

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

THE  
*Smart Jour of Conn*  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

LUTHER'S DOCTRINE AND CRITICISM OF  
SCRIPTURE.

BY PROFESSOR KEMPER FULLERTON.

I.

WE are unable to appreciate the full significance of Luther's doctrine of Scripture unless we understand how he arrived at it. We cannot understand how he arrived at it until we understand what, in essence, was the religious situation in his day. Two facts furnish us with the key to this situation.

1. Ecclesiastical tradition had superseded Scripture; and the Pope as the mouth of tradition, rather than the Bible as its source, was the supreme authority. Theoretically the Bible was still the ultimate authority (the Pope supported his claims by the appeal to Scripture<sup>1</sup>), but practically it was not so. The Bible was a book of heavenly mysteries. The allegorical method of interpretation, received from the early church and elaborated by the Schoolmen, had turned the Bible into an enigma. It needed a competent interpreter. This competent interpreter was the church as represented by the Pope. Was he not the possessor of apostolic tradition as to the meaning of Scripture? But the one who has the authority to explain

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Bull "Unam Sanctam" of Boniface VIII.

the meaning of the Bible is the one who possesses the real and final authority. Theoretically the law is supreme. Practically the court which interprets the law is supreme.

2. The hierarchy, as the conservers of the apostolic tradition and the dispensers of the sacraments, had arrogated to themselves divine powers. They held the keys of heaven and hell. Through them alone men could find access to God. The right of the individual to approach his God directly through Jesus Christ was denied. The priest blocked the way. Salvation was the reward of merit which the church had largely at its own disposal, not a gift of grace directly from God to the individual soul. But at this point the individual soul rebelled. Luther's position was developed in the sharpest and most direct antithesis to the two principles of the papacy just described.

1. The Reformation was born in a great spiritual experience. Luther found God without the church's mediation. It was the realization of this possibility by one who had the strength to accept its consequences, that initiated a new epoch in the world's history. In the great spiritual struggle through which Luther passed in the convent at Erfurt, his sins weighed him down. The thought of the anger of a just God gave him no peace, do what he would to earn merit and forgiveness. He was only finally comforted by the words of an old monk, who reminded him of the article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the remission of sins," and of Paul's assurance that the sinner is justified by faith. Then, in accordance with the advice of Staupitz, he turned from the study of the Schoolmen to the study of the Scripture, St. Augustine, and Tauler. The light broke into his soul. The great gospel doctrines of sin and grace were absorbed into his being, became an integral part of his experience. This experience of justification by faith

alone, as contrasted with the acceptance of it at the hands of the church, was an assured fact in Luther's life before he entered upon his great struggle with the church, which began with the Indulgence Controversy.

2. But Luther did not at first appreciate the critical significance of what he had passed through. The immediate though wholly unlooked-for consequence was that he was compelled to grapple with the question of authority. His experience brought him into conflict with certain abuses of the day which had the sanction of the church. It was soon made apparent by his adversaries that Luther's position was at variance with the recognized religious authorities of the times, the Schoolmen, the Pope, the Fathers, and even the General Councils. Had a mere individual the right to assert himself against these authorities, which the whole religious world, at least the whole official religious world, held to be final? It was a critical moment. How could Luther support himself in the eyes of the world in such an emergency? At this point he made his appeal to Scripture. But would he be able to maintain the authority of Scripture against the weight of all these ecclesiastical authorities? It took nearly two years of strenuous conflict (from the beginning of the Thesis Controversy, in October, 1517, to the debate with Eck at Leipzig, in the summer of 1519) to decide this question.<sup>1</sup> Slowly and with difficulty Luther fought his way through. One authority after another was abandoned, until only the supremacy of the General Council was left. The Leipzig Disputation largely turned on the question whether such a council could err. Luther wavered in the debate. He could scarcely bring himself to take the final

<sup>1</sup> For the development of Luther's doctrine of Scripture during this period, cf. especially the exhaustive treatise of Preuss, *Die Entwicklung des Schriftprinzips bei Luther bis zur Leipziger Disputation* (Leipzig, 1901).

step, and reject the supreme authority of a general council. Through his hesitation he was placed at a disadvantage in the debate. But immediately after the close of the disputation he reaches the final decision. In his report of the proceedings to the Elector of Saxony, he bluntly announces his conviction that one should rather believe a layman with Scripture than the Pope and Councils without Scripture,<sup>1</sup> and he never subsequently swerved from this position. Thus, as against the two fundamental positions of Rome described above, we have two fundamental principles developed in the history of Luther; viz. (1) the necessity of a personal religious experience in which the individual soul comes into contact with its God through faith in Christ alone, without human mediation, as opposed to the claims of the church to bestow salvation; and (2) the supreme and sole authority of Scripture as authenticating and supporting this experience, as opposed to all ecclesiastical or any other authorities which might be introduced to cast doubt upon it. 'These [namely Scripture and experience] are to be the two witnesses, and as it were the two touchstones, of the right teaching.'<sup>2</sup>

These two principles have been called respectively the Material and the Formal Principle of the Reformation. This terminology follows the old Catholic distinction between *forma* and *materia*, or content. In its present application it implies, if it is used at all strictly, that we are to distinguish between a certain truth contained in the Bible, namely, the doctrine of justification by faith (the *materia*, or content, or matter, of Scripture), and the Bible as such (the *forma*), which is supposed to vouch for the truth of this truth. When, to take

<sup>1</sup> Erlangen Edition of Luther's Works (hereafter referred to as E. A.), lili. 19.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. li. 103 (date, 1534).

another example, a person says that he believes in a creation in six days because it is in the Bible, he is really making this distinction between the Bible as *forma* and the content, or *materia*, of the Bible.

Starting from this distinction, and keeping in mind the historical sequences in Luther's development, Dorner arrives<sup>1</sup> at the following exceedingly important conclusion:—

'The apostolic and prophetic writings only came to be regarded [by Luther] as the decisive rule and judge after the saving matter which the church still held in common with the Scriptures, had approved itself to his heart by its own inherent power. Before the decisive turning point in his life, the Scriptures only influenced him as means of grace, similarly to preaching, but not as a divine rule recognized by him as independent,'

i.e. as a formal authority independent of the inherent truth of its content. Yet it seems historically hardly possible to hold that the Scripture was not, in some degree at least, a formal authority for Luther before the Indulgence Controversy. Luther was heir to the general church doctrine of the Bible. It must therefore have had for him, at the start, a certain measure of formal authority.<sup>2</sup> He would scarcely have been quieted in his distress of mind if he had not thought the old monk had the warrant of Scripture to assure him of the truth of the forgiveness of sin. If this assurance had possessed no more authority for him than that which attaches to the opinion of a trusted friend, it would scarcely have sufficed to relieve him. The carefully worded formulation of Köstlin<sup>3</sup> seems appropriately to combine the truth in Dorner's statement with the consideration just mentioned.

<sup>1</sup> That certainty [of justification by faith] to which he had been

<sup>2</sup> History of Protestant Theology (English trans.), i. 221.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walther, *Das Erbe der Reformation im Kampfe der Gegenwart*, 1. Heft (Leipzig, 1903), p. 60 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Luther's Theologie (2d German Ed., Stuttgart, 1901), i. 243.

led, . . . especially through his penetration into the Pauline Epistles, and with which he then opposed the dominant ecclesiastical doctrine of salvation, did not rest for him upon a *previously attained conviction and theory of a unique, divine origin of the biblical writings*, by virtue of which they were to be raised above the ecclesiastical authorities. Rather, after he had first received a *general persuasion* of the divine origin of Scripture out of the church doctrine, the full consciousness of its *uniqueness* was first attained by him, and maintained against the ecclesiastical authorities in his fight for his doctrine of salvation, which he had taken from Scripture and of whose truth he was fully persuaded.'

In this statement the original authority of Scripture as inherited by Luther from the church is not ignored, as it seems to be on Dorner's view, but it is *subordinated* to the authority which the Scripture possessed for Luther through the truth of its content. The fact is, we are probably not justified in distinguishing between form and content in considering the development of Luther's persuasion of the truth of Scripture. It was certainly not any formal authority of the Bible as such, apart from its *materia*, or content, that influenced Luther. On the other hand, it was not the self-evidencing power of a great religious truth *isolated from Scripture* that affected him. It was the self-evidencing power of a great *truth contained in Scripture* that won him first of all. The relationship between a truth as self-authenticated and a truth authenticated by Scripture was not considered by him. Accordingly a distinction between a Formal and a Material Principle as seen in Luther's development does not seem to be justified if we press the strict use of the terms. Nevertheless, it may be allowed a relative justification in so far as the Material Principle stands for the truth of the doctrine of justification by faith, not apart from but as contained in the Bible, while the Formal Principle stands, not for the general authority of the Bible as such, which was theoretically admitted by everybody, but for the *sole* authority of the Bible as containing this truth, and as opposed to all other

authorities.<sup>1</sup> The Formal Principle, accordingly, must not be understood as referring to the formal authority of the Bible apart from its content,—though this is undoubtedly its proper definition,—but it means, as applied to Luther's doctrine of the Bible, the *sole* authority of the Bible as containing in objective form the great truth of justification by faith.

Even when the Formal Principle is thus qualified, it is still of the utmost importance to observe the sequence in Luther's development, to which both Dorner and Köstlin call attention. The Formal Principle was only gradually developed, and its enunciation followed Luther's conviction of the Material Principle in point of time.<sup>2</sup> In other words, *Luther experienced the truth of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith before he was prepared to admit the final and absolute supremacy of the Bible over all other authorities.* This means that Luther's experience of the *religious* truth of the Bible was decisive for his doctrine of the Bible as the sole authority. The prime question with Luther was, whether he would deny the truth of a great religious experience which he had enjoyed, and the logical consequences which followed upon it. But this experience was the experience of a truth which he had found in Scripture. Hence the defense of his experience meant in the last analysis, because of the historical conditions of his time, the defense of Scripture as the sole authority. While, therefore, it is not legitimate to hold that Luther made a conscious distinction between the authority of form and the authority of content, it is, nevertheless, true that, in his most characteristic utterances concerning Scripture, Luther had the *content of Scripture chiefly in mind.* That which was really epoch-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Preuss, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Preuss, *l. c.*, Scheel, *Luthers Stellung zur heiligen Schrift*, (Tübingen und Leipzig, 1902), p. 13 ff.

making in Luther's treatment of Scripture can be understood only when the influence of his experience of the saving truth of Scripture upon the development of his doctrine of Scripture is constantly borne in mind.

It is now proposed to state the main features of Luther's doctrine of Scripture in the light of the historical conditions under which it was developed.

1. *The Christocentric Character of Scripture.*—The first and most original feature in Luther's conception of the Bible was that it was Christocentric. The Bible was considered to teach, above everything else, Christ, and justification by faith in him.

'If you will interpret well and surely, then take Christ with you, for he is the man whom the whole of it [the Scripture] concerns.' . . . The entire Scripture refers to him'. . . The Lord points out to us the true knack of interpreting Moses and all the prophets, and gives us to understand that Moses, with all his histories and figures, points him out and belongs to Christ; . . . that Christ is the point in the circle from which the whole circle is drawn'. . . All Scripture is so ordered as always to urge this saying [namely, the doctrine of salvation by faith]. It is the chief saying in all of Moses, and all that proceeds and follows refer to it.' . . . He cannot err in Scripture who sees Christ everywhere in it, even though in the words of a passage he is not to be seen.'<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with these ideas, Luther proposes, in his Preface to Genesis,

'to take a book from the Old Testament and interpret the same . . . just as he has done in the New Testament, from which every Christian may see how Scripture everywhere agrees, and how all examples and histories, yes the entire Scripture, through and through, tend to this, that Christ be recognized. . . . As we have seen hitherto how all the Gospels teach and urge nothing but the one thing, so we will see the same thing in the Old Testament.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lxiii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. xlvii. 242 (1530-32).

<sup>3</sup> E. A. xlvi. 338 ff. (1537-38).

<sup>4</sup> E. A. xxxiv. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Hoppe, *Dogmatik des deutschen Protestantismus*, I. 238.

<sup>6</sup> E. A. xxxiii. 22 (1527).

It is evident that the conception of Scripture implied in these statements, which might be multiplied indefinitely, springs immediately out of the personal experience of Luther. Here the whole emphasis lies upon the content of Scripture. The Bible has no meaning for him apart from its presentation of Christ (*vid. infra*).

2. *The Perspicuity of Scripture.*—Not only does Scripture teach Christ, it must teach him so clearly that the individual can understand it for himself without the aid of any ecclesiastical interpretation. The perspicuity of Scripture, at least with regard to Christ, is an absolutely essential characteristic of Scripture, if it is to serve as the sole principle of authority. An obscure authority which necessitates an interpretation is for all practical purposes no authority at all. If Luther was to maintain the validity of his experience on the basis of Scripture as against the ecclesiastical authorities, it was essential that the sense of Scripture should be so clear that there could be no possibility of mistaking it. Otherwise his opponents could say that he had not interpreted it aright, and the scriptural basis for his position would then be undermined.

3. *The Grammatico-historical Principle of Exegesis.*—Immediately connected with the perspicuity of the Scripture is Luther's principle of exegesis. The perspicuity of the Scripture can be maintained only when the allegorical interpretation is abandoned, and the grammatico-historical principle introduced. The allegorical method, as we have seen, had turned the Bible into a book of riddles, and had thus necessitated the introduction of an authoritative ecclesiastical interpreter. By the adoption of the new principle of exegesis, the Bible became self-interpreting. It could now be recovered from the hands of the priest, and placed in the hands of the layman, in the assurance that the layman could understand it for himself.

The principles of the perspicuity of Scripture and of the grammatico-historical exegesis are thus seen to be indis severably linked together.

With respect to the perspicuity of Scripture, we frequently meet with such statements as the following:—

“We must be sure of this that no simpler speech has come to earth than that which God has spoken.<sup>1</sup> . . . Be only absolutely certain that nothing is clearer than the sun, that is the Scripture. But if a cloud has passed over it, yet there is nothing else behind it than the same sun. And if there is an obscurity in Scripture, do not doubt that there is certainly the same truth behind, which is clear in *other* places; and let him who cannot understand the dark places remain by the light.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the fullest treatment of the grammatico-historical principle of exegesis is found in two works dating from 1521, —the Answer to “Bock” Emser, and the Exposition of the Twenty-second Psalm. In the former work he speaks of the literal sense as

‘the highest, best, strongest, in short as the whole substance, essence, and basis of the Holy Scripture; so that, if one did away with it, the whole Scripture would go for nothing. . . . As the Holy Spirit is the simplest writer and speaker of all that is in heaven and earth [Perspicuity], *therefore* his words can have no more than the one simple sense, which we call the literal or tongue sense.’<sup>3</sup>

In his exposition of Ps. xxii. 18, Luther draws an analogy between Scripture and Christ’s garments.

‘The truth of faith is wrapped up in Scripture as Christ is wrapped up in his clothes. But the garments were divided. So the simple meaning of Scripture is divided by the allegory into various senses. The apostles of the Pope began to spread through the world the fourfold sense of Scripture [the illusion is to the scholastic elaboration of the allegorical method], and so rent the garment of Christ, which became thus mere rags and tatters [note the contemptuous expression], which serve for the teaching of neither faith, nor hope, nor morals. But, beyond this division of the garments, there was the casting of lots whose it should be. In this

<sup>1</sup> E. A. xxxiii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> This reference I have unfortunately lost.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. xxvii. 258, 259, 262.

game the Pope is prince. Others may investigate and dispute in Scripture, but without the Pope they can decide nothing conclusively. He plays with his fellow-gamblers till the lot falls to him alone, and so the interpretation of Scripture comes into his power alone. The victory in this game has been so complete that the Pope is raised above Scripture. Through this gaming of the accursed popes and sophists upon the seamless robe of Christ, the robe has become a mockery and an uncertain possession; for how will you teach faith with certainty when you make the sense of Scripture uncertain?"<sup>1</sup>

Nothing can show more clearly than do these statements how conscious Luther himself was of the logical relationship between the allegorical method of exegesis, the resultant obscurity of Scripture, and the consequent necessity of an authoritative interpreter, of which the Pope skillfully took advantage. The consistency with which Luther himself applied the grammatico-historical method is, however, another matter. This very exposition of Ps. xxii. 18 is about as neat an example of allegorical interpretation as one could wish to find, though it is only fair to Luther to add that, in accordance with the principle laid down in his exposition of Gal. iv. 24,<sup>2</sup> he rarely, if ever, made use of the allegory in proof of a doctrinal position. His use of it was rather for homiletical purposes.

But there is one qualification which should be carefully noted, as it has a direct bearing on our conception of Luther's attitude toward the Bible. His adoption of the grammatico-historical principle of exegesis was due, not to a scientific interest, but to a dogmatic interest.<sup>3</sup> The Bible was for him, not primarily an historical source, but a religious source. It follows,

<sup>1</sup> E. A. (*Exegetica Opera*), xvi. 314 ff.

<sup>2</sup> E. A., *Latin Commentary on Galatians*, ii. 248. 'Allegories yield no firm proofs in theology, but, like pictures, they adorn and illustrate the subject.' Cf. also E. A. xxvii. 285, 'The spiritual sense which Emser puffs up is not valid for argument.'

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (*Engl. Trans.*), vii. 246 ff., Köstlin, *op. cit.*, ii. 44; Walther, *op. cit.*, 27.

therefore, that his principle of exegesis, which was enunciated in a dogmatic and religious interest, would be largely dominated by this interest, rather than by a strictly historical one.

An instructive illustration of this result is seen in the relationship of his exegetical principle to his Christocentric theory of Scripture. In the statements cited under (1) there is really involved a new canon of interpretation, which may be called a dogmatic canon. The Scripture must be so interpreted as to teach Christ. The grammatico-historical exegesis is the means by which Scripture is to be made to teach Christ. This comes out very clearly in the Preface to Genesis, already alluded to.

'These are the two things which we have to say by way of preface, first, that we should allow the words to remain in their simple, straightforward meaning [here the grammatico-historical method is expressly adopted]; secondly, that one should *understand the words in their kernel* and feel them in the heart.'<sup>1</sup>

Here the dogmatic canon of interpretation is asserted. But what if the grammatical method and the dogmatic interest should lead in opposite directions? Which is to be followed?

On this point, Luther observes:—

'I have often said, Whosoever will study in the Holy Scripture must see to this, that he stand by the simple words *as long as he can*, and not turn from them unless an article of faith compel him to understand it differently from what the words express, . . . that is, when faith does not suffer the meaning which the words give.'<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly when, in another connection, Dan. iv. 27 was urged against his doctrine of justification by faith, he says: 'One must hold to the *Hauptstück*, and get along with the sayings on good works as best he can.' If Luther could not solve this statement of Daniel, he would prefer to let it pass, rather than to deny the one clear text, John vi. 27 (the verse on which he was commenting). Hence 'the statements on

<sup>1</sup> E. A. xxxiii. 28 (1527).

<sup>2</sup> E. A. xxxiii. 24.

good works *must receive a gloss*, in order that they may rhyme with this text, for this must stand fast.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which, on occasion, Luther's dogmatic interest will carry him, is seen in the following remarkable passage. To the Sophists who urge texts of Scripture favoring work-righteousness (he again has Dan. iv. 27 chiefly in mind), he says:—

'Here on this side stands Christ, there on that side stand certain texts of Scripture which speak of law and works. But now Christ is ever a Lord over the Scriptures and all works. . . . Therefore, while Christ himself is the treasure by which I am ransomed and redeemed, and was made a sin and curse that he might make me righteous and bless me, I ask no questions of other texts of Scripture, however many you may bring against me with which to establish righteousness by works and to overthrow righteousness by faith. For I have on my side the Lord and Master of the Scripture with whom I will hold, . . . and [I will] let you cry away that the Scripture contradicts itself, at one place ascribing righteousness to faith, at another to works, although it is impossible that the Scripture should contradict itself. . . . You may see to it how to rhyme these texts with each other, which you say disagree. I stand by the one who is the Lord and Master of Scripture. Therefore if any one cannot deny the fact that he is unable satisfactorily to harmonize the texts in Scripture which speak of works with those [which speak of faith], and must listen to the antagonists boasting with a great noise of the work-texts, then let him give this simple answer, Hear you well, you boast confidently with the Scripture, which is nevertheless under Christ as a servant, and you besides bring out of it what is not at all the best part of it. I do not care for this at all. Boast away of the servant. I however bid defiance in Christ, who is the true Herr and Kaiser over the Scripture.'<sup>2</sup>

In these bold, really startling words, the dogmatic canon of interpretation, namely, that the Scripture should urge Christ, has transcended all other considerations. Of course what Luther means to imply is that those parts of Scripture which

<sup>1</sup> E. A. xlvii. 242 ff. (1530-32).

<sup>2</sup> Walch's Edition of Luther's Works, viii. 2139 ff. The same passage is found in a more original form in E. A., Lat. Comm. on Gal. i. 387 ff.

reveal Christ are so clear that they serve as a criterion for all the rest of Scripture. When he says, therefore, that Christ is above Scripture, this is his vigorous way of saying that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture.<sup>1</sup> But in the peculiar way in which this fact is stated there is something more fundamental involved. The *materia*, or what Luther calls the religious "kernel," of Scripture, is emphasized to such an extent that its formal authority is altogether lost sight of. Of course, when reduced to the simple proposition that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, the above statement is quite compatible with the recognition of the formal authority of Scripture. But in its *mode of expression* it betrays the attitude of one who is, for the time at least, quite indifferent to any authority of Scripture apart from its religious content. It is this content, as summed up in the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ and as experienced by Luther, that was supreme for him. But this very kernel of Scripture, in the interest of which it was to be interpreted, might, when it takes the form of the "analogy of faith," become itself a formal authority in its relation to interpretation, and so hamper very disastrously the scientific development of the grammatico-historical principle of exegesis. In fact, this was the result that actually happened in the subsequent development of Protestant scholasticism which practically subjected exegesis to the creeds.

4. *The Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*.—According to Luther, perception of the real meaning of Scripture and the final persuasion of its truth are impossible without the coöperation of the Holy Spirit. This thought is a supplement to his theory of biblical perspicuity, and a corollary to his Christocentric theory of Scripture. His treatment of this subject in his great work against Erasmus, "De Servo Arbitrio," may be regarded

<sup>1</sup> Dorner, *op. cit.*, i. 252 ff.

as typical. Here again he lays down his fundamental principle, that 'what is given for instruction must not be obscure,' but he proceeds to qualify this as follows:—

'There are two kinds of perspicuity and two kinds of obscurity in Scripture. The one is external, in the Scripture itself, as it lies before us. This is in no respect obscure, but gives to the whole world in clear words the chief thing which the Scripture contains. The other is internal, in the heart, so that one recognizes and understands the spiritual things which the Spirit brings to the attention. In regard to these things there is not a man on earth who understands the least letter of Scripture, except those who have the Spirit of God. For all men are by nature blind and have a darkened heart.'<sup>1</sup>

But a spirit-wrought understanding of Scripture is practically equivalent to a spirit-wrought persuasion of its truth. This latter thought, that it is only the Spirit who can produce this persuasion, is involved in the following statements.

In arguing against the dictum of Augustine, that he would not have believed Scripture if he had not believed the church,—a statement, by the way, which gave Luther and other Reformers a good many unhappy moments,—he says:—

'Each one must believe by himself that it is God's word, and that he *inwardly* comprehends it that it is true, though an angel from heaven and all the world preach against it.'<sup>2</sup> . . . You must not be Luther's, but Christ's scholars; and it is not enough that you say Luther, Peter, or Paul has said this, but you must feel Christ himself in your conscience, and *inwardly* experience that it is God's word, though all the world should contend against you. As long as you have not *the feeling*, so long you have not tasted God's word.'<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most remarkable passage of all is the following:—

'The Romanists say, Yes; but how can it be known what is God's word, and what is true or false? We must learn it from the Pope and the Councils. Very well, let them decree and say what they will, still say I, Thou canst not rest thy confidence thereon, nor satisfy thy conscience. Thou must decide for thyself, thy neck

E. A., Opera latina, varii argumenti, vii. 127.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. II. 324 ff. (1523).

<sup>3</sup> E. A. xxviii. 298 (1522).

is at stake, thy life is at stake. Therefore must God say to thee in thy heart, This is God's word; else it is undecided.'<sup>1</sup>

The way in which Luther utilizes the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti* is very significant. In the above passages, Luther is not thinking mainly, if at all, of the inspiration or divine origin of "God's word," but of its religious content.<sup>2</sup> It is to this that the Holy Spirit bears witness. He does not argue from the formal authority of Scripture to the truth of its content. The whole emphasis again falls on the content. The truth of this is practically axiomatic, self-authenticating to the spiritually illuminated man. 'Through the truth,' says Luther, 'is the soul captivated so that she can sit in judgment upon all things, yet cannot sit in judgment upon the truth, but rather is compelled to say in infallible assurance, that this is truth.' Luther gives an analogy. We say that 3 and 7 are 10, but we cannot tell why. We only know that it is so. He then continues:—

'Such a *sensus* is in the church [for Luther, the communion of individual believers] through the illumination of the Spirit to judge and confirm the doctrines, of which, though she cannot demonstrate them, she is yet certain. Just as among the philosophers no one judges of common ideas [axioms], but by them judges all other ideas; so is it among us<sup>3</sup> the sense of the spirit which judges all things, yet is judged by none, as St. Paul says.'<sup>4</sup>

In statements such as these the formal authority of Scripture is completely lost sight of in the self-authenticating truth of its religious content. In statements such as these is also involved that great Reformation principle which was the most direct contribution of the Reformation to the history of civilization,—

<sup>1</sup> Walch, xl. 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Köstlin, II. 10.

<sup>3</sup> What is said of the church in this passage holds good for the individual believer; cf. Köstlin, I. 303, n.

<sup>4</sup> E. A., Opera latina, v. a., v. 102 (1520).

the Right of Private Judgment.<sup>1</sup> For this right ultimately meant the overthrow of feudalism in *society* as well as in religion.

From the foregoing statements of Luther,—which are not isolated statements, or wrested from their contexts unless I have wofully misinterpreted them, but are typical expressions, and embody what are some of the most fundamental and characteristic convictions of Luther,—it is clear that the weight of emphasis does not fall on the Bible as a formal authority. It is not the inspiration or divine origin of Scripture which is most in Luther's mind, but the religious truth of its content which had been verified in Luther's experience. We may remind ourselves again that Luther did not isolate this truth from the Bible. The Christ-truth by which he had been "taken captive" was a biblical truth, not a truth of philosophy or natural religion. It is improper to ignore the effect of this consideration upon him. Indeed, as we shall see, he is himself quite conscious of this consideration. Nevertheless, in the peculiar historical development of his doctrine of Scripture in the correlation of his main conceptions of Scripture as illustrated in the four points thus far presented, and in many of his specific statements in which he formulates these conceptions, *the momentum of his thought is distinctly away from the Scripture as a formal authority and toward the spiritual authority of its content.* That this is not an unwarranted inference is fairly demonstrable from the criticism of Scripture which Luther allows himself, 'The Christian man is the most free lord of all, and servant of none.' This liberty of the Christian may be exercised upon the Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Yet in Luther's view this was really the judgment of the Spirit in the Christian, rather than of the Christian himself. Cf. Köhler in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1903, No. 13.

'From this [he says, alluding to the distinctions which he drew among New Testament books], you can now judge of all books and doctrines, what is gospel and what not. For what is not preached or written in this way, [namely, what does not urge Christ], that is false, however good it seems. *This power to judge all Christians possess, not the Pope or Council.*'<sup>1</sup>

It is now proposed to consider Luther's criticisms of Scripture.

## II.

It has been questioned whether Luther's criticisms were mainly influenced by religious or by historical considerations. As we shall see, historical arguments are not ignored, but, as might be expected from what has already been said, it is primarily his Christocentric theory of Scripture which is Luther's main canon of criticism, as it is his main canon of interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Thus he says in his Preface to James: 'This is the true touchstone, by which all books are to be judged, when one sees whether they urge Christ or not, as all Scripture shows<sup>3</sup> forth Christ, and St. Paul will know no one but Christ (1 Cor. ii. 2).'<sup>2</sup> In accordance with this canon, Luther feels at liberty to draw distinctions in Scripture, even to the point where certain books seem to lose all their authority for him, because of their inability to meet the test which he has set up.

1. In the conclusion to his Preface to the New Testament of 1522, we read:—

'From all this you can rightly judge among all books, and make distinction as to which are the best. For John's Gospel and St. Paul's Epistles, especially that to the Romans,' and St. Peter's

<sup>1</sup> E. A. II. 324 ff. (1523).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Köstlin, i. 383 ff., and Scheel, 48 ff., who lay the emphasis on the religious nature of Luther's criticism. On the other hand, Walther, 39 ff., creates the impression that it should be regarded as historical. I have been unable to consult Kunze's works, in which the historical interest of Luther is emphasized.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. Ixlii. 157 (1522).

'This epistle is the true masterpiece of the New Testament, and the purest evangelium of all' (E. A. Ixlii. 119).

First Epistle, are the true kernel and marrow among all the books. These should be fairly the first, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most of all, and through daily reading to make them as common as the daily bread. In these you do not find much description of the works or miracles of Christ. But you *do* find developed, in a masterly fashion, how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives righteousness and blessedness, and this is the true nature of the gospel. . . . For if one were to be deprived of either the works or the preaching of Christ, I would prefer to forego the works rather than the preaching, for the works do not help me. But his words, they help me as he says, John v. 51. [Note the subordination of the historical interest in Christ's life to the religious interest in his doctrine.] Because, now, John writes little of the works of Christ but much of his preaching, whereas the other three Gospels write much of his works but little of his words, therefore John's Gospel is the one dear, true, chief gospel, and to be much preferred to the other three, and to be exalted above them. And also the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter are far in advance of the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In fine, St. John's Gospel and First Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's First Epistle,—these are the books which show Christ to you, and teach everything which it is necessary for you to know, even though you never saw or heard any other books.<sup>1</sup>

It is indeed true that elsewhere he praises the Synoptists as supplementing John in their fuller account of Christ's works,<sup>2</sup> and even says in his "Table Talk" that they are to be especially recommended to the common man and young people; while John, Paul, and the Psalms are the best books for those who must contend with heretics.<sup>3</sup> But these statements can hardly be considered as materially qualifying the important distinctions drawn in the Preface just cited. That these bold distinctions spring out of the very essence of Luther's conception of the Bible, and are not simply casual and thoughtless criti-

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lxiii. 114.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. xliii. 81 (1532).

<sup>3</sup> E. A. lxii. 137. But Luther does not explain *why* he recommends the Synoptists to the common man.

cisms, is seen in the fact that almost the same paragraph which has been quoted from the Preface of 1522 is again found in his preface to his sermons on First Peter of 1523.<sup>1</sup> But the paragraph was suppressed in the last edition of his Prefaces to the New Testament in 1545. The significance of this omission will be considered later.

2. But Luther's criticisms go far beyond the statements just examined. This is notably true in the case of his criticism of the antilegomena James, Revelation, Hebrews, and Jude. In his Prefaces to the New Testament of 1522 he groups these books together at the end, and introduces them by saying, 'Hitherto we have dealt with the certain, true, chief books of the New Testament. The four following, however, have had *from ancient times* a different standing.'<sup>2</sup> This caption might suggest that Luther's doubts of these books are mainly historical, and attention has been called to the fact that such good Catholics as Erasmus and even Cajetan felt free to criticise them, as being of doubtful canonicity.<sup>3</sup> And it is true that the doubt as to these books in the ancient church and the uncertainty as to their apostolic origin influenced Luther. Chiefly historical reasons seem to determine his attitude toward Jude. It is an abstract from Second Peter, not apostolic, and doubted in the ancient church. Its citation from Enoch also gives him trouble. But criticism of the contents is not wanting. Though he will praise it, yet he describes it as an unnecessary epistle, subordinate to the chief books.<sup>4</sup> Formerly, according to another casual statement, the book had seemed to him *inutilis*, though this severer judgment he afterward retracted. At a later date his attitude is more conservative. He speaks of Jude as the author, and

<sup>1</sup> E. A. II. 326.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. lxiii. 154.

<sup>3</sup> Walther, 39.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. lxiii. 158.

does not stumble at the citation from Enoch.<sup>1</sup> He denies the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, on account of ii. 3 (an historical argument); but in the case of this Epistle he also takes specific exception to the contents. He finds it a "hard knot" that repentance should be denied to one who sins after baptism, and holds that xii. 17 'is against all the Gospels, and Epistles of St. Paul.' Yet he acknowledges that it is a fine epistle, that it speaks of the high priesthood of Christ in a masterly fashion, and interprets the Old Testament in a fine, rich way. It is evidently the book of an excellent, learned man who was a disciple of the apostles, and built upon their foundation gold, silver, precious stones, *although possibly some wood, hay, and stubble were mixed in.* Who wrote it is unknown. But that makes no difference. We are to be content with the teaching.<sup>2</sup> Later we again find a more cautious attitude assumed. The hard knot is untied, and, instead of saying that xii. 17 is against all the Gospels, and Epistles of Paul, the text of the revised Preface of 1530 substitutes, '*as it reads, it seems to be against,*' etc.<sup>3</sup> But he still denied its Pauline authorship.

While the historical arguments are chiefly influential with Luther in the case of Jude and Hebrews, though the argument from contents is by no means ignored, the latter is the conclusive reason for his very unfavorable opinion of Revelation. He will not force others to adopt his opinions, but he proposes to say what he feels. His chief objection to the book is its obscurity (recall what has been said upon Luther's demand for a perspicuous Bible). The apostles prophesy with clear words, as it is proper to the apostolic office to speak clearly and with-

<sup>1</sup> Köstlin, ii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. lxiii. 154 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Köstlin, ii. 32. The text of the Erlangen Edition does not notice this change, but it is vouched for by Walther, presumably on the ground of a purer text, though he does not give his authority.

out figure, of Christ's person and work. Not even in the Old Testament is there a prophet who deals so much in figures. The Apocalypse is more like Fourth Ezra [the same comparison is also made elsewhere], and Luther cannot discover that it is by the Holy Spirit. He finds fault with its threats and promises with regard to those who respectively add to or take from the book, or who keep its words when nobody knows what it means, and, as far as we are concerned, it need never have been written. In fine, his spirit cannot adjust itself to the book (*Mein Geist kann sich in das Buch nicht schicken*), though he will let others think what they please about it. He notices also the doubts of the book in the early church, but this difficulty is entirely subordinate to the difficulties raised by the contents. It is enough reason for him to think little of the book because Christ is neither taught nor recognized in it, though that is the chief work of an apostle.<sup>1</sup> In a sermon of the same year (1522) he actually classes the Apocalypse with the prophecies of Lichtenberger.<sup>2</sup>

When it is remembered how hostile Luther was to Fourth Ezra (he would not even translate it), and to Lichtenberger,<sup>3</sup> these comparisons are all the more surprising. But, as in the case of Jude and Hebrews, we must recognize here also the assumption of a much more conservative attitude in Luther's later writings. In a subsequent edition of the sermon just mentioned, the reference to the Apocalypse as being on the same plane with Lichtenberger is left out,<sup>4</sup> and in the edition of his works in 1545 a new and much more moderate preface was substituted for the old one.<sup>5</sup> He still finds trouble with the obscurity of the book. On account of this he had formerly

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lxiii. 169 ff. (1522).

<sup>2</sup> E. A. viii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. lxiii. 250; cf. Köstlin, ii. 29.

<sup>4</sup> See the text in E. A. viii. 23.

<sup>5</sup> E. A. lxiii. 158.

let it alone, and especially because of the doubt of it in the early church, as attested by Eusebius (H. E. iii. 25). Many have attempted to explain it, but up to the present time have brought out nothing certain from it, but have read into it much inappropriate stuff out of their own heads (a timely warning still). But Luther will now make an earnest effort to give it an interpretation. It is noticeable how the emphasis now falls on the testimony of Eusebius, an historical argument as contrasted with the earlier emphasis upon the content.

Luther's opinion of the Epistle of James is well known. Through his entire life he was hostile to it, and a more cautious attitude toward it is not so observable in his later years, as in the case of the other Antilegomena. As early as 1519, in the Leipzig Resolutions, he expressed an unfavorable judgment upon it. 'Its style was far below the majesty of an apostle, and not to be compared in any way with Paul.'<sup>1</sup> In the Babylonish Captivity he doubts its authenticity.<sup>2</sup> As compared with the other Epistles, it is a right strawy epistle, and has no evangelic quality in it.<sup>3</sup> He praises it because it does not set up any doctrine of man, but urges God's law, and he acknowledges that there are many good sayings in it, and that the author was a good, pious man who had gathered together various sayings from the disciples of the apostles. But he denies its apostolic character, as it 'flatly contradicts St. Paul and all other Scripture' in allowing righteousness to works, when it says that Abraham was justified by works. Again, the Epistle proposes to teach Christian people, and yet not once

<sup>1</sup> E. A., Opera Latina, v. a., iii. 278.

<sup>2</sup> E. A., Opera Latina, v. a., v. 111. He adds, 'Even if it were by an apostle, it does not become an apostle to institute new sacraments. This belongs to Christ.' Luther is discussing James v. in its relation to extreme unction.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. lxiii. 115.

does it mention, in so long a writing, the death, resurrection, or spirit of Christ. It names Christ several times, but it teaches nothing concerning him, speaking only of the common faith in God. The office of an apostle, on the other hand, is to preach of Christ's sufferings and death. He then announces the true touchstone for judging Scripture, quoted above.<sup>1</sup> In the "Table Talk" he will put his doctor's cap upon the head of any man who can harmonize the doctrine of James with that of Paul.<sup>2</sup>

Here, as in the case of his earlier views of Revelation, almost the whole emphasis falls upon the religious content of the book. This is the true touchstone.

How little real weight he attached to purely historical arguments is seen in the fact, that, on the one hand, he accepted Second and Third John and Second Peter, though these books were also reckoned among the Antilegomena in the early church, and that, on the other hand, he rejected Second Maccabees, against church authority.<sup>3</sup> Of Second and Third John he only says in his Preface that they are not doctrinal Epistles, but examples of love and faith, and have a right apostolic spirit.<sup>4</sup> In his Preface to Second Peter he never raised the question of its apostolicity, but refers only to its content.<sup>5</sup> In his later exposition of this Epistle he notices the argument against its apostolicity that was based on iii. 15, 16, but he is not convinced by it, though he had used himself a precisely similar argument against the Pauline authorship of Hebrews.<sup>6</sup> As to Second Maccabees, Eck had cited it in support of the doctrine of purgatory. Luther answered that it was not canonical. Eck adduced the Council of Florence, which had recognized its canonicity. To

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lxiii. 157; cf. also li. 337.      <sup>2</sup> E. A. lxiv. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Scheel, 48 ff.      <sup>4</sup> E. A. lxiii. 154.

<sup>5</sup> E. A. lxiii. 152.      <sup>6</sup> E. A. iii. 271 (1524).

this, Luther replied, that Jerome and the Hebrew canon omitted it (an historical argument), and then added, and this was for him decisive, 'the church is not able to attribute more authority or force (*firmitatis*) to a book than that which it has in itself.'<sup>1</sup> Further, the fact that Luther expressly stated that his criticisms were only the expression of his own private opinions (cf. the citation from his Preface to the Apocalypse), and others were at liberty to entertain other opinions, also shows how independent he was of historical considerations.<sup>2</sup> If he had attached much importance to the authority of the ancient church, he would scarcely have permitted such latitude to private judgment.

But here a question arises: Did Luther feel free to criticise these books because in his opinion they were not canonical, or was he bold enough to criticise them on the basis of his Christocentric theory of Scripture, even though they were canonical? In the latter case we would have to admit that logically Luther had really destroyed the formal authority of the Bible. In the former case this inference would not necessarily follow.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is not possible to give a definite answer to this question, yet the evidence would seem to suggest that Luther really made these thoroughgoing distinctions within God's word, rather than definitely separated these books from God's

<sup>1</sup> E. A., *Opera latina*, v. a., lili. 131. On the other hand, he says of 1 Macc.: 'This is also a book which is not reckoned in the Hebrew Bibles, although its discourses and words are almost like those of the other books of Holy Scripture, and it would not be unworthily reckoned among them, as it is a very necessary and helpful book to understand the Prophet Daniel in chap. xi. [!] . . . as fairly as the first book might be received into the number (of the books) of Holy Scripture, so fairly the second book of Maccabees has been rejected, although there is some good in it' (E. A. lxiii. 104 ff.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Scheel, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. respectively Harnack, *Hist. of Dogma*, vii. 224, and Walther in the *Theologisches Literaturblatt*, 1901, No. 50.

word as being uncanonical. This view is borne out by his willingness to express a very adverse criticism of Esther, which was an undoubtedly canonical book. 'The Book of Esther,' he says in "De Servo Arbitrio," 'although they have it in the canon, deserves beyond all others, in my judgment, to be kept out of the canon.'<sup>1</sup> Again, he says in the "Table Talk," 'I am so hostile to that book [2 Macc.] and to Esther that I wish they did not exist, for they Judaize too much, and have too much that is heathenish.'<sup>2</sup> These sentiments are as severe as any that he expressed as to James, and yet they are entertained with regard to a book which Luther admits to be canonical. Judging by these statements, his religious criticism seems to have led him not only to distinguish within Scripture between the more and the less important, as in the case of John and the Synoptists, but also at times between the true and the actually false. This would not conflict with anything that has been said thus far with regard to Luther's doctrine of Scripture. In fact, it is a very natural outcome of his Christocentric theory of Scripture. Whether it is consistent with another group of Luther's statements not yet noticed is another question.

3. Because of the same Christocentric point of view, from which the religious kernel becomes the all-absorbing object of interest, the questions raised by modern biblical study sink for him into insignificance. But just because they are so subordinate, he is able to treat them with a freedom astonishing to those who have been under the influence of the post-Reformation theories of inspiration. The human element in Scripture is admitted by Luther to a very large degree. Thus he notes the compilatory character of the prophetic books. In his

<sup>1</sup> E. A., Opera latina, v. a., vii. 195.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. lxii. 131. Of Ezra and Nehemiah he says: 'They Estherize and Mordecaize in a wonderful fashion' (Jena ed. of Luther's Works, iv. 726 b.)

"Table Talk" he makes the general observation that 'no prophet's sermons have been completely written, but their disciples and hearers have gathered one saying at one time, another at another, and so compiled them together. Thus hath the Bible been preserved.'<sup>1</sup> More specifically he marks the disorder in the arrangements of Isaiah's prophecies, and says in his preface to the book: 'Whether this is due to one who may have read and compiled his prophecies, as is thought to have happened in the Psalter, or whether Isaiah so arranged them himself, . . . I do not know.'<sup>2</sup> Of the disorder in Jeremiah he remarks, 'It looks as if Jeremiah had not arranged such books himself, but that they are composed of fragments from his discourses. . . . Hence one must not trouble himself about the order, or allow himself to be hindered by the disarrangement.'<sup>3</sup> Finally, in the Preface to Hosea, he says 'It looks as if this prophecy of Hosea had not been fully and completely written, but that certain fragments [Stücke] and sayings of his had been gathered together and compiled into a book.'<sup>4</sup> In these statements we find the clear admission of redaction in the prophetic books. What were the natural impressions made by these books upon Luther's mind, unhampered by dogmatic prepossessions, have been amply confirmed by the more careful scientific study of modern times. But modern scholars have

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lxii. 132.<sup>2</sup> E. A. lxiii. 52 ff. (1528).<sup>3</sup> E. A. lxiii. 61 (1532); cf. also lxi. 74.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. lxiii. 74. According to the present text of E. A. lxii. 128, Luther suggests that Ecclesiastes may have been compiled in its present form by Sirach on the basis of material found in the Ptolemaic library in Egypt. But the text of this passage is probably corrupt, and the reference is to Ecclesiasticus, not Ecclesiastes. Cf. Köstlin, *ibid.* 25. This supposition is borne out by what he says of Ecclesiasticus at E. A. lxiii. 100; whereas, in his Preface to Ecclesiastes (E. A. lxiii. 40) the book is attributed to Solomon, though not written down by his own hand, but compiled by others from Solomon's words, a position proved by xii. 11 (!).

taken the next logical step, and ask what bearing these phenomena, so long ago noted by Luther, have upon the questions of date and authenticity of these writings.

When modern criticism, on the basis of these phenomena, proceeds to deny the genuineness of certain passages, even here a warrant may be found in principle in Luther's indifference to the questions of authorship. As we found him asserting that it made no difference who wrote Hebrews, so we find him asking, 'What difference would it make even if Moses did not write the Pentateuch?'<sup>1</sup> His own opinion is that it is Moses' book, and he warns against asking such useless questions; but this does not affect the principle involved.<sup>2</sup> An interesting passage bearing on the same subject of redaction is found in Luther's exposition of Matt. xxiv. 15—28:—

'The two evangelists, Matthew and Mark, throw both together [i.e. the two descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world], and do not preserve the order which Luke has preserved, for they both look to nothing further than to give the words of Christ, and do not trouble as to what was spoken first or last. Luke endeavors to write more clearly and in order. . . . Know then that Matthew weaves together here the end of the Jewish people and of the world, boils them, as it were, in one pot of porridge. If you will understand it, you must separate it, and refer each part to its own end.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lvii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> How indifferent Luther is to the question of authorship is seen in the striking statement (E. A. lxiii. 157): 'That which does not urge Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul taught it. On the other hand, that which proclaims Christ would be apostolic, though Judas, Annas, Pilate, or Herod said it.' Here the whole emphasis is laid upon the content.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. xiv. 319 ff. It may be noted, in passing, that Calvin adopted a similar theory of compilation with reference to Matthew's revision of the Sermon on the Mount, and he says: 'When the Holy Spirit does not trouble himself about the order, he will not either.' Thus the keen minds of Luther and Calvin, less trammelled by rigid inspiration theories than the later Protestant scholastics, recognized some of those peculiar phenomena which create the Synoptic problem.

Thus difficulties in the connection of the Gospels are explained by the evangelists' indifference to order in their redaction of Christ's words. But in this particular instance Luther does not regard such a disarrangement as an actual blemish, as he says on this very passage in another sermon, 'It is the manner of the Holy Spirit in the Sacred Scripture to speak in this way.'<sup>1</sup>

But does Luther admit that the human element in Scripture involves its errancy? In this connection the following passages are to be considered. In discussing the place of Peter's denial, Luther notes that, according to John, the first denial seems to take place in the house of Annas and the last two in the house of Caiaphas. This question must be left to the learned. It is John who makes the confusion. A troublesome fellow would blame the evangelist for this. But one does not go to heaven or hell even if he does hold that all the denials took place in the house of Caiaphas. Luther then proceeds to give a possible method of reconciliation by which John is brought into harmony with the Synoptists, but concludes as follows: 'We will not sharply investigate such subtle questions and opinions. One should at this place give most attention [mark the emphasis] to the great and superabundant comfort for sinners.'<sup>2</sup> On the different positions assigned to the cleansing of the temple by John and the Synoptists, he says:—

'If we have the *true understanding of Scripture* and the *true articles of faith* that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has suffered and died for us, there is no great lack if we do not answer all that is otherwise asked. The evangelists do not have a uniform order. What one places first another places last. . . . It may be that the Lord did this more than once, and that John describes the first event and Matthew the second. Be that as it may, whether it is to be placed first or last, whether it happened once or twice, it does not disturb our faith.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. A. xlv. 119.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. l. 266 ff. (1528-29).

<sup>3</sup> E. A. xlvi. 173 ff. (1537-38).

In these two statements there is, it is true, no distinct admission of errancy. Luther even suggests ways of solving the difficulties. But the important thing to notice is his utter indifference as to whether he can solve them. Walther seeks to restrict the significance of this fact by maintaining that all we can infer from these passages is Luther's indifference to his ability to solve a biblical difficulty, not his indifference to the existence of a biblical error.<sup>1</sup> But this seems to me to draw a distinction not warranted by the spirit of the passages. If Luther had been vitally interested in the inerrancy of Scripture, he certainly would not have expressed himself as he does. The belief in an inerrant Scripture is always scrupulously anxious to harmonize the discrepancies. The solutions are never matters of indifference to it, but, on the contrary, are of vital importance. All allusions to the bearing of the phenomena discussed in the passages just cited upon the inspired accuracy of the Bible are noticeably absent.

But, in the next passage to be cited, Luther admits at least the possibility, if not the actuality, of an error. On Matt. xxvii. 9 he asks, why Matthew ascribes a text to Jeremiah when it stands in Zechariah. He answers:—

'Such questions do not trouble me, as they matter little, and Matthew does enough in citing certain Scripture, though he may not hit just the name, especially as he in other places cites [Old Testament] sayings, but not just word for word as they stand in Scripture. Now, if one can stand that, and it can be done without danger to the sense, why should it make trouble though he may not give just the name?''<sup>2</sup>

It is urged by Walther that Luther avoids admitting here the actuality of a mistake, the German expressing only the possibility, but this seems to be forcing the German to a more precise definition of Luther's thought than Luther himself probably intended.<sup>3</sup> In his "*Supputatio Annorum Mundi*,"

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, 49.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. xlii. 330 ff.

<sup>3</sup> The exact words are: "Solche und dergleichen Fragen beküm-

written in the last years of his life, he notices the contradiction between Acts vii. 2ff. and Genesis xi., and says that he prefers to agree with Moses.

'With reference to this narrative of Stephen, it may be said, that his assertion was not a proper one, but the narrative was taken from the common talk [*e vulgo*] which is wont to be confused and obscure. Thus the evangelists are accustomed rather to indicate the passages than to cite them, content briefly to adduce, and then refer to the fountains themselves [he refers to the looseness in the New Testament citations]. See how the genealogies (Matthew i.) do not correspond with the histories. At the same time it cannot be denied that this place (Acts vii.) is in no way corrupted by smatterers [*sciotos*, i.e. it is not due to text-corruption], for this is a patent [*perspicuus*] error when he said the Lord appeared in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Haran.'<sup>1</sup>

Walther seeks to destroy the force of this passage by urging the familiar distinction between Stephen's statement, which was incorrect (though he was full of the Holy Spirit), and the *report* of it in Acts, which was correct.<sup>2</sup> But this explanation is based on the supposition that Luther held to the subsequent scholastic theory of a special inspiration for the *writing* of Scripture. Unfortunately neither in the passage before us nor elsewhere does Luther make use of or imply such a theory of inspiration.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most interesting of Luther's casual criticisms concerns Chronicles.

mern mich nicht, weil sie wenig zur sache dienen und Mattheus gleich genug thut dass er gewisse Schrift führt, ob er gleich nicht so eben den namen trifft. . . ." According to Walther (p. 51 ff.), the ob clause avoids expressing the actuality of an error.

<sup>1</sup> Jena, iv. 617 (1540). On the same page he says, with reference to the discrepancies in the synchronisms of 2 Kings i. 17; iii. 1 and viii. 25: 'The description of the time of Elijah and Elisha is most confused, just as the Kingdom was then most confounded by the idolatry and impiety of Jezebel?' Yet elsewhere he tries to harmonize such chronological discrepancies (cf. Scheel, 72).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Köstlin, ii. 16, 30; Scheel, 68, 73.

'The Books of Kings go ten thousand steps for one of the writers of Chronicles. For he [the Chronicler] has only shown the summum and the finest of the history. What is bad he has passed over. Hence the Books of Kings are more trustworthy than Chronicles.'

The modern view of the Chronicler is nothing more than the scientific elaboration of this statement of Luther. Finally may be adduced two statements which Luther makes with reference to the prophets.

In the same sermon in which Luther speaks so slightly of the Apocalypse, cited above, he refers to different kinds of prophesying, and says that the prophets are so called principally

'because they prophesied concerning Christ, and by their expositions of the divine word guided the people aright in faith, rather than because they sometimes foretold things concerning kings and the course of earthly events, which [kind of prophesying] they also exercised on their own account, and hence often failed in it, but the former kind of prophecy they exercised daily and never failed in it.'

<sup>1</sup>E. A. lxi. 132 (Table Talk). Walther (p. 48) paraphrases this statement as follows: 'The latter [Chronicles] pass over much and abbreviate the rest which the books of Kings do not omit or treat more fully. In consequence of this different "*tendenz*" of the two works, the worth of the Chronicles [Walther must mean Kings here?] as an historical work is much greater. There is not a word about errors.' Walther seeks to resolve Luther's statement into a harmless statement of the different *purposes* of the two works. But it is not a harmless statement, for Luther refers to the Chronicler's habit of omitting *what is bad*, and for this reason he is *less trustworthy*. Not so very many years ago a prominent professor of one of our leading seminaries was deposed from his position for maintaining this proposition among others.

<sup>2</sup>E. A. viii. 23 ff. Walther seeks to avoid the testimony of this passage by suggesting that Luther does not have in mind prophecies found in Scripture, and he maintains that no specific instance has been given of a prophecy in the Bible pronounced to be false by Luther. The passage is still adduced by Köstlin in his second German Ed. (ii. 21) as proof of Luther's admission of error. The context certainly does not hint that Luther is thinking of extra-canonical prophecies. Walther's method of treating these various statements is unpleasantly suggestive of the special pleader.

The second statement is even more remarkable. After referring to Christ's commands to search the Scriptures, Luther continues:—

'And without doubt the prophets in this way have studied in Moses, and the later prophets in the former, and have written down in a book their good thoughts inspired by the Holy Spirit. For they were not the kind of people who, like the fanatics, have thrust Moses under the bench, and have fabled their own visions and preached their own dreams. But they have practised themselves daily and industriously in Moses, as he often and emphatically commanded even the king. But although hay, wood, straw, and stubble were sometimes gathered by these same good and faithful students and teachers of Scripture, and not simply silver, gold, and precious stones, yet the foundation remains. . . . We have the same experience [he continues] with other writers, as the Magister Sententiarum; Augustine, Gregory, and Cyprian.'

Here we have the recognition of the natural human agency in the composition of the prophetic books (the prophets study in Moses) and the admission of failings in these writers (cf. the wood and stubble in the Epistle to the Hebrews), combined with his statement that their thoughts were given them by the Holy Spirit.

But does this not involve a self-contradiction on the part of Luther? Can errancy and inspiration be predicted of the same men? The syllogism which is said to demand a negative answer to the second question, and therefore to require an exegesis of Luther's statements which will relieve him of the charge of a self-contradiction, may be thus constructed: (a) The Holy Spirit cannot err: (b) The Scripture is the product

<sup>1</sup> E. A. lxiii. 379 (1543). Köstlin, after accepting this passage in his first edition (Eng. Trans. ii. 235, 254) as proof of Luther's admission of errancy in the prophets, holds, in his second German edition (ii. 21, n.), that it does not apply. The errors are said to be attributed not to the prophets, but to Augustine, Cyprian, etc. So, also, Walther, 48. This is not the usual, nor does it seem to me to be the natural, interpretation of the passage if the Erlangen text is adhered to. Neither Köstlin nor Walther mentions any change of text.

of the Holy Spirit: (c) Ergo, the Scripture cannot err.

The trouble lies in the minor premise. The question is, In what way and to what extent is the Scripture the product of the Holy Spirit? On the assumption of the later verbal dictation theory of Scripture, and only on this assumption, will this syllogism be strictly valid. What now was Luther's theory of inspiration?

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]