

Inspiration

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If we take up a study of inspiration at this time, the reason is not that the doctrine itself needs a restatement. We all are familiar with it, and not only subscribe to it but confess it with all our heart. Yet a restudy seems desirable because of the many attacks, both open and disguised, which are being made on it in our day in increasing number and with increasing vehemence. There is danger in these attacks also for us. Not so much that we might weaken in our convictions, but that in meeting the attacks we might lose our sense of proportion, might permit ourselves to be crowded into a false approach to the doctrine.

I. The Place Of Inspiration In The Gospel

Before taking up attacks on, and perversions of, the doctrine of inspiration we give our attention to the place that this doctrine holds in the Gospel message and in God's economy of salvation.

We must ever bear in mind that the Gospel does not begin with the doctrine of inspiration. The Gospel begins with the announcement of forgiveness to a sin-lost world. Our risen Savior greeted His disciples with the words: "Peace be with you," and with this announcement of peace He sent them forth into the world. He summed up their message for them in this way: "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name among all nations."

So it was from the very beginning of sin in the world. God did not impress upon Adam and Eve that they must accept His oracles as infallible (although their sin had started with doubting His word). He did not hand them a document to which they must submit as given by His inspiration. He spoke about their plight that they had lost communion with Him, that they had yielded themselves into the power of their murderous adversary, and that He, God, would change all this through the death battle of the Seed of the woman against the serpent. This was the protevangel, with not a word about inspiration.

The doctrine that the Holy Scriptures are the only source and norm of all articles of faith is often called the formal principle of the Reformation. Yet also the history of the Reformation clearly shows that it does not hold the first place among the articles of faith, but rather, in a sense, is an auxiliary doctrine. Just remember the order of three names in the development of Luther: Wittenberg—Leipzig—Worms. It was Luther's concern for peace with God that led to the posting of his 95 theses on indulgences on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. In the Leipzig debate, two years later, the foundation on which his faith in the forgiveness of his sins rested was questioned. Councils may err and have erred. But there is the Bible, which cannot fail. It is not safe to deviate from the Scriptures. "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God." This was the firm stand attained, again two years later, in Worms.

The content of the Gospel brings peace to the troubled heart: When our faith is assailed and begins to look about for assurance, we find that it was the Bible that enlightened our heart. The Bible carried in itself the power to dispel our doubts and to create reliance on its message in our hearts. We experienced the Bible as a living and life-giving Word. A mere man's word does not carry such conviction; even Christians and great church councils may err. The heart always remains uneasy when it accepts their word. They may be instrumental in bringing the message to us, but in order to be raised from spiritual death to spiritual life, from unbelief to faith, a more powerful authority is required than even that of the biggest ecumenical church council. The testimony of men, even of the most learned and pious men, is not sufficient to repel the fiery darts of the Wicked One. Our faith must have a stronger armor, a firmer foundation.

Whence is our faith? Whence does it draw its confident cheer? Whence its vitality over against our natural desperate condition? Whence its victorious power against the attacks of the enemy? It was born out of the Bible, and it lives by the Bible.

Thus we are led by our faith, by its struggles and its victories, to examine the Bible. Why should the Bible be able to create and sustain faith? What is the secret of its power? What does it say about itself? And naturally we will accept every word that the Bible, which has proved its life-giving power by bringing peace to our heart, has to say about itself, its origin, and its nature.

Now the Bible says about itself that, although men wrote it, its real author is God. The human writers were real living personalities; each one had his own characteristics, physical and mental; each had his own training; each had his own peculiarity of diction, his own vocabulary and style. And when God called these men to give us His Word through them, He did not devitalize them, depersonalize them, or in any way change them. He took them just as they were, rather, they were what they were and as they were because God Himself had so prepared and trained them, so that He might speak to us precisely in the way in which He now actually did speak. When they wrote, they themselves felt fully responsible for every word they penned and for the way in which they expressed themselves (so that Paul, e. g., was worried for a while whether he had not been a little too severe in his letter to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 7:8). Yet it was the Holy Spirit who used their entire personality to write what He wanted to write and in the way He wanted to write it.

This is a mystery that we cannot solve, about which we, therefore, cannot set up any theories, a mystery, the truth of which we accept in faith. When the Church analyzes the act of inspiration into the three component parts of *impulsus ad scribendum*, *suggestio rerum*, *suggestio verborum*, this is not an attempt to understand the mystery, nor is it a theory about inspiration: it is merely an attempt at summarizing the various statements which the Scriptures make about their own origin.

When we study the Scriptures, which have kindled that wonderful living faith in our heart, a little further we find that they claim clarity for themselves. The oracles of the Greeks distinguished themselves by the ambiguity of their pronouncements. They left an Oedipus in the dark, and actually incited a Croesus to a disastrous campaign. Not so the Scriptures, they are a lamp and a light. Any one who is guided by them will find life and salvation. They do not shed their light mechanically or magically into our hearts. They are to be read attentively and to be pondered. Natural man may grasp the grammatical sense, but the real spiritual sense will remain hidden from him, he has no organ to grasp it; and what he does begin to grasp he will regard as utter foolishness. The Scriptures were not meant for our Old Adam; he must be taken captive and blinded in order that the Holy Spirit may lead us into a correct understanding. A Christian will carry on his meditation with prayer to God for His enlightenment. In comparison with the glory of the future heavenly light the Scriptures may appear dim; but in themselves and compared with the darkness of this world they are a most clear light.

The Scriptures, our study will show further, claim the authority to teach. The Scriptures tell us what to believe, and how to live. If anything is presented to us from any source for our acceptance, the Scriptures will be the judge. Nothing may be added to them, nothing subtracted from them. No man may tell us how the Scriptures are to be interpreted. Scripture is its own interpreter; and Scripture is sufficient, completely sufficient for our salvation.

The above are some of the things that the Scriptures say about themselves. Our faith not only accepts them without question, but also draws encouragement from them. The Scriptures originally created faith in our hearts, and now our faith learns that this is in accordance with the very nature of the Scriptures. They are the living Word of the living God. And our faith rests all the more secure in this knowledge.

This connection of our faith with inspiration, and this place of the doctrine of inspiration in the whole Gospel economy, must ever be borne diligently in mind. Only a believer can understand and appreciate the doctrine of inspiration. The message of justification out of pure grace for Christ's sake without any merit or worthiness on his part has made a new man out of him. He is battling against the lusts that are innate in his heart—successfully, he delights to do the will of God; he is patient in bearing the cross; he is even hopeful in the face of death and judgment. He can understand this change only if God Himself had His hand in it. Yes, he

realizes that God alone could perform it, not only without any cooperation on his part, but in spite of his stubborn resistance.

He rejoices to learn that the Word, which produced this change in him claims for itself that it is the Word of God, that God Himself in all His majesty and in all His love is personally addressing him in the Word. There is no intermediary between him and his God. It would, indeed, be wonderful if he had heard the message of life at second hand; but then there would always be the possibility that the bearer had in some way altered it, just as refraction takes place when light rays pass through a prism. All of this is eliminated if God Himself is the author of the Word, if the message, though spoken by men in their own peculiar way, nevertheless is the authentic Word of God Himself in all its details.

That Word may contain many things which the Christian finds difficult to understand; it may contain statements which apparently contradict each other, and others which run counter to what historical and natural sciences record on the basis of available evidence: if he cannot find a solution, he will in childlike faith leave the difficulties unresolved, satisfied that God knows the solution.

Thus a believer understands and appreciates it when the Scriptures claim divine inspiration for themselves in all their statements.

An unbeliever lacks this understanding.

An unbeliever can indeed have a grammatical, literal understanding of the doctrine. He can understand when the Scriptures in scores of places state that the Holy Spirit spoke “through” the prophets (διά c. gen.). He can understand when Peter says that no prophecy was produced by human effort, but that the holy men of God spoke as they were moved, carried along, by the Holy Ghost. He can understand that the Scriptures are unique in this that they were “given by inspiration of God,” that they have permanent characteristics, which no human word can have, as a result of their divine origin. He can understand when Paul says that he and his co-laborers proclaim things which eye has not seen nor ear heard, things that have never entered into a man’s heart, with words that cannot be attained by human wisdom, but which the Holy Ghost teaches. He can understand when Peter makes the sharp distinction between the prophets of old and the “Spirit of Christ which was in them” and spoke by them. He understands when Jesus makes the sweeping statement that the “Scripture cannot be broken.” He understands when Paul stresses the singular number of the word “Seed” and bases his argument on it. He may deride the method as rabbinical, but his very ridiculing shows that he has grasped the literal understanding of the matter. Not the words as such seem senseless to him, but the claim contained in them is offensive. He understands when God with a solemn curse forbids additions to, subtractions from, or alterations in any form, of His Word. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

In spite of all this the unbeliever does not understand the doctrine of inspiration. Because he has not found the forgiveness of his sins in Christ, he is still under the Law, his understanding is under the Law, and he has a legalistic concept of inspiration.

It will not be necessary in our conference to carry out this point at great length. A few hints will be sufficient. The unbeliever will feel as though the article of inspiration lays a heavy burden on him. He feels it, and resents it, as a curb on his scientific research work, as demanding of him to accept something as true although it may be in conflict with his scientific convictions. The faith which inspiration demands of him, as he understands it, can best be expressed in the formula: *credo, quia absurdum*.

A legalistic conception—at least a legalistic use—of the doctrine of inspiration will result also if we make it the beginning of our Christian witness. The Bible is given by inspiration, and now you *must* believe in justification by grace through faith; you *must* believe in the real presence of Christ’s body and blood under the earthly elements in the sacrament; you *must* believe in the *communicatio idiomatum, genus majestaticum*, etc.

In this way the attitude of the heart can never be attained which the psalmist expresses when he sings about the judgments of the Lord: “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey comb.” “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.” “I will delight myself in thy statutes. . . Thy testimonies also are my delight. . . Behold, I have longed after thy precepts. . . I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.”

A Christian, however, joins in singing these praises of the Bible from the bottom of his heart, because in the fact that the Bible is given by inspiration of God he has the assurance that his hope in the forgiveness of his sin, born out of the Bible, is not an empty dream. It has a solid foundation. The Word of God has made him free.

Being freed by the Word of God he will also feel bound by it. His freedom depends altogether on it. The moment he leaves the Word of God he loses his freedom, and sinks back into serfdom. For that reason one little word of God will make the world too narrow for him. "My flesh will tremble for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." ("My flesh creepeth in awe of thee"—J.M.P. Smith, in the Goodspeed Bible. "My being shudders before thee"—Moffat. "My flesh shuddereth for fear of thee"—Jewish translation.)

This attitude applies to the Scriptures as a whole and to every individual statement. A wholehearted acceptance of divine inspiration will not permit a believing child of God to make any sort of distinction, as though only parts of the Bible were given by inspiration. Which? He will not apply as a touch stone *Was Christum treibt*, accepting the passages which deal directly with Christ, while hesitating about others. Rather, for him every passage found in the Bible is there because in some way or other it refers to Christ, be it ever so remotely. He will not differentiate between things near the center and such as fringe the outer periphery. No matter where a statement may lie, it is there because God Himself put it there by inspiration as His truth. He will not distinguish between statements pertaining to salvation and such as treat of other matters, economic, chronological, and the like. As long as they are in the Bible, God has put them there, and they are the truth. To be sure, he will try to understand them in their originally intended sense, as spoken by men to men. For instance, he will not insist that a plain figure of speech be understood in the literal sense. (God is called a "rock"—metaphorically; Jesus told the disciples to drink the "cup"—metonymically; etc.) He will not understand an every day phenomenal remark as a scientific pronouncement. (The sun "stood still.") Else he would be falsifying the Word of God, making it say something that God did not say. (We know what damage a literal interpretation of the symbolical language of Revelation has done—Millennialism!)

In short, a believing child of God will rejoice to hear his Father's voice in the Scriptures, and will not endanger his salvation by applying to the Scriptures some arbitrary method of selection and interpretation.

II. "Unity" and "Cooperation"

Unity and cooperation are two words that are sometimes used to express the relation between the Holy Spirit and the human writers in the act of inspiration. Both terms must be used with care.

"Cooperation," when used without any qualification, would suggest the joint effort of equals. Taken in that sense, the word would be entirely out of place when applied to inspiration. In the Pittsburgh Agreement the word does occur in point 3: "Believing, therefore, that the Bible came into existence by this unique *cooperation* of the Holy Spirit and the human writers." Yet we note how carefully the term is guarded. It is not only called a *unique* cooperation, thus taking it out of the sphere of ordinary cooperation and placing it into a class by itself, it is further restricted by the demonstrative *this*, which word refers the reader to the description of "cooperation" as given in the previous point 2. There we read: "Nevertheless by virtue of a unique operation of the Holy Spirit . . . by which He supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word. . . This unique operation of the Holy Spirit upon the writers is named inspiration." It is this description of inspiration which is inadequate; else, if it were satisfactory, then no objection could be raised to the use of "cooperation" in point 3.

The same would apply to the use of the term "union," meaning the union of the Holy Spirit with the person of the human writers and the resultant union of the divine and human elements in the word as produced by their united efforts. Also this term calls for adequate safeguards.

The Scriptures speak of several unions.

There is the mystic union of the Triune God with His believing children. Jesus described this union in answer to a question by Judas the brother (son) of James: "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come upon him and make our abode with him." This union is mediated through faith: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," and is so intimate that whatever is done to us is

regarded by Jesus as having been done to Him. When Saul persecuted the Christians Jesus asked him: “Why persecutest thou me?” And on Judgment Day His sentence will be: “In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

There is, secondly, the unique union of the heavenly elements of the body and blood of Christ with the earthly elements of bread and wine in the sacrament, sacramental union.

There is lastly, the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, so intimate that a perfect communication of idioms takes place, not only by an elevation of the human nature, but by a sharing of either nature in the properties, actions, and experiences of the other, and by a joint operation in performing the work of redemption, each nature contributing its part according to its own peculiarities, native or communicated.

It was the late Pastor Gausewitz who in our circles used the last mentioned, hypostatic, union to illustrate some points with reference to inspiration. This was in his essay that he delivered only a few weeks before his sudden death. He found the similarity in the fact that the Son of God united Himself with a human nature in all its infirmities, and in His human nature bore all the sufferings that His enemies inflicted on Him. So, Gausewitz pointed out, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us, bringing us the glorious heavenly message, in human speech with all its limitations and subjected to the indignities which sinners heap upon it.

It is quite proper to present inspiration as the result of a union between the Holy Spirit and the human writers, provided that the $\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ of the Scriptures is never lost out of sight. The Holy Spirit is the sovereign, the human writers are His agents, and the union is one that results from this fact and reflects it in every phase. The Holy Spirit is the author of the message; the human writer is merely His mouthpiece through whose service the message reaches us. An ambassador dare not omit any part of the message that he was commissioned to deliver, nor dare he add anything to it, be it wise or foolish.

There are people today who assume that the Holy Spirit gave the human writers license to insert some remarks of their own, even false statements, provided only that they limited such remarks to the field of human knowledge (or ignorance). But He kept a strict watch over them, so that they injected no spiritual error. All the passages of Scripture quoted on inspiration are understood with this qualification; and the verdict of Jesus that the “Scripture cannot be broken” is modified by the restriction: in matters pertaining to salvation.

It is claimed that such a doctrine of inspiration could do no harm. God is speaking to us in the Bible by means of the extremely weak human language in words which do not come anywhere near the infinite truths of the divine concepts. Why should He not also speak to us through human mistakes? It is said that the Holy Spirit is able to create faith also by means of error. It is true that the Holy Spirit can, and often does create and maintain faith in spite of human errors, errors which lie not only in fields subject to human reason (history, science, etc.) but which touch the very heart of the Gospel. Think of the many devout Christians in the church of the Roman Antichrist. But does this justify the conclusion that the Holy Spirit creates faith through error? And even if we grant that He can perform this miracle, does it follow that He may subscribe to an error and make it a part of His own statement? Above all, where does Scripture even remotely hint such a possibility?

In the Holy Scriptures God is speaking through the human writers, not intermittently. All Scripture, and every Scripture, is given by inspiration. The Holy Spirit is the author of every word—the apostles spoke with words “which the Holy Ghost teaches.” The Holy Spirit supplied “content and fitting word” not merely when He was speaking of spiritual matters, He was doing the same when speaking trivial things of every day affairs, of the lost asses of Kish, and of Timothy’s weak stomach.

In ascribing inerrancy in all its statements to our Bible we are not unduly claiming a state of glory. No, the description which Paul gives us of the book when he says, “We see through a glass, darkly” still remains true in spite of its inerrancy. There will be no comparison in the brilliance of the *lumen gloriae*, when we shall see God as He is, face to face—no comparison with the dim light of the errorless Word of God as presented to us in the Bible with all the limitations of human speech.

To draw once more on the hypostatic union of the natures in Christ for a comparison: Christ in His state of exinanition showed all the infirmities of human nature and was “in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin.*” So the Bible, given by inspiration, shows all the limitations of human speech, yet without error. To

admit the possibility of error would open the floodgates wide for doubts concerning every part of the Bible, even the books of the Bible taken together as a whole.

The idea of a cooperation of the human writers with the Holy Ghost in producing the Scriptures, or of a union of the Holy Ghost with the human writers, may be used, provided the connection is always conceived as one that can be properly expressed only by *διά*.

III. Brunner On Inspiration

Brunner's views on inspiration may not be typical, yet they must be reckoned with as prominent among modern distortions of the Scripture doctrine.

Up to World War I it became increasingly unpopular to speak about original sin. The world was in a very optimistic mood. Progress was the catchword. Things were moving ever onward and upward. The world was getting better day-by-day.

It was equally unpopular to speak about revelation. Just as the world was making great strides forward in the standard of living, both economically and morally, so it was also progressing intellectually. A revelation of God was deemed unnecessary, if not even a hindrance to progress. Man was capable of solving every problem that might present itself. There was no mystery too deep. Ultimately, man hoped to fathom them all. Schleiermacher had taught the people to base their knowledge of God and of their salvation on their experience, having established contact with Him from their feeling of absolute dependence. Religion had thus also been placed on a scientific basis. Man was not separated from God by sin. God was not the Transcendent. He was immanent. There was continuity from God to man. In fact, man was God.

And the result? There came World War I, and the Babylonian tower which man had erected to his own glory came down with a crash. Optimism gave way to fear. Fear and the strain of fear became characteristic of the world situation in an ever-increasing degree of intensity.

Then arose the Barthian movement, the so-called theology of crisis. God, the wholly other—the “pure negation”—must reveal Himself to man by an encounter. “God's revelation must be arresting, shocking, engaging, confronting, convicting.” He “must constantly intrude into our lives with a moment-by-moment revelation which cuts across our expectations, and which yet meets the depth of our inner man” (*The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, by Ed. J. Carnell, p. 32).

From the beginning Emil Brunner was a prominent member of the Barthian movement, and although in the course of time he detached himself from Barth in certain respects, yet with regard to the demand of an encounter between God and man he did not change.

This demand is really nothing new. To call our faith an “I—Thou” relation corresponds to the way in which Scripture describes our relation to our God when it tells us that God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying *Abba, Father*. It agrees to that intimate personal relation expressed by the Greek word *γινώσκειν*—“Ye have known God, or rather, are known of God” (Galatians 4:9). Faith is not a cold calculation about God, not an intellectual acceptance of the proposition that there is a God who is mighty, wise, and good—such a head-faith is found also in devils. Faith is a personal union with God, mediated by the Spirit in the Word, based on the redemptive work of our Savior. The only thing that is new so far is the terminology, speaking of an “encounter,” an “I—Thou” relation, a “dialectic.” (For an understanding of the expression “dialectic” the following statement by Brunner is helpful: “That is the reason why genuine theology must be dialectical. It is always a *conversation* between God and man” (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 15). Also the demand that faith be “existential,” i.e., not merely knowing something about God, but being affected in our inmost essence by the encounter with God, is new in word only. Compare the French Existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre (atheist) and Gabriel Marcel (theist).

The great question, however, is how this faith-encounter of man with God is brought about.

On this point we find some fine expressions in Brunner's works. “It is true that no one can come to the Son save through the Holy Scriptures” (*RR*, p. 136). “The Bible is not only a document of historical revelation, but it is itself the product of divine revelation, and this makes it also a revelation to us. God speaks to us His

Word in Christ through the Prophets and Apostles; through their word He speaks to us His Word of judgment and of mercy” (1. c.). Again, “He (Christ) is the living, present Lord of the Church hence His revelation also is a living and present event, which takes place in and through the Church” (1. c., p. 137). “Jesus Christ is not directly *here* for us, as He was for the disciples. We possess Him only in their narrative that tells us about Him. Their narrative and their doctrine are the *means* which God uses in order to unite us with Him” (*Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 33).

Statements like the above sound good. We might also accept statements like the following: “The authoritative word of the Church, that which continually creates new life, and the word which supports the Church, is that of public preaching.” ... “The word, the preaching of the Church, consists essentially in making the word of the Bible present and available” (*RR*, p. 141). Or: “He (Jesus Christ) is not present otherwise than through definite ideas, through the Apostolic witness to Him, to God. God’s Word is more than can ever be confined within human language, but it does not come to us apart from human words” (*RR*, p. 151).

The matter becomes doubtful when we read statements like the following: “The Apostles ... know themselves to be *witnesses* to the divine revelation” (*CDG*, p. 15), and then find on p. 32: “Where the knowledge of Jesus Christ given through the Holy Spirit is concerned, in the very nature of the case there is no difference between the Apostles and the members of the Christian Church, thus also there is none between the Apostles and the Christians of later generations.” “The message of the Church ... is also a form of revelation” (1. c., p. 19).

Calling the message of the Church a *form of revelation*, which is really on a level with that of the Apostles points to a false conception of inspiration. On p. 28 of *CDG* we find a reference to “Verbal Inspiration, with all its disastrous results.” We assemble a few more statements from the same book. The Reformers “were wrong, when they made the Biblical doctrine their *final* unassailable authority, by identifying the Word of God with the word of the Bible” (p. 54). “A final resort to a single Scriptural passage is impossible for us” (p. 49).

This means rejecting the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration as taught in the Scriptures. How then does Brunner conceive of the revelation of God as mediated to us through the word of the apostles?

In a quotation, which we heard a moment ago, Brunner equated the message of the Church with the revelation of God through the Apostles. Here are a few more statements of his that shed light on his position. “There is no Apostolic word, and no Holy Scripture, without the Church” (*RR*, p. 139). Why? “How could He, the Living Word, cease to reveal Himself? He reveals Himself through the witness, the preaching and the teaching of the Church” (1. c., p. 138).

Speaking of “the true relation between the word of the Bible, the word preached by the Church, and the Word of God,” Brunner lists as one of “three typical deviations from the right path” the position that places “a non-historical emphasis on the Bible.” He charges that it “does not allow for the necessary mediation between the word of the Bible and the modern man through the *viva vox ecclesiae*. It confronts the individual man directly with the Holy Scriptures, and regards the word of the Bible alone as the Word of God.” He charges, furthermore that “it deifies the *letter* of the Bible, as if the Spirit of God were imprisoned within the covers of the written word.” Then he continues: “Those who take this view do not understand that there is only an indirect identity between the word of the Bible and the Word of God; that even the word of the Bible is only the *means* of the real Word of God, Jesus Christ, and that therefore, in spite of its priority as the original witness, fundamentally it stands upon the same level as the testimony of the Church” (*RR*, p. 145). In the light of such declarations we view also the following: “The living Christ lays hold of the individual through the living witness of his fellow man, which, in turn, is based upon the primitive witness of the Apostles to the historical Mediator” (1. c., p. 148).

We mark the word “witness” in the last quotation. The Apostles had direct contact with Jesus, the personal Word of God; they had, moreover, also the direct testimony of the Spirit of God in their hearts. Then they in turn testified. They expressed in their own words the Word, which they had received directly. Through their “witness” their hearers were brought into touch with the “historical Mediator.” This process continued, and is repeated from generation to generation, and thus “the living Christ lays hold of the individual.” “The spoken word is now no longer the revelation itself, or to put it more exactly, it is no longer directly *revelation*, but only

indirectly. The spoken word is an indirect revelation when it bears witness to the revelation: Jesus Christ, the personal self-manifestation of God... The spoken word ... has thus been relegated to a secondary position” (CDG, p. 25).

What then about inspiration? It has been replaced by something which Brunner calls “witness” and which he compares to the effect on a ray of light when it passes obliquely from one medium into another; it remains the same ray, but is deflected somewhat. “Here already it is evident that the divine truth is a light which cannot be received by the human mind without being refracted. The one truth of Christ is refracted in the manifold doctrines of the Apostles; but it is the task of the Church ... to seek continually for the one Light of Truth within these refractions” (CDG, p. 13). “The refraction of the divine revelation in the human medium ... is already at work in the primitive Christian testimony” (1. c., p. 46).

Naturally, then, we need not be surprised to find differences and contradictions in the testimony of the Apostles. “Recourse to *the* doctrine of the New Testament is, in the strictly literal sense of legal doctrinal authority, impossible.” “The theological doctrine of the Apostles must be subjected to critical examination.” For it is a “fact that the doctrines of the Apostles (and) the doctrines of the New Testament to a great extent differ from one another.” (1. c., p. 46. 47)

In passing we note that Brunner discards the theory of creation, of paradise, and of the fall. He believes in evolution, “that is, the view that the species which we see in the world at the present day have been preceded by countless others, from which they are directly and causally descended, and the view that man must be regarded as forming part of this series of evolution” (RR, p. 279).

Yet Brunner dares to call his changeling: Inspiration. “The Scripture ... is a word inspired by the Spirit of God; yet at the same time it is a human message; its human character means that it is colored by the frailty and imperfection of all that is human” (CDG, p. 34).

IV. Luther On Inspiration

It cannot be our aim to review all that Luther said on the Scripture, its divine origin, and its absolute authority. Volumes could be written on that. Nor will we devote more than a passing remark to the claim that Luther decided the question of inspiration by the test *Was Christum treibt*.

Brunner also quotes this expression of Luther’s from his introduction to the Epistle of St. James, and adopts it for himself: “We believe in the Scriptures because, and *in so far as* they teach Christ” (CDG, p. 110). It has been pointed out often enough how Luther here has been thoroughly misunderstood. We merely note how in Brunner’s RR this remark of Luther is even mistranslated, interchanging the subject and the object of the sentence: “What Christ does not teach” (p. 131, footnote). Brunner tries to fortify his position by the following further quotations from Luther: *Christus dominus (scripturae).—Si adversarii scripturam urgerint contra Christum, urgemus Christum contra scripturam.—Scriptura est non contra, sed pro Christo intelligenda, ideo vel ad eum referenda, vel pro vera scriptura non habenda* (CDG, p. 110). These propositions of Luther do express the same truth that he voiced in his introduction to St. James. (Five Disputations, 1535, I, 40, 49. 41. EA Var. Arg. 4, 377ff.; St. L. XIX, 1436.)

We leave this now and devote our attention to a quotation of which pretty much is being made most recently, to show that Luther did not consider the Scriptures as inerrant in minor matters, that do not pertain to our salvation directly. It is his remark (in his commentary on the prophet Zechariah) on the statement in Mt. 27:9: “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet.”

Hier quälen sich die heiligen Schriftsteller ab, und Hieronymus wirft die Frage auf, warum der Evangelist Matthäus dies Zeugnis angeführt habe, als sei es aus Jeremia, während es doch nirgends in Jeremia stehe, sondern in diesem Propheten Sacharia. Ich habe kürzlich dies zu antworten: Die Evangelisten pflegen die Zeugnisse der Propheten nicht wörtlich anzuführen, sondern nur deren Meinung wiederzugeben. Luther illustrates this point by referring to Mt. 21:4, compared with Zech. 9:9, and calls attention to the addition, in Mt. 27, of the words, “whom they bought of the children of Israel.” —Sodann darauf, dass er es anführt, als ob es aus Jeremia sei, habe ich nichts anderes, was ich antworten könnte, als dies bekannte Wort, dass der Prophet

vielleicht zwei Namen gehabt habe, oder dass er nach der Weise, die auch die andern Evangelisten haben, ganz allgemein zitiert habe, unbekümmert um den Namen des Propheten. Augustin behandelt diesen Gegenstand sorgfältig, den siehe nach. Ich möchte nicht leicht glauben, dass die Bücher der Propheten verwechselt worden seien durch Veränderung der Titel. Sodann waren bei Matthäus ohne Zweifel heilige und gelehrte Leute, voll des Heiligen Geistes, die ihn erinnert haben, dass diese Schriftstelle in Sacharia sei, die er angeführt hatte, nicht in Jeremia. Durch deren Erinnerung veranlasst, hätte er diesen geringen Irrtum (*levem illum errorem*) leicht verbessern können, wenn es ihm beliebt hätte, oder wenn er dafür gehalten hätte, dass viel daran liege. Aber es ist kein Grund, warum wir uns mit diesen und ähnlichen Bedenken ängstlich abquälen sollten, da in diesen Dingen nicht das Hauptstück und der Inbegriff unseres Glaubens liegt. Diejenigen sind überaus unsinnig, die sich in derartigen unnötigen Dingen abmühen ... während sie doch vor allen Dingen dies Eine tun sollten, dass sie Christum lehrten (St. L. XIX, 2133f).

The point is made that Luther here admits a *levis error* on the part of Matthew.

We note, in the first place, that Luther calls attention to a certain fact which we frequently overlook, viz., that if the substitution of Zechariah for Jeremiah actually had been due to a slip, there would have been any number of men among the first readers to catch it. If the writers of the New Testament had misquoted, misinterpreted, misapplied any Old Testament passage, the opponents of the Gospel would have been ready to pounce on it and make the most of it. This is particularly true of such books as were addressed primarily to Jewish readers, as were, e.g., the Gospel according to St. Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews. And then it would have been a simple matter for Matthew to correct his mistake. But in spite of the friendly interest of Christian readers and the hostile scrutiny of opponents the name of Zechariah remained unchanged in Matthew's text. From Luther's premises we are justified in drawing a stronger conclusion than did Luther, not only that the whole thing mattered little, but also that Matthew most likely had his reasons for writing as he did. And it will be our task to try to find them.

Let us assume for the present that Luther's words indicate an error of Matthew. The question still remains whether we have Luther's actual words. Luther lectured on Zechariah during the years 1525/26. In 1527 he himself published his exegesis of Zechariah in German. The words quoted above are not found in this edition. In fact, they were not published during Luther's lifetime. They are contained in a manuscript prepared by a student, Stephan Rodt, on the basis of notes taken in the classroom. Evidently they were some off-the-cuff remarks of Luther.

Two things must be kept in mind. In remarks of that type words and expressions are, in the nature of the case, not always weighed with sufficient care to express the author's views precisely. And I think we all know from experience how often just such remarks of the teacher are misunderstood by even the most attentive among his students. In evaluating the words of Luther due allowance must be made for these two factors.

Furthermore, who was Stephan Rodt, the man who took down the notes? In 1527 and 1528 he edited parts of Luther's *Kirchen-Postille*. We quote a paragraph from Luther's Foreword to the winter section of his postil: *Mein lieber Leser, diese Predigten, so zuvor sind fast unordentlich und ungeschickt von andern gestellt und durch den Druck ausgegangen, habe ich müssen bisher lassen in der Irre, wie sie gegangen sind, weil ich selbst der Zeit nicht gehabt, dieselbigen zu mustern. Aber weil sie meinen Namen haben geführt, hat es mir fast wohl gefallen, dass mein Freund, Magister Stephan Rodt, sich derselbigen hat angenommen, sie zu bessern und rechtfertigen, auf dass sie meinen Sermonen doch etwas ähnlicher würden und meinen Namen mit ein wenig besserem Fug führten, und unsere Lehre desto mehr schmücken* (St. L. XI, p. LII).

In later years the relation between Luther and Rodt did not remain so cordial. We may omit from our discussion the marital difficulties of Rodt, which Luther blamed, in part at least, on a lack of firmness and manliness in Rodt's character. There are several letters extant, written by Rodt to Luther. He complains that Luther misunderstood him and misjudged his motives. (Luther returned this particular letter unopened.)—In another letter he complains that Luther still bears a grudge against him, and pleads with Luther to lift the ban and resume brotherly relations. In another letter he complains that a friend of Luther's, through whom Rodt had expected an answer from Luther on his latest letter, either written or oral, had passed through Zwickau (Rodt's home town) without even calling on him. What had happened?

In one of the letters mentioned above we read the sentence: *Ich kann nicht leiden, dass Eure Ehrwürdigkeit ... etwas Böses von mir denke. Denn ich bin nicht so, wie die meisten mich bei Eurer Ehrwürdigkeit angeben* (XXIb, 1971). Rodt complains that people slander him before Luther. In 1528 Rodt had reported to Luther that his pastor, Paul Lindenau, used abusive language in his sermons, and Luther, accepting Rodt's report, wrote to Pastor Lindenau and pleaded for Christ's sake, *dass du die Gemüter der Zuhörer vielmehr beruhigst als aufreizest* (XXIa, 1099). It seems that Luther soon discovered that his confidence in Rodt had been misplaced, and he had been misled into unfair action by his report. And now it became Rodt's turn to complain that people misrepresented him before Luther.

These are some facts that shed some light on the character of the man from whom we have the above quoted words of Luther on Zechariah. He would not deliberately falsify the words of his revered teacher, but his judgment apparently was not reliable.

Now briefly back to Matthew, how can he ascribe to Jeremiah a word taken from Zechariah? The explanation offered by Lightfoot that the book of Jeremiah introduced the third section of the Jewish Old Testament and that, hence, things contained anywhere in this section were simply ascribed to Jeremiah, does not seem adequate. The Prophet Jeremiah spoke very much about buying a field. He prophesied the Babylonian Captivity, and when the Babylonian armies were threatening the overthrow of Jerusalem, he bought a field from his uncle's son and had the transaction duly recorded for a testimony that the Lord would deliver His people out of the captivity, since His promise of sending the Savior of the world still had to be fulfilled. The people, however, persisted in turning away from the Lord, and ultimate destruction had to be announced to them. Read Jeremiah, 32ff. The Babylonian Captivity became a figure of ultimate destruction. Jeremiah broke an earthen bottle in the potter's field, in the valley of Hinnom, announcing that it would be called the "valley of slaughter" (Jer. 19). These things Matthew touched in his report of the end of Judas (cf. "field of blood") as before him Zechariah had also touched them; and Matthew adapted the words of Zechariah to the events foretold by Jeremiah.

Luther believed in the inerrancy of the Scriptures so firmly that one little word would make the world too narrow for him. Nor was this a theologoumenon with him, it was his faith.

We could do worse than to apply to Luther the admonition of Heb. 13:7: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith" (RSV).