach to the canon, a quantitative rather than qualitative approach. The subsequent listing of the sixty-six books in proper order indicates further that the basic intent and purpose of this article is to delineate those writings which belong to the canon. The entire article should be viewed in the light of this central concern. If the non-allegation clause be construed materially as referring to canonical character, then it would stand as a foreign element in an article otherwise concerned wholly with the crucial formal question of the scope of the canon.⁽¹²⁾

The place of Article IV in the context of Articles III-VII, the logical sequence and progression of thought in these articles, also substantiates this interpretation. Article III confesses the divine origin of the Scriptures in oral and written revelation, by virtue of which they are called holy and divine. Article IV indicates in which books these holy and divine Scriptures are contained, marking off the extent of the canon by mentioning the books which belong to it, first in general ("two books, the Old and the New Testament") and then in particular (the sixty-six books by name). By way of transition Article V casts a look back to the preceding article in reiterating the established bounds of the canon as received and confessed by the Church ("We receive all these books, and these only, . . ."). Then it proceeds to explicate the meaningfulness of the Scriptures in their canonical character, indicating the normative sig-

⁽¹¹⁾ "Auxquels" ("which") must have these references as its antecedent, for it is plural in form.

⁽¹²⁾ Within the committee there was also some support for the view, that the subordinate clause, "against which nothing can be alleged," was probably inserted by the authors of the confession after the word "canonical" for the simple reason that the word "canonical" would not be immediately understandable to a majority of the common people who adopted this confession as the truth of God's Word. With the unlettered people of the church in mind, the authors then placed this phrase here so that no one could possibly doubt the meaning of the otherwise somewhat strange word "canonical." The Old and New Testament are canonical, i.e., against them nothing can be alleged. On this interpretation it is impossible to say whether the primary import of this clause is formal or material, since this was not in the author's purview at this point.

nificance of the canon and the basis upon which our reception of it rests. Article VI treats of the *status* and *character* of the apocryphal writings in contrast to the canonical writings, suggesting a treatment parallel to that given the canonical writings, which moved from canonical *status* in Article IV to canonical *character* in Article V, Article VII, against the background of the preceding limitation of the divine, holy, canonical Scriptures to the sixty-six books of the Old and the New Testament, now confesses that this limitation (versus Roman Catholicism) involves no impoverishment for the Church, since the will of God and the way of salvation is so fully and perfectly and sufficiently revealed therein as to make the Scriptures an infallible rule, excluding the necessity of all other writings as canonical and demanding the rejection of everything apart from the Scriptures which is contrary to them.

This interpretation is not in conflict with that of the Synod of 1924. The area of controversy there was, of course, quite different. Still, though the context there was different, yet the conclusion reached is quite acceptable even in our context here. The Synod of 1924 states: "The clause 'against which nothing can be alleged' is simply to be regarded as an explanation of the term: canonical" (*Acts of Synod, 1924, p. 204*). The unqualified use of the term "canonical" leaves unanswered the question we have here sought to answer, namely: In what sense is canonical to be understood in this article?

This interpretation is likewise not in conflict with that of the Synod of 1959, which recognizes that this non-allegation clause "refers to the content of all the books as well as to the inclusion of the books in the canon" (*Acts of Synod, 1959, p. 67*). Here both canonical status and canonical character are posited, but without attempting to define the relationship of meaning or priority between them. This above interpretation may then be taken as a supplement to that of the Synod of 1959.

c. Although the central concern of this article is not *what is contained in the holy Scriptures*, but in *what the holy Scriptures are contained*, still a recognition of the canonical status presupposes and implies a prior recognition of the canonical character of those books. This is the deeper background of the Confession's reaffirmation of the historic Christian canonical commitment, here viewed primarily in its canonical status, in other articles viewed more explicitly in its canonical character. In Article IV therefore by inference the deduction may be drawn that the term "canonical books" finds further material explication in the subordinate clause: "against which nothing can be alleged." Canonical books are holy and divine books, and therefore beyond reproach, above negative criticism, books against which nothing can be alleged which would in any way detract from them as the Church's canon for faith and life. In a similar vein the famous Reformed theologian Junius in his theses *De canone Sacrae Scripturae* comments as follows on the meaning of Scriptural canonicity: "We call canon the most true, most certain, most right and manner, ordained by God for the faith and life of His Church: —the canon in the Church is therefore nothing else than the Word of God, which is in its inward form the unchangeable truth of God, and in

its outward form, the Holy Scripture, the most pure and most absolute expression of that inward form" (*Junii Opuscula*, 1592, ed. Kuyper, pp. 307, 308).

d. As mentioned previously the number of the canonical books was a controversial point. In the Lutheran confessions we nowhere find a list of the canonical books and at the Conference of Poissy the Lutherans objected to including the Epistle of James among the canonical books in the Gallican Confession of Faith. Some of them doubted the canonicity of II Peter, II and III John, Jude, James, Hebrews and the Revelation of John.

Sometimes Calvin is charged with the same attitude concerning certain books of the canon. He was, however, one of the authors of the Gallican Confession and objected only to the fact that Paul is there called the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Reformed churches have always accepted the canon of the church of all ages. It was not instituted, but accepted by the church, because God has given these books their authority.⁽¹³⁾

e. On the difference between the Old and the New Testament (cf. pt. a. above) we turn to Articles IX and XXV of our Confession. In Article IX we read: "That which appears to us somewhat obscure in the Old Testament is very plain in the New." And in Article XXV: "We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians; yet the truth and the substance remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion." This is according to the old rule: What is latent in the Old Testament is patent in the New Testament. There is a history of revelation, and a progression from the shadows to the light.

f. The parenthetical phrase, "against which nothing can be alleged," is of special significance for our understanding of the teaching of the Belgic Confession on the doctrine of Scripture. It indicates the attitude the believer assumes toward the Scriptures. This attitude excludes making any allegation, of any kind whatever, which would detract from the canonical character of the Scriptures.

(13) Whether the concept "canonicity" be construed in terms of canonical status or canonical character, it should be acknowledged that the Scriptures constitute the canon of Christian faith and life not by reason of an act of ecclesiastical infallibility, which enabled the church to make such a selection inerrantly, since this involves the recognition of a "canon" above this canon. Neither may the church claim divine inspiration in autonomously selecting these books, since this would constitute a violation of the uniqueness of Biblical inspiration. Nor can the church simply appeal to a special divine providence by which it was allegedly guided in the lengthy sifting process which produced the canon, since such a special providence is nowhere evident in the history of canon formation. No act of the church, or any other extra-Scriptural factor, however lofty or divine, adequately accounts for the formation of the canon. The secret lies within the canon itself. The canon established for itself a place within the believing consciousness of the church, impelling the church to embrace these Scriptures as the Word of God. It won for itself this place by virtue of the witness of the Holy Spirit within the Word and the witness of the Holy Spirit with the Word.

This phrase should be seen as a corollary of canonicity. Those books are canonical which set the rule or norm for faith and life. Above these canonical books there is no canon. That is to say, while the canon makes rules for and passes judgment upon us, we may not make rules for or pass judgment upon the canon. The canon of Scripture declares what we should be and do. We on our part may never declare or intimate that the canon is not what it really should be. The Scriptures are wholly inviolable.

Article V.

Whence the Holy Scriptures Derive Their Dignity and Authority

"We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they carry the evidence thereof in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled."

a. "We receive." This means that the church has not produced the canon nor conferred canonicity upon the Scriptures. The church has received them. In receiving the Scriptures the church acknowledges that they are from God.

b. "For the regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith." True faith is always related to the Word of God. As Calvin states: "We must remember, that there is an inseparable relation between faith and the word, and that these can be no more disconnected from each other than the rays of light from the sun. Hence in Isaiah the Lord explains: 'Hear, and your soul shall live' (Is. 55:3). And John points to the same fountain of faith in the following words: 'These are written, that ye might believe' (John 20:31). Take away the word, therefore, and no faith will remain" (*Instit.* III, ii, 6).

c. "Believing without any doubt all things contained in them." These words, without distinction or exception, speak of all the contents of the Word of God. Our Creed does not limit faith to the gospel, nor to the promises, nor to "the only comfort." It extends to *all things* because all these things have been written for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith. That does not mean that our Confession denies that the content of the Holy Scripture varies greatly. We pointed out already that it distinguishes between the shadows of the Old Testament and the fulfilment in the New Testament. But the point stressed here is that everything of Scripture is for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith and is to be received by us as such.

Once again, as we noted in reference to Article IV, the Confession here indicates the attitude the believer assumes toward the Scriptures. What was stated negatively in Article IV, is expressed positively here. In the former article any and every allegation against the Scriptures is excluded. In the present Article we testify that we believe without any doubt *all* things which the canonical books contain.

d. "Not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts, that they are from God, and also because they carry the evidences thereof in themselves." Our Confession mentions three motivations for "believing all things contained in" the Scriptures. The first one (in order of mentioning, but not of importance) is that of the authority of the church, expressed in the words: "Not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such." Calvin attacks the Roman Catholic conception of ecclesiastical authority. He denies that our faith in the eternal and inviolable truth of God could rest on the will of men. Still he defends the words of Augustine who declared that he would not believe the gospel, were he not moved by the authority of the church. He declares that especially "those who are not yet enlightened by the Spirit of God, become teachable by reverence for the Church" (I, vii, 3). Calvin adds that "the consent of the Church is not without its weight. For it is not to be accounted of no consequence, that, from the first publication of Scripture so many ages have uniformly concurred in yielding obedience to it, and that, notwithstanding the many extraordinary attempts which Satan and the whole world have made to oppress and overthrow it, or completely efface it from the memory of men, it has flourished like the palm-tree and continued invincible" (Inst. I, viii, 12).

This reverence for the Church, however, can lead only to a relative, or tenuous certainty because the Church can err and has often erred. Calvin therefore continues by saying, "it is plain that Augustine would have the certainty of the godly to rest on a very different foundation." At that point he speaks of the *second motive*, which is to be found in the *testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts*. "As God alone can properly bear witness to His own words, so these words will not obtain credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted" (I, vii, 4). Calvin finds proof of this testimony in the words of Isaiah: "My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." And at another place he speaks of the Spirit, promised by the Savior, who should not speak of Himself, but confirm the truth, which He had Himself delivered through the Word. "Hence the office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends" (Inst. I, ix, 1).

The *third motive* is to be found in Scripture itself, for the books of Scripture "carry the evidence thereof (that they are from God) in themselves." Calvin speaks of the uniqueness of Scripture in impressing

the hearts of the readers. "Read Demosthenes or Cicero, read Plato, Aristotle, or any other of that class: you will, I admit, feel wonderfully allured, pleased, moved, enchanted; but turn from them to the reading of the sacred volume, and whether you will or not, it will so affect you, so pierce your heart, so work its way into your very marrow, that, in comparison of the impression so produced, that of orators and philosophers will almost disappear; making it manifest that in the sacred volume there is a truth divine, a something which makes it immeasurably superior to all the gifts and graces attainable by men" (I, viii, 1).

This article of the Confession speaks of the blind who are able to perceive that the things foretold in the Scriptures are being fulfilled. Calvin makes use of the same metaphor when he speaks of the writings of the apostles which "though the greater part read them blindfold, exhibit a heavenly majesty, which in a manner binds and rivets every reader . . . Peter and John who were employed with their little boats, being all rude and illiterate, had never learned in any human school that which they delivered to others. Paul, moreover, who had not only been an avowed but a bloody and cruel foe, being changed into a new man, shows by the sudden and unhoped-for change, that a heavenly power had compelled him to preach the doctrine which once he destroyed . . . The very circumstances proclaim that the Holy Spirit must have been the teacher of those who, formerly contemptible among the people, all of a sudden began to discourse so magnificently of heavenly mysteries" (Inst. I, viii, 11).

These three motives are not of the same force or quality. The first is more or less pedagogical. The last is somewhat apologetical in character. Only the inward testimony of the Spirit is irresistible and absolutely convincing, because it does not consist in a logical conclusion which we draw but in the work of God Himself in our hearts. In witnessing in our hearts that the Scriptures are from God, the Spirit makes use of the "evidence" the Scriptures contain.

Article VI.

The Difference Between the Canonical and the Apocryphal Books

"We distinguish those sacred books from the apocryphal, viz.: the third and fourth book of Esdras, etc. All of which the Church may read and take instruction from, so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less may they be used to detract from the authority of the other, that is, the sacred books."

a. The canonical books are called the sacred books; they are holy, set apart from others. There is sharp and deep separation between these books and all others; the apocryphal books, accordingly, however religious they may be, belong to the non-sacred books.

b. The church *may* read the apocryphal, it *must* read the sacred books. The church *may* take instruction from the apocryphal books; it *must* take instruction from the sacred. The church *may* use the apocryphal books, so far as they agree with the canonical books; the

latter are the only standard of faith; all other books have no authority in matters of faith, and even the age-old and much-revered apocryphal books are not permitted to confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion, nor to detract from the Bible's authority.

Article VII.

The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to Be the Only Rule of Faith

"We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone, 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 to take away anything from the Word of God, it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is the most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, *Prove the spirits whether they are of God.* Likewise, if anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not in your house."

a. This article is directed against Rome, which teaches that the Holy Scripture is insufficient and must be supplemented by tradition. The Council of Trent declared that Scripture and tradition were to be received by the Church as of equal authority (*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*). The first sentence of Article VII is directed against this Romish doctrine. These words do not mean, that the will of God is limited to the contents of Scripture. The revealed will of God is to be found in the Bible, and then only in so far as we need to know that will; for some prophetic and apostolic writings have disappeared (1 Kings 4:33; 1 Chron. 28:19; 1 Chron. 29:29; II Chron. 9:29; I Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16) and we read in John: "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30.) Moreover we do not find in Scripture the rules for all customs, ceremonies, temporary and local rules of the church, but we do find in it the complete will of God concerning our salvation and the manner of worship, which God requires of us.

We know from Scripture, and from Scripture only, the way to God in Jesus Christ and the manner in which we should glorify His Name. This doctrine "is most perfect and complete in all respects."

b. The uniqueness of Scripture is therefore stressed in the immediately following words of the article. By these words all the pillars on which tradition leans are pulled down (custom, great multitude, etc.); only Scripture presents the truth of God because all men are of themselves liars. Calvin rightly states: "If we reflect how prone the human mind is

to lapse into forgetfulness of God, how readily inclined to every kind of error, how bent every now and then on devising new and fictitious religions, it will be easy to understand how necessary it was to make such a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by the neglect, vanishing away amid the errors, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men" (I, vi, 3).

c. "Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying: *Prove the spirits, whether they are of God.*"

The relative pronoun "which" in this sentence should be substituted by the conjunction "as." (French text: comme nous sommes enseignes de faire; Dutch text: gelijk ons de apostelen geleerd hebben.)

What is meant by the expression: infallible rule? The opinion has been defended that these words express the same idea as that of the Westminster Confession (1647) I, ix. "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

Now there is indeed a striking similarity in words between the two Confessions, but this does not mean that there is also similarity in thought; the Belgic Confession speaks of the sufficiency of Scriptures, the Westminster Confession speaks of the interpretation of Scriptures; the Belgic Confession exalts the reliability of Scriptures above the deceitfulness of man, the Westminster Confession speaks of passages in the Bible, which are difficult to understand and which have to be elucidated by other passages which speak more clearly.

Methodologically it is better to make use of the Gallican Confession of 1559 in the interpretation of Art. VII of the Belgic Confession than to refer to the Westminster Confession of 1647. In the Gallican Confession we read in Art. V: "Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them."

In these words of the Gallican Confession it is clearly indicated that the rule of examination, regulation and reformation of all things is the Holy Scripture.

The same conclusion must be drawn in regard to Art. VII of the Belgic Confession. This article speaks of the uniqueness of the divine Scriptures; in these Scriptures we find the truth of God. Then follow the words: "Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule." The word "this" points back to something referred to earlier, namely, the antecedent, "those Scriptures." We must conclude, therefore, that the Holy Scriptures in this article are called an "infallible rule." This conclusion is supported by the head-

ing of the article, "The sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the only rule of faith." This does not belong, however, to the original text, but was added to the Latin edition in the Harmonia Confessionum of 1581.

The term "infallible rule" contrasts with the fallible writings of men; all men are of themselves liars; but in Scripture God speaks, He who cannot lie, and whose Word cannot fail.

d. Is all tradition to be rejected then? De Bres speaks of this question in his *Baston de la fey*, in which book he quotes many church Fathers and councils. He defends this method against all those who prefer to quote only from the Word of God. In the works of the Fathers, he says, are many gifts of God. We must find out whether they speak of themselves or whether God speaks through them. "We will know that, if their doctrine agrees with the rule of all truth (recht), which is the Word of God, the doctrine of prophets and apostles" (Polman, *De Nederlandse Geloofbelijdenis*, I, p. 278). Calvin speaks in the same way when he expresses a due respect for councils, and yet "the highest place," he says, should "be given to Scripture, everything being brought to it as a test" (Inst. IV, ix, 8).

e. Is the Scripture an "infallible rule" in all its words regardless of the context? Article VII speaks of the will of God, which is to be found in the Holy Scriptures, of the teaching about salvation and of the manner of worship which God requires of us. This means that we find in Scripture a message from God; and that the words of Scripture serve to make known that message to us. They do so in an infallible manner, but it is our responsibility to find God's special message in every part of His Word, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13).

Interestingly enough, Voetius asks the question: "How far does the authority of Scripture reach?" He gives the following answer: "The divinity and authority of Scripture has to be considered either as history, or as a rule to be followed in our worship and life. As to the first, it reaches to all parts of Scripture. As to the second, the divinity of Scripture extends itself absolutely to the words and works: 1. of our God; 2. of Christ as God and man; 3. of the angels. And as to the words of the prophets and the apostles, in which they in their writing or speaking edify the Church these are infallible; and concerning their works, these are by and in themselves not an infallible rule, unless Scripture approves them" (*Catechisatie over de Heidelb. Catechismus*, 1662, ed. Kuyper 1891, p. 71).

Analysis of Some Answers of the Heidelberg Catechism, Relevant to Our Inquiry.

Answer 21. "True faith is not only a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also a firm confidence which the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the Gospel."

a. In this answer the Catechism distinguishes between the Word of God and the gospel. Mention is made of the gospel also in answers 19 and 22. In connection herewith, Ursinus makes the distinction between faith in general and faith in particular. "Faith in general, as became

evident from our description of it, embraces the entire Word of God, and assents to it fully. But justifying faith in particular respects the promises of the gospel or the preaching of grace through Christ." The Reformed dogmatists made the same distinction in speaking of a *fides generalis* and a *fides specialis*. Prof. Louis Berkhof explains that by "*fides generalis*" is meant saving faith in the more general sense of the word. Its object is the whole divine revelation as contained in the Word of God. Everything that is explicitly taught in Scripture or can be deduced from it by good and necessary inference, belongs to the object of faith in this general sense . . . [*Fides specialis*] is saving faith in the more limited sense of the word. While true faith in the Bible is absolutely necessary, that is not yet the specific act of faith which justifies and therefore saves directly. It must and as a matter of fact does lead to a more special faith. There are certain doctrines concerning Christ and His work, and certain promises made in Him to sinful men, which the sinner must receive and which must lead him to put his trust in Christ" (*Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. p. 506).

b. According to Ursinus, faith in general "embraces the entire Word of God and assents to it fully." In this embracing of the entire Word of God no exceptions are made. "I hold for truth *all*, that God has revealed to us in His Word." The Word of God is a unity, a totality of truth. Wielenga says in his explanation: "All, that little word has a special accent. No sifting by an authority which exalts itself above the Bible [is permitted]."

"All Scripture, law and promise, history and prophecy, objective message and subjective expression, the most important things and the seemingly superfluous things, [is] object of faith. In this book all is the Word of God, it is not, as the holy things in the temple, covered with gold, it is solid" (*Onze Catechismus* I, pp. 153, 154).

c. This answer of the Catechism does not speak of the manner in which the Word of God came to us. It does not speak of inspiration, but only of revelation. It points out, however, that we have a God-given book which is trustworthy in all its parts, without any reservation.

Answer 25. "Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word that these three distinct persons are the one, true and eternal God."

The doctrine of the holy Trinity is known only from revelation. That revelation is found in the Word which we read in the Holy Scriptures. This answer too does not speak of inspiration, but only of revelation. But this also points out that we have a revelatory book from God, by means of which we can know the Triune God.

Answers 95, 96. "It is, instead of the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word, or besides Him, to devise or have something else in which to place our trust." "That we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word."

a. The first commandment forbids idolatry and the second forbids worship of images. Both are human inventions which try to take the place of the service of the one, true God. The Catechism stresses the

point that we are able to know God adequately only through His Word and that the only manner of worship which is allowed is the manner prescribed in that Word.

b. Although none of these answers speak of inspiration, they all stress the necessity and the authority of the revealed Word, which we find in the Bible.

Answer 117. "First, that from the heart we call upon the one true God only, who has revealed himself in His Word, for all He has commanded us to ask of Him."

This part of the Catechism speaks of the requirements of prayer. The first requirement is, that we know Him to whom we speak. That knowledge depends on revelation, because God dwells "in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). True prayer is addressed only to the God who has revealed Himself in His Word. The Word only is the way to the knowledge of God which is prerequisite to acceptable prayer.

Moreover we need the Word to know the things for which we should pray. We are to pray "for all that He has commanded us to ask of Him." We know God and our needs only by means of the Word. This part of the Catechism also omits speaking of inspiration, but it does point out the necessity and the authority of the revealed Word of God which we find in the Bible.

Answer 123. "So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; destroy all the wicked counsels conceived against Thy holy Word."

The coming of the kingdom of God is closely connected with the continuing influence of the Word of God. Submission to the Word of God is submission to God Himself. And counsels against God's Holy Word are counsels against His kingdom.

Once again we note: in this Lord's Day the doctrine of inspiration is not at stake. The Word of God, however, is considered as the Word of the King, who rules absolutely. Disobedience to that Word or attempting to undermine that Word is *leze-majesty*.

Analysis of Some Parts of the Canons of Dort Relevant to Our Inquiry

Chapter I, Art. 14.

"As the doctrine of divine election by the most wise counsel of God was declared by the prophets, by Christ Himself, and by the apostles, and is clearly revealed in the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, so it is still to be published in due time and place in the Church of God, for which it was peculiarly designed, provided it be done with reverence, in the spirit of discretion and piety, for the glory of God's most holy name, and for enlivening and comforting His people, without vainly attempting to investigate the secret ways of the Most High (Acts 20:27; Rom. 11:33, 34; 12:3; Heb. 6:17, 18)."

a. This article of the Canons explains the necessity of preaching the deep and incomprehensible doctrine of divine election. This follows from the fact that it was first declared by the original oral revelation and later

was clearly revealed in the Scriptures. The words of this article find their foundation in the exposition of this subject in Calvin's Institutes. When Calvin begins to speak of eternal election, he mentions a class of men, who "recommend that the subject of predestination should scarcely ever be mentioned, and tell us to shun every question concerning it as we would a rock." Calvin continues then: "In order to keep the legitimate course in this matter, we must return to the Word of God, in which we are furnished with the right rule of understanding. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is taught but what it is of importance to know. Everything, therefore, delivered in Scripture on the subject of predestination, we must beware of keeping from the faithful lest we seem either maliciously to deprive them of the blessing of God, or to accuse and to scoff at the Spirit, as having divulged what ought on any account to be suppressed. Let us, I say, allow the Christian to unlock his mind and ears to all the words of God which are addressed to him, provided he do it with this moderation—viz., that whenever the Lord shuts His sacred mouth, he also desists from inquiry" (III, xxi, 3).

b. In another place Calvin stresses the same point, even with stronger words. He is accused of using too strong expressions in speaking of the hardening of the heart by God. He answers then with an appeal to the clear expressions of Scripture and says: "It is not I that said 'that God turned the heart of the nations, and hardened them to hate His people'; or 'that He hissed for the Egyptians, and used them as His servants.' It was not I that said 'that Sennacherib was God's rod in His hand, to punish His people.' I did not say all these things. They are the declarations of the *Spirit of God Himself*" ("Defense of the Secret Providence of God," 1558, cf. H. Cole, *Calvin's Calvinism*, p. 320).

c. It is evident, that the Canons of Dort, reflecting the thinking of Calvin, want all the doctrine contained in the Word of God, not more and not less, to be preached in the church. That Word had to be obeyed and to be explained, even if it revealed "how unsearchable are his judgments, and His ways past tracing out" (Rom. 11:33). And that had to be done, because the declarations of the Word of God were declarations of the Spirit of God Himself.

Chapter I, Art. 17.

"Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy..."

In agreement with Art. VII of the Belgic Confession this article presupposes the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the only rule of faith. The will of God as revealed in His Word is not to be doubted.

Chapter I, par. 3.

"...men are drawn away by useless questions from the truth of gracious justification and from the *simplicity of Scripture*."

a. This paragraph speaks of the simplicity of Scripture. This expression is sometimes used by John Calvin to express the artlessness of the

style of the books of the Bible. "Three evangelists give a narrative in a mean and humble style. The proud often eye this simplicity with disdain, because they attend not to the principle heads of doctrine" (Inst. I, viii, 11). This kind of simplicity cannot be meant here, because the Canons do not refer to the style of the Bible, but to the simplicity of its doctrine.

b. The matter which is at stake in this paragraph is discussed by Calvin in the Third Book of his Institutes. He speaks there of the subtlety of Thomas who tries to demonstrate that in a certain sense the foreknowledge of merit is the cause of predestination and goes on to say: "But let us have done with these disputes as superfluous among those who think that there is enough wisdom for them in the Word of God. For it has been truly said by an old ecclesiastical writer, 'Those who ascribe the election of God to merits, are wise above what they ought to be'" (III, xxii, 9). He speaks similarly when he reproaches some of vain curiosity in speaking of God's providence, and giving themselves up to utterly useless speculations. He calls all these things "the very wiles of the devil" because they try "to obscure or corrupt that which the Scripture declares with all possible and naked simplicity" (*op. cit.* Cole, *Calvin's Calvinism*, pp. 228, 229).

c. In speaking of the simplicity of Scripture the Canons of Dort refer to its quality of perspicuity in doctrine, which may not be confused by human subtleties. No human wisdom can compete with the wisdom of God's Word.

Chapter III and IV, Art. 12.

"... this regeneration is not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the Author of this work declares."

a. The Canons of Dort often speak of the testimony of Scripture, but only here of the fact that this Scripture has been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

b. In this article the Holy Spirit is named the Author of the work of regeneration. This means that He and He alone makes dead sinners live. This Author of regeneration has inspired the Scripture. There He announces and explains His own work. No one else could do that, because only the Author of this mysterious work knows how it transpires.

c. In this article our Creed clearly confesses the inspiration of Scripture as a work of the Holy Spirit by means of which he informs us of spiritual mysteries which no man of himself could know.

Chapter V, Art. 10.

"This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to or independent of the Word of God, but springs from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16); and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable."

a. This article speaks of the perseverance of saints and of the assurance which the true believers may have of this perseverance.

b. This assurance has three sources: 1. faith in the promises revealed in the Word of God for our comfort; 2. the testimony of the Holy Spirit and 3. the desire to perform good works with a good conscience. Since even that desire is worked by the Holy Spirit, it may freely be said that the assurance of the perseverance in faith is a work of the Holy Spirit.

c. Therefore this assurance is finally called "an infallible pledge of eternal glory." Infallibility is not a human quality, but the distinguishing mark of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is to be found in the promises of the Word of God as well as in the sealing of these promises in our hearts.

d. This article does not speak directly of inspiration; it calls the promises of the Word of God an infallible pledge of eternal glory. This Word is trustworthy in an absolute sense and the Holy Spirit seals it as such in our hearts.

General Observation on the Use of Scripture in the Rejection of the Errors

a. Every "head of doctrine" in the Canons ends with a rejection of errors. And almost every paragraph of this rejection ends with an appeal to texts of Scripture. This constant appeal to Scripture to reject errors is a result of the conviction that Scripture cannot err and is the end of all contradiction.

b. Sometimes the quotation of Scripture is prefaced thus: "the apostle writes," "the apostle declares," "Moses addresses the people of Israel as follows," "Christ said," etc. Other times this is evident from such expressions as, "This is repugnant to the entire Scripture," "they contradict the Holy Scripture which teaches," "this is repugnant to Scripture which teaches," "the Scriptures testify," etc.

c. It is clear that the Canons of Dort have made use of Scriptures as a unity of truth.

Concluding Observations From the Analysis of the Confessions

1. The term "inspiration" appears only in the Canons of Dort (III and IV, Art. 12).

2. The Church confesses that the books of the Bible are from God (Belg. Conf. Art. V).

3. They are called "holy and divine Scriptures" (Belg. Conf. Art. III) and "sacred books" (Belg. Conf. Art. VI). The meaning is that they are separated from all other books and have a divine quality.

4. They are called "the Word of God" (Belg. Conf. Arts. VII, XXIV, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXVI, XXXVII; Cat. Answ. 21, 123; Can. of Dort, I, Art. 17).

5. They are called "an infallible rule," which means, (1) that this Word can not fail (Belg. Conf. Art. VII); (2) that the assurance en-

joyed by their promises is "an infallible pledge," (3) that the Word of God is absolutely trustworthy (Can. of Dort, V, Art. 10).

6. All that God has revealed in this Word is without exception or reservation the object of faith for the Christian (Cat. Answ. 21).

7. This Book is necessary for the knowledge of the Triune God (Cat. Answ. 25), eternal election (Can. of Dort, I, Art. 14), the way to God in Jesus Christ, and the manner in which to worship Him and to glorify His Name (Belg. Conf. Art. VII; Cat. Answ. 95, 96, 117).

8. The doctrine of Scripture is simple and ought to be published in the Church of God in all its perspicuity, without however attempting to investigate the sacred ways of the Most High (Canons, I, Art. 14, III and IV, Art. 12).

9. The Triune God reveals Himself in Scripture progressively. In the course of the history of revelation things which were first somewhat obscure are gradually made plain; the shadows yield to the light; the ceremonies and symbols of the law cease; the culminating-point and centre of revelation is Jesus Christ (Belg. Conf. Art. IX and XXXV, Cat. Answ. 19).

10. The Church confesses that against the Bible no allegation can be made. The Holy Scriptures must have the last word (Belg. Conf. Art. IV). The Church gives expression to her faith-commitment to the Scriptures further by "believing without any doubt all things contained in them" (Belg. Conf. Art. V).

V. DOCTRINAL IMPLICATION OF THE WITNESS OF THE CREEDS

The Creeds posit the objective reality of divine special revelation. This revelation is more than a human witness to the will of God. It is a divine self-disclosure, which finds its source and origin in God, who in it makes himself known to man. Men spoke from God who communicates his redemptive purposes through his appointed and qualified organs of revelation. The ultimate motivating force behind this revelation is not the will of man, but the will of God mediated through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In conveying his self-revelation God employed both the tongues and the pens of prophets and apostles. Originally divine revelation was communicated orally to man through these chosen and commissioned spokesmen. Receiving their message from the revealing God, they in turn proclaimed it to their contemporaries. Since, however, the mind of man, both that of the preacher and that of the hearer, is deceitful, unretentive and unreliable, God provided for the inscripturation of his revelation in the Bible. This added provision is abundant evidence of his great concern for the integrity of his revelation and for man's right understanding of the will of God unto salvation, on the part of man. This recasting of the substance of the original divine revelation into written and readable form is designed to secure it against the deteriorating tendencies to which oral traditions are inevitably subject. This second form of revelation is therefore not merely an added convenience, nor

a dispensable luxury, but a dire necessity, if succeeding generations are to possess a divine revelation which is trustworthy.

For us today the Word of God inscripturated is the sole source of special divine revelation. In it alone the original oral revelation lives on, and though long silent, still speaks. The thrust of both modes of revelation is identical, namely, to express God's special care for man and his salvation. Both are geared to man's redemptive needs and both are directed to the response of faith. These things were first spoken and later written in order that we might believe, and believing might have life through His name. This written form of revelation, Holy Scripture, is the school of the Holy Spirit. The core of its curriculum is the redemptive grace of God in Christ Jesus unto fallen mankind. All its instruction is directed to the redeeming response of faith.

The distinction here made between the original oral revelation and the later written revelation may not be construed to imply a divorce between the two. They are equally authoritative, and between them is a basic revelational-redemptive unity, for they have a common source in God the Revealer who once spoke to the prophets and apostles and through them to their hearers, and now continues this same divine self-disclosure to us through the written Word. Hence the later written revelation is no less holy and divine than the earlier oral revelation. This distinguishes the Scripture from and elevates it above all other writings. The former is sacred, the latter profane.

In the written Word is a directness and immediacy of communication which reflects that of the spoken Word. The mode of revelation is different, but the reality is the same. Scripture is a living and dynamic Word, bringing us into a direct encounter with the God who speaks and producing such an immediate confrontation with the holy oracle that it is the same to say, "God says" (oral revelation) and, "Scripture says" (written revelation). Oral revelation was doubtless broader in scope than its written deposit in the Scriptures. In revelational value, however, and its impact upon man, they are alike.

This Word of God written is contained in two books, the Old and New Testament. These two volumes differ indeed in their outlook upon redemption. They differ as promise differs from fulfillment and expectation from realization. Such differences serve to indicate the greater fullness and clarify the New Testament. These differences end in distortion, however, when used to detract from the revelational value of any given portion of Scripture.

These two testaments consist of the enumerated books, all of these, and these only. The Church here reaffirms its commitment to the traditionally recognized and time-honored limits of this closed and well-delineated canon over against all violations of it, whether by additions to it or subtractions from it. No one can bring any valid allegation against the canonical status of these books. This confession is anchored in the conviction that these books constitute not a man-made but a God-given canon. The acknowledgment of these canonical boundaries involves no impoverishment for the Church, for the will of God and the

way of salvation is so fully revealed therein as to render unnecessary the inclusion of any other writings.

The Church here confesses not only the canonical status but also the canonical character of the Scriptures. The one implies the other. The question of canonical status apparently stands in the foreground of Article IV. But in the deeper purview is also the question of canonical character, since the former presupposes the latter. What lies in the background in the Confession, however, lies in the foreground of our interest in this study.

Scripture is the canon for Christian faith and life, the overruling guide and the criterion of judgment for Christian doctrine and conduct. In fulfilling this normative function it serves as an infallible rule. No allegation is permissible which would weaken its canonical authority. This canon is inviolable, unimpeachable. It is beyond negative, destructive criticism, since this canon is subject to no other "canon." We may not pass judgment upon what Scripture should be or do or say, but rather Scripture passes judgment upon what we should be and do and say. It may be interpreted only by its own analogy, the analogy of Scripture, which means that Scripture brings with it its own canon in accordance with which it sets out to do what it is intended to do. Hence in evaluating Scripture we must work with the standards of interpretation which the Scripture itself gives. Scripture itself leads to its believing and diligent student the norms by which his study is to be governed. Just as God is a law unto himself, so Scripture is a canon unto itself. In handling Scripture aright, therefore, we must accept it as faithful to its own canon in the sense that it infallibly conveys its message in accordance with its own professed intent and purpose. (We may not bring to the Scripture criteria of infallibility, inerrancy, reliability or accuracy — for example, the literary criteria of higher criticism or the criteria of precise exactitude of modern science — which are foreign and alien to Scripture's expressed intent and purpose.) We do violence to Scripture when we demand that it comply with any and every conceivable criterion of infallibility; when, for example, we require it to meet criteria of pedantic precision which it is not intended to meet. For the whole and sole intent and purpose of Scripture is to serve as an authoritative and infallible canon for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of Christian faith and life.

But how does the Christian come to receive this canon? There are three motivating forces which lead him to it. First there is the witness of the Church which serves as a pedagogical authority, teaching men the truth of God's Word and leading them to embrace it as their canon for faith and life. The Church is true to this trust; however, only in being a servant of the Word which it proclaims. Bowing before that Word the Church beckons others to do the same. Thus the Church becomes the "mother of believers," instructing her children to confess God as their Father through the Word He has given.

A second of those motivating forces is the internal evidence of Scripture itself, the self-testimony of the Word, bearing record to its own

divine truth and carrying within it the high and holy claims of divine authority. This internal evidence serves an apologetic purpose, confirming the believing commitment with which the Christian approaches Scripture. But like all apologetics, standing alone it cannot produce that believing conviction which embraces the Bible as the inspired, authoritative and infallible Word of God. Hence the decisive motivating force is, thirdly, the testimony of the Holy Spirit within the heart, certifying to man the truth of Scripture and impelling him to a whole-hearted surrender to it. Acceptance of Scripture is ultimately not the result of a successful application of the law of non-contradiction. It is not a logical conclusion arrived at as the end-product of our rational syllogisms. Rather the Holy Spirit whose external testimony is embodied in Scripture testifies also internally to the truth of Scripture, thus inducing a believing acceptance of it. Specifically stated, this internal testimony of the Holy Spirit means that we accept the Word of God by faith, and this faith, which comes by the very hearing of the Word which it embraces, is a work of the Holy Spirit.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit is not a new source of revelation, different from or supplementary to the revelation contained in Scripture. For both are testimonies of the same Spirit, the one acting upon us internally, the other externally, yet in full harmony, and both directed to the single goal of believing acceptance of the Word of God. In implanting this faith the Spirit works through the very Word which He indelibly seals upon the believing heart. For it is His Word, and in certifying it to us He is witnessing to and concurring with his own words, once given to the prophets and apostles. His inner testimony is therefore not merely a formal one, detached from the material content of Scripture (as in Roman Catholicism), nor is it different in quality from His external testimony in Scripture (as in Mysticism). Rather both testimonies are one in spirit, one in message, and one in purpose. Both are objectively real: the voice of the Word is a witness that comes to us; the voice of the Spirit is also a witness that comes to us, not from within us. Whenever we break this divinely established bond between Word and Spirit, then it is no longer God's Spirit who speaks, but our spirits; then we no longer hear God's Word, but our own.

Hence, our believing acceptance of the canonicity of Scripture, its inspiration and authority, does not rest upon a prior demonstration of its infallibility, inerrancy and accuracy to the satisfaction of the laws of logical consistency. It is not based upon a rational apologetic which seeks to establish in advance Scripture's authenticity and reliability as a ground for this acceptance, but upon the Spirit's internal testimony acting concomitantly with his external testimony in the Word. The Bible gains its authority from the fact that it is a Word which comes from God, in which God Himself speaks. But only faith will hear his voice in it. This faith is a work of the Holy Spirit through his internal testimony in the believing heart.

Having a unique authority because of its divine origin, and conveying its message infallibly, since this infallibility is secured by inspiration, Scripture is therefore infused with a divine power, a dynamic ef-

ficacy. As such it stands alone among all writings. For at the heart of the gospel is that vitalizing force which makes it the power of God unto salvation.

To obtain knowledge of God's redemptive dealings with mankind we need not look beyond the Scriptures. It contains the *only* adequate, and at the same time the *wholly* adequate written deposit of the will of God and the way of salvation. Its record of God's redemptive words and works is indeed not exhaustive. It is sufficient however to exclude doubt as to his revealed will for men. It is wholly adequate unto the intent and purpose for which it was given. It infallibly conveys the meaning envisioned by its Author. In this it serves as a perfect canon for faith and life. No other canon may be permitted to supplant or supplement this canon, however venerable or lofty that other canon may be, whether it be earthly or heavenly, whether it be apostolic or angelic.

The Scriptural canon does not however live up to every conceivable human canon of value judgment. Neither was this the aim of its Author. Nor does Scripture itself make any pretense on this score. A confession of Scripture's sufficiency should not be construed to mean that it is a source-book and reference-work on any and every phase of human knowledge, nor that it can successfully pass every conceivable test of sufficiency. Scripture, although it does indeed at times exhibit rigid precision, does not claim to possess pedantic precision, nor the meticulous exactitude of a scientific treatise. Neither does its reporting of redemptive history always reflect the precise correspondence to event and circumstance which is often demanded by modern historiography. Nor is its rhetoric always free of irregularities and inelegancies, when judged by more sophisticated standards of grammar and diction. For Scripture reflects the culture of its human authors, and therefore often appears to us very humble and artless in style. Yet its message stands perspicuous and unobscured within the very simplicity and modesty of its literary framework. Nor, finally, are its accounts always exhaustive in the sense, for example, that the evangelists supply all the data needed for writing a complete biography of Jesus. But they do contain whatever is needed to meet him as the Christ of God and to sense his high and holy claim upon our lives. The adequacy, perfection and sufficiency of Scripture is geared to its redemptive intent and purpose, which is also true of its infallibility. Those qualifications permeate the total structure of Scripture to its whole extent and in all its parts.

To affirm that Scripture falls short of its appointed intent and purpose is to impugn its sufficiency. To affirm that it deviates from its appointed intent and purpose is to impugn its infallibility. It violates Scripture's sufficiency to make it say more than it is intended to say, but also to make it say less than it is intended to say. To say less than Scripture says is to impoverish its teaching. To say more than Scripture says is speculation. Its sufficiency requires that we neither add to nor detract from it.

These qualities of Scripture constitute it an infallible rule for the regulation of Christian worship, for the knowledge of the will of God

and the way of salvation, for the foundation of the Christian religion, for the confirmation of Christian faith. It is also an infallible rule in forming value judgments on the spirit of the times, historical movements, social institutions and customs, church councils and every doctrine of men. Divine inspiration establishes Scripture as an infallible rule and a sufficient canon for all of Christian faith and life by securing it against falsification, error and deceit. Therefore its redemptive promises are so solid and sure that the believer can embrace them as an infallible pledge of his salvation, a pledge infallible in the sense that it secures man's salvation against failure and assures him of the full reliability of all that God says in His Word.

VI. SYNODICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

A. *Decisions prior to 1959.*

On three different occasions, namely in 1922, 1924, and 1937, the Christian Reformed Church has gone on record in giving an interpretation to crucial statements of the Belgic Confession (Articles III-VII) concerning the authority of Scripture. Rather than present a detailed chronological report of the cases involved and the conclusions reached, we present the salient conclusions that the church has drawn on the meaning of these articles.

1. In 1922 Synod declared that Articles III and VII disallow the injection of a fallible human element into divine revelation (*Acts* 1922, p. 273). In passing judgment on student notes of Professor X which contain the following: "Prophets are very conservative. Prophets say that from earliest times Jehovah lived in tent. Harks back to Mosaic customs. Prophets want to perpetuate Mosaic forms of worship. But David wants temple. But building must be postponed; looks like compromise David is out and out progressive. He wants new things provided they pertain to non-essentials" (*idem*, p. 272). Synod said: "in the one more, in the other less, a human, fallible element is injected into divine revelation" (*idem*, p. 273).

2. In 1924 Synod said that Articles III and VII bind us to maintain the objectivity of divine revelation. Synod found that Professor X's notes taught that Nathan's opposition to the building of the temple was due to his conservatism. To this Synod objected and declared: "The statement in Art. III that the Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, precludes the view that e.g. any influence proceeded from the alleged conservatism of the prophet Nathan upon the revelation which he received and communicated to David" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 218).

3. This same Synod said that the subordinate clause of Article IV, "against which nothing can be alleged" "does not imply [as the protestant claimed] that the Reformers instituted an empirical, critical search into the origin and history of the books of the Bible, and as a result came to the conclusion that they were canonical. The phrase . . . is simply to be regarded as an explanation of the term: canonical" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 204).

4. The same Synod also recognized that Art. VII "deals with the question what writings are authoritative for our Christian doctrine and faith, and does not have direct reference to the historicity of the Bible. This Article does, however, set over against the absolute trustworthiness of the Word of God the fact that "all men are liars"; so that if historical facts, attested by the Scriptures, should be contradicted from any human source whatever, then we are, according to this Article, bound to choose for the testimony of the Scriptures" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 210).

5. In 1937 Synod declared that the evolutionary view of revelation and of the history of Israel (as it came to expression in Dr. X's teaching that when Amos struck the death blow to the existing monotheism and declared that Yahweh was the supreme God "ethical monotheism had been attained.") is in conflict with Article V of our Confession: "We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them . . ." (*Acts*, 1937, pp. 269, 270).

6. In 1937 Synod declared that when Dr. X in his writings manifested a naturalistic view of revelation and made the vision, which is one of the most important means of revelation, the product of the prophet, his teaching was "contrary to Article III of our Confession" (*Acts*, 1937, p. 273).

7. In 1937 Synod found passages in the notes of Dr. X which contain representations contrary to the Word of God e.g., that "Moses' teaching respecting God was contrary to that of Amos." In passing judgment Synod declared that "All such teachings are contrary to the Word of God and also to our Confession, Art. VII, where we read: 'It is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures'" (*Acts*, 1937, pp. 274, 275).

* * *

In addition to these express interpretations of the creed, these same Synods have also expressed themselves concerning the principles that should guide the believing scholar in his investigation of Scripture. Since these are of direct relevance for the present discussion on inspiration and infallibility, we believe they also should be enunciated here.

1. The presupposition of the believing searcher of Scripture must be the conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This presupposition disallows "any conclusion which would conflict with the prepossession of an inspired and infallible Word of God . . ." (*Acts*, 1924, p. 207). "The Bible is the Word of God and therefore must be believed on its own authority" (*Acts*, 1922, pp. 271, 272). Accordingly, "if the apologist does not proceed on the premise that the Bible is the Word of God, he has nothing anymore to defend in his apologetics" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 210).

2. The investigation of the origin and history of the Old Testament writings "can be carried on only within such limits that the results will never conflict with the belief in the divine origin and inspiration, the trustworthiness and authority of said [O.T.] books" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 204).

3. The believing scholar must recognize the antithetical relation between believing and unbelieving science in his formulation of theological definitions. "The statement that it is to the credit of the theologian that his definitions are such as unbelievers can also employ can not be defended on solid grounds. This is a virtual denial of the antithesis in science, even in theological science. There can be no agreement, as to principles, between believing and unbelieving science" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 202).

4. For Scripture to be absolutely reliable, it must possess historical reliability. It must be "strictly according to fact." It is inadmissible to claim that the stories of Sanison "are not important historical accounts, but current and oral traditions" (*Acts*, 1924, pp. 223, 224). "The approval of a scientific believing theologian to the Bible should be that of one who unconditionally accepts the facts stated by the Bible" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 211).

An examination of the Church's interpretation of the Belgic Confession as well as of the principles which it has enunciated force us to the conclusion that the approach of the Church to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures is not to subject them to a long and painstaking investigation in order to ascertain whether or not the Bible is reliable. The approach is rather to give testimony to the faith of the Church on the basis of the demands of Scripture to its own authority and trustworthiness. An attitude toward the Bible must be taken at the outset, and may not be held in abeyance until after investigation has been completed. This attitude must be one of unconditional acceptance.

B. Decision of 1959.

In 1959 Synod declared "that it is inconsonant with the Creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area in Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies (cf. Article V, Belgic Confession, 'Believing without any doubt all things contained therein')" (*Acts*, 1959, p. 68).

1. This Declaration states that it is inconsonant with the creeds to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies in the Scripture. It does not say that this is inconsonant with the Bible. This approach is to be explained from the character of the "Protest and Appeal" of Prof. M. Wyngaerden who charged that certain views of President Kromminga were out of line with or fail to do justice to the "Synodically approved stand" concerning the Belgic Confession. This restriction in the "Protest and Appeal" is carried over into the Declaration of Synod.

2. In this Declaration, Synod testified that according to the creeds, the Bible is accurate in its reporting of historical events. Proof is adduced from Art. V of the Belgic Confession: "believing without any doubt . . ." In this Article the Creed gives expression to the faith of the Church that the Scriptures are wholly reliable and trustworthy. They are so trustworthy and reliable that we must believe *without any doubt* all things that they contain. In the opinion of Synod, this trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible extends to its reporting of historical events. In other words, it is impossible to believe without any

doubt all things contained in the Scripture except we also maintain its historical accuracy or reliability.

3. This Declaration does *not* further define historical inaccuracies. It does not indicate what standard is to be used in determining what is and what is not historically accurate. In other words, this Declaration does not bind us to an interpretation of the Bible according to the norms of modern historical science. It does, however, make contraband every interpretation of historical phenomena which would detract from the trustworthiness of the Scriptures so that we could no longer believe without any doubt all things contained therein.

4. In this Declaration Synod limited itself to the consideration of actual historical inaccuracies. It did not concern itself with apparent inaccuracies. Any allegation, then, that there is actually, as a matter of fact, an inaccurate statement in Scripture is said to be out of harmony with the creeds.

5. This Declaration does not indicate whether the Scriptures are historically accurate only in the autographs or also in the copies and the translations, since Synod was interpreting the Creed which does not employ this distinction.

6. Whether or not the Declaration has made a felicitous choice in employing the words "actual historical inaccuracies," is subject to question. The word "inaccuracies" here might suggest a kind of strict precision which the Scriptures do not always exhibit. The word "error" might have been a happier choice, inasmuch as it does not necessarily convey the connotation of imprecision, yet guards against our undermining the trustworthiness of Scripture.

VII. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Two of the more important doctrines of Holy Scripture and the Reformed Confessions are on the one hand the sinfulness, and consequent blindness, deceitfulness, and vanity, of all men, and on the other hand the divine authority and trustworthiness of the sacred writings. Both doctrines, it is supposed, can and must be believed in one simple act of faith. Their apparent incompatibility is removed by still another doctrine of Scripture and the Creeds, that God by special revelations has disclosed Himself to men and has moved chosen vessels to preserve that divine self-disclosure in written form, so inspiring them that what they wrote is the very Word of God. Because of this "mighty act of God," both supernatural and mysterious, the writings of these Spirit-inspired men are to be received as the very voice of God speaking out of the "light unapproachable" into our darkness. They are to be believed implicitly and obeyed unquestioningly because in them God speaks. They come with divine authority and are characterized by divine infallibility. This authority is in no way diminished and this infallibility is in no way endangered by the fact that the revelation has been committed to writing or by the fact that fallible and sinful men were employed as agents of inscription. The Holy Spirit's sovereign act by which He inspired the human writers so overruled their sinfulness and

their human fallibility, even while preserving the integrity of their personalities, that the quality of divinity was made to pervade the whole product of their pens. The Scripture to its whole extent and in all its parts speaks with divine authority and with divine infallibility. To be sure, the authority and the infallibility which pervade the whole of Scripture are no other than the authority and infallibility which the divine act of inspiration communicates to it; and inspiration looks to the preservation and the communication of revelation. Nevertheless, when so viewed, the authority and infallibility of Scripture are absolute and are not in any way to be limited or restricted.

It was out of jealousy for this Scriptural and creedal doctrine that Synods of the Christian Reformed Church have been aroused to action whenever the uniquely divine quality of Scripture seemed to be denied or questioned. In seeking to uphold it they have said that it is not permissible to teach that a fallible human element has been injected into divine revelation, or that a subjective element has in some way crept into revelation to compromise its complete objectivity, or that progress in revelation may be construed in an evolutionary framework, or that doctrines of one section of Scripture are in conflict with doctrines of another, or that the believing Bible searcher may entertain conclusions that conflict with the prepossession of a divinely inspired Word of God possessing divine authority and divine infallibility, or that a merely human authority may contradict historical facts attested by Scripture, or that the historical records of Scripture are not "strictly according to fact," or "that there is an area in Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies." While it must be admitted that the definitive value of these synodical declarations is limited somewhat by the fact that they are juridical in character and must be evaluated in the light of the specific cases to which they were addressed, by the fact also that they sometimes lack somewhat in precision of statement, and further by the fact that they stand without that larger body of commentary which is always necessary to remove all equivocation; nevertheless, it is obvious that the Synods of the Christian Reformed Church have been insistent on the unequivocal acknowledgment of the full divine authority and full divine infallibility (understood as including full divine inerrancy) of Holy Scripture. Even in apologetic efforts, the Synods have declared, this authority and trustworthiness are in no way to be surrendered since to do so is to lose at the outset the very thing that one attempts to defend. In this the Synods have been loyal to Scripture and the Creeds since both Scripture and the historic Reformed Confessions disallow all teaching that tends in any way to deny or limit the authority and trustworthiness which Scripture claims for itself.

Whether or not the Synods have always made proper application of the confessions in adjudicating those specific cases which have bearing on the doctrine of Scriptural inspiration and infallibility may well be subjected to further study, but that question has little to do directly with the issue at hand. It may be asked, however, whether or not the Church, speaking through its Synods, may have been carried away by

its zeal in the defense of Scripture to espouse positions that go beyond Scripture and the Creeds. Has the Church, e.g., said too much when it said that "the approval of a scientific believing theologian to the Bible should be that of one who unconditionally accepts the facts stated by the Bible" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 211); or when it charged one of its professors with impugning the trustworthiness of Scripture because he did not accept a certain historical narrative as "strictly according to fact" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 224); or when it said that "it is inconsonant with the Creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area in Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies" (*Acts*, 1959, p. 68)? That it may have done so is the expressed fear of some. It must be remembered, however, that these are not fully defined doctrinal pronouncements. They are juridical declarations issued in the adjudication of specific cases. As such they are subject to all the inherent limitations noted above. In the first instance, Synod was faced with an assertion that a believing theologian in his *scientific* study of Scripture may "for argument's sake" demand conclusive evidence "before accepting stated facts." To this Synod replied that the historical witness of the Bible must be accepted on the authority of the Bible alone. It said, "If it is beyond doubt that the Bible states the fact, no more evidence can be demanded by faith" (*Acts*, 1924, p. 211). In the second instance, Synod objected to the fact that the admission of the Sarnson narratives into Holy Writ did not prevent her professor "from assailing their absolute reliability" by calling them popular accounts which had been exaggerated after the manner of popular legends. In the third instance, Synod spoke in the context of a document in which a professor "employed language which may easily leave the impression that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies" (*Acts*, 1959, p. 68). Without judging that this professor had actually taken this position Synod went on to disallow it. In all three instances the Synods have defended the historical reliability of Scripture and have asserted that both Scripture and the creeds extend the trustworthiness of Scripture to its history as well as to its doctrine. However, in no one of these three instances has Synod provided a fuller commentary on her positions such as would preclude all misunderstanding and all mis-application of her pronouncements. Perhaps it was not obliged to do so in the circumstances.

The present study has shown, we believe, that in defending the divine trustworthiness of Biblical history the Synods have done no more than Scripture warrants and faith demands. We trust that this study also will provide such elucidation of these synodical pronouncements as is necessary to indicate in what sense they are to be interpreted and applied.

This is not to pretend that all the complex and sometimes perplexing problems regarding the infallibility of Scripture have been solved. Many questions remain. It is generally supposed today that when Scripture speaks of the rising and the setting of the sun it is not attempting to teach a fact of natural science, and when it speaks of the coney and the

hare, chewing the cud it is not attempting to teach a biological fact. But when, for example, Scripture speaks of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, does it mean to teach that he is the author of all that is contained in the first five books of the Bible? When the book of Job regards the dialogue between Job and his friends does it teach that their dialogue was actually carried out in the high flights of poetry; or when the words of Jehovah to Job are given does Scripture mean to teach that God spoke to His faithful servant poetically? When the evangelists report the words of Jesus do they claim to preserve the very words of our Lord? When Scripture reports that Samson slew a thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass and when it reports that he caught three hundred foxes does it mean to teach that these numbers are exact? When Luke reports the defense of Stephen does he record it as a speech which bears the quality of divine infallibility or are we but to suppose that he preserved Stephen's speech infallibly? These and many other questions like them remain and can not be solved by mere appeal to the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility. They are questions that must be answered by careful exegesis on the part of believing interpreters who in all their theological labors proceed from the prepossession of a divinely authoritative and divinely trustworthy Bible.

Before bringing this report to a close, two words of caution are in order. We should exercise caution first of all against attempting to build a defense for an infallible Bible merely on the basis of a historical apologetics. The temptation to do so is always great in view of the relative readiness of the unbelieving mind to yield to historical demonstrations. The temptation is intensified today when the findings of archeology are providentially demonstrating with almost monotonous regularity the historical reliability of Scripture thus exploding the theories of destructive criticism to the great joy of the Church. Two decisive considerations should sober our reaction in the face of these remarkable findings and should warn us against a purely historical apologetics. In the first place historical apologetics which seeks to authenticate Scripture involves a denial of the self-testimony of Scripture and presupposes that Scripture must be authenticated by evidences drawn from extra-Scriptural sources. This is to place the authority of extra-Biblical sources above the authority of the Bible and is in effect to lose the Bible as a writing of unique authority and trustworthiness in the very process of defending it. Evidences drawn from historical studies may be effectively employed against many of the hypotheses of unfriendly critics of Scripture, but they cannot be employed to make Scripture more sure without diminishing the self-authenticating character of Scripture. Secondly, historical evidences can do no more than demonstrate the general reliability of the Bible as a book of history. But it is not as a history book that the Bible speaks to us. It is a book of revelation. Indeed Scripture preserves and communicates a revelation which is imbedded in history. Nevertheless it is first of all a book of revelation. This is its uniqueness and it is as a book of revelation that it claims for itself divine authority and divine infallibility. An historical apologetics attempts to judge of Scripture by criteria that are foreign to the essential nature of Scripture.

The infallibility of Scripture is an article of faith based on Scripture's own claims for itself. It is not a fact disclosed by historical studies nor yet verifiable by such studies.

We would guard secondly against a pre-occupation with the doctrine of Scripture and its attendant problems and mystery. Beyond all doubt there is a Scriptural doctrine of Scripture which can be neglected only to the detriment of faith; and these are times when that doctrine needs sober study and valiant defense. The Church should remember, however, that the Lord has called it not to probe the mystery that is Scripture nor yet to resolve all the "problems" that are present in Scripture. Its basic task is rather to search the Scriptures for the testimony which they give of Christ. He, not Scripture, is the Savior and Lord of the Church, the supreme object of our faith. To faith in the Christ of the Scriptures the Church must call the world.

VIII. THE "PERIPHERY" QUESTION

The committee is also instructed "to study the matter upon which Synod withheld judgment" (*Acts*, 1959, p. 71-IV, B, 3, b). The matter to which reference is here made is "the view expressed by President Kromminga" in his paper "How Shall We Understand Infallibility?" (p. 69-C, 7, b (3)) against which view Dr. Wyngaarden charged that there is made an "unwarranted distinction between the so-called periphery and that which does not belong to the so-called periphery" (p. 68-C, 7a) and that in so doing Dr. Kromminga committed himself in his policy as President to a "drastic reinterpretation" of Arts. III-VII of the Belgic Confession (p. 71-9, (3)). The committee then is to weigh this charge and pass judgment on the consonance of the Kromminga distinction with the Creeds.

It should be noted that Synod did agree "that the statement of President Kromminga [to the effect that 'It was claimed with some justification that the Christian Church had always believed in infallibility'] is weak" (p. 68-6b, (1)); "that the word 'periphery' in this context of President Kromminga's article is ambiguous," and that "He [President Kromminga] has employed language which may easily leave the impression that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies" (p. 68-7, b (1)). Furthermore, Synod took note of the admission of Dr. Kromminga that his first interpretation of the clause in Art. IV of the Belgic Confession "against which nothing can be alleged" was "too restrictive and that he recognizes that it refers to the content of all the books as well as to the inclusion of the books into the Canon" (p. 67-3, b).

On the other hand, the record indicates that in the judgment of Synod the view of President Kromminga "does not . . . substantiate so serious a charge as Dr. Wyngaarden brings against the President of the Seminary" (p. 68-b, (1)); that President Kromminga in his paper "does not commit the seminary in its policies to any interpretation of the Creeds" (p. 70-9, b, (1)); and that Dr. Wyngaarden argues from silence (p. 64-4b) and "develops his argument by inference, but does not demonstrate that his is a necessary inference" (p. 69-8, b, (2)).

It is understandable that misunderstandings and misgivings should arise out of a reading of the Kromminga paper for, as the *Acts of Synod* indicate, there were a number of inconclusive and ambiguous elements in the situation as well as in the paper itself. The article might be construed to say, as indeed it was, that peripheral matters in Scripture participate to a lesser degree in inspiration and infallibility than do those that are central. It might give the impression that the peripheral includes certain specific words and some historical data thereby excluding them from Biblical infallibility. However, President Kromminga removed these misunderstandings and misgivings by insisting that the distinction he made is not to be understood "in terms of a quantitative limitation of Scriptural infallibility" (p. 68-b, (2)) nor is it intended to refer to "this or that word" in Scripture but rather (to) 'some aspect' of the content of the words which is not germane to the Spirit's purpose" (p. 68-7, b, (1)); and by assuring Synod that "he heartily believes that Scripture in its whole extent, in all its parts, and in all its words, is the infallible and inerrant Word of God" (p. 67-4, b).

It should be noted further that President Kromminga nowhere in his explanation explicitly employs the *distinction*: peripheral and non-peripheral. He simply uses the term "periphery" in the sense indicated above. The counter-term ("non-periphery") is supplied by implication to give us a workable distinction. To this President Kromminga does not object. It should be noted, however, that this intimates how little President Kromminga conceives of this distinction, partly expressed, partly implied, as a fixed and rigid categorization of his view of Scriptural infallibility. He might just as well have used another term (other terms).

Although Synod averred that this distinction is a relatively new one in our Church, nevertheless it does have recognized standing in our Reformed theological tradition. As is well known, Reformed Biblical scholarship has always sought to discover what is the heart of any given passage and then to group the attendant data around this central truth. More specifically Bavinck (*Geteformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4th edition, Volume I, pages 409, 410), in repudiating the mechanical and stressing the organic concept of inspiration, and using the analogy of the human body, where e.g. the heart and head are more central than the hair and nails, although all belong to the single organism, applies this analogy to Scripture. In Scripture too there is this *centrum*. Moving about this *centrum* is a periphery of truth, which though more or less removed from the *centrum*, nevertheless belongs organically to the revelatory circle of God's thoughts. This distinction in no way carries in it implications which predetermine one's approach to the Scriptures, or which categorically impose a fixed interpretation upon the Scriptures. It is used simply to describe what the Bible interpreter discovers when opening the Scriptures, namely, that there is in the Scriptures incidental and circumstantial data which has no *independent* revelational significance, but is dependent for its revelational significance upon the relationship it sustains to the central intent and purpose of a given passage. When viewed in this light, the term "periphery" must be judged not inconsonant with creedal teachings on infallibility.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee, having sought to fulfil the mandate given to it by the Synod of 1959, offers the above study report to the Synod of 1961, and submits the following recommendations:

1. That Synod receive this study report as the fulfilment of the mandate "to study the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and our own Creedal statements."
2. That Synod submit this study report to the Church as a guide (to form rather than to bind the mind of the Church) in understanding the concept of Scriptural infallibility.
3. That Synod make the committee's judgment on the "periphery" question its own, namely, that the use of this term to describe Scripture's incidental and circumstantial data which has no independent revelational significance apart from its organic relation to the central intent and purpose of a given passage, is not in consonant with the Creeds.

John H. Bratt, *Chairman*

Paul G. Schrottenboer, *Reporter*

Jacob T. Hoogstra

Louis Praamsma

Gordon J. Spykman

John H. Stek

Clarence J. Vos