

# The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture

## An Examination of Hermann Sasse's *Sacra Scriptura* Based on the History of Doctrinal Theology and Dogmatics

By Gottfried Wachler\*

1. *An Examination of Sasse's Dogmatic-Historical View*
  1. The Jewish doctrine of inspiration
  2. The Apologists
  3. Augustine
  4. Luther
    - a. The basis for the authority of Scripture
    - b. The criteria of canonicity
    - c. The authenticity of the traditional authors
    - d. The inerrancy of Scripture
  5. Lutheran Orthodoxy
    - a. The Scripture principle a philosophical one?
    - b. Monophysitism?
    - c. Notes on further criticisms
2. *Sasse's Basis for His Doctrine of the Relative Inerrancy of Scripture*
  1. Otherwise a "logical-rational" understanding
  2. The Bible's special concept of truth
  3. *A priori* or *a posteriori*
  4. The analogy of the two-nature doctrine
3. *Scripture's Claim to Be Truth*
  1. The equating of Scripture and the Word of God
  2. God's Word is true
  3. The antithesis of God's Word and man's word
  4. Christ's testimony to the Old Testament
  5. Theological truth and historical reality inseparable
    - a. God's dealing in judgment and grace is indissolubly interwoven with history
    - b. God's addressing us is indissolubly united with the accounts of history
    - c. The gospel is indissolubly united with the message of creation and the fall

In *Sacra Scriptura*, published by F. W. Hopf, Erlangen 1981, a volume is now available that contains almost all writings by Hermann Sasse on the theme "Holy Scripture." These studies, taken in part from his literary legacy and in part also from his earlier publications, especially in *Lutherische Blätter*, were written over a period of 25 years. That already demonstrates how important this topic was for him. Already in an article titled *Zur Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift* ("Concerning the Doctrine of Holy Scripture"), published in 1950, he expressed his conviction that the Lutheran churches dare not be satisfied with what the Lutheran Confessions state about it as though in passing: "The time has come to speak in greater detail and more unmistakably than in the Book of Concord." After giving three reasons for that, he states: "Even more emphatically does the state of emergency demand a solution for the fact that within the Lutheran churches themselves the restraint evident in the Confessions is being misused in the dogmatic treatment of the doctrine of Scripture to introduce [smuggle in] modern false teachings into the church, as for example the denial of inspiration, something unknown in the

---

\* Dr. Gottfried Wachler is President of the Theological Seminary in Leipzig. This translation was prepared by Pastor Harold Wicke for the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and was printed at its request in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Fall 1984 and Winter 1985. The brethren in Sweden have put out a paperback version of this writing in the original language.

16th century.” God grant that his appeal—as well as that of others—directed to the theologians “who take their commitment to Scripture and the Confessions seriously” may at least not in the confessional Lutheran churches die unheeded. (*Sacra Scriptura* p 209; only the page will be given from now on. In addition, Sasse’s *Erläuterungen der Grundprobleme, die aus Genesis Kap. 1–3 fließen* August 1967 [“Comments on the Basic Problems resulting from Genesis 1–3”] which are available to me only in xerox form, “translated by Bishop Dr. G. Rost,” will also at times be quoted and cited as *Erläuterungen*.)

But Sasse not only cried out, “Something must be done!” but himself toiled untiringly to offer his contribution to a consensus on the doctrine of Scripture among confessionally bound Lutheran churches. In examining his studies and taking a position over against them, I myself would like to offer my own contribution.

To a great extent I am able heartily to agree with Sasse’s expositions, for example, those about the antithesis between God and idols, between Christian faith and pagan religion (11ff; 113ff). With joy one reads his criticism of the definition—at best very onesided—of revelation as “a self-revelation of God” (31) or of the mode of expression that Christ’s life and death are “God’s visible revelation of himself for all people” (35). And how seldom does one today, when there is talk almost only about a revelation in history, read so clear a statement that stresses, in agreement with Scripture, a *word*-revelation of the *speaking* God (31–40). Therewith Sasse does not deny that God’s deeds in the history of salvation are revelation. They are such, however, “only for believers, for those who accept the explanation of the event because of the word that precedes or follows” (35). One must fully agree with that. (To be sure, here already the question surfaces whether for Sasse this is valid only of the great deeds of salvation or of all events which the Bible reports.) Within the framework of this essay it is impossible to commend everything worthwhile in the essays referred to, to say nothing about Sasse’s other merits. But we will call attention to some of them.

It is clear that he addressed himself most passionately to the question of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. His theological-historical and biblical research always finally led to this point. On the one hand he does not shun, in contrast to today’s dominant opinion, repeatedly to set forth clearly the fact that the early church, the church of the Middle Ages, the Eastern church as well as that of the West, Luther and the church of the Reformation, in short, that all of Christendom up to the beginning of the modern era was convinced of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and, from that point of view, not only confessed: The Bible *contains* God’s Word and constantly *becomes* God’s Word, but also: “The Bible is the written Word of God. For 1700 years that was the conviction of all Christians” (276 cp 210, 233, 254, 265, 291). Yes, he is convinced that in the struggle that rages about this confession today we are involved “about nothing less than the fundamental basis of the Christian faith, about existence and non-existence as Christians” (291), that therefore confessing the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is also necessary today and that “we must desist from speaking about ‘errors’ in Scripture” (261). On the other hand he stresses with the same emphasis that the *understanding* of inspiration and inerrancy today must be different from what it was for Christianity up to the 17th century including Luther who, so to say, lived in the “prehistorical” era of theology (347 cp 291). The question facing us today is “how far and to what inerrancy extends” (294). “Do errors and contradictions belong to the human side of the Bible?...What is not in question and for Christians ought never be a matter of question is the *absolute inerrancy*...of the Scripture in all *articles of faith*, in all questions that pertain to the relationship of men to God and that pertain to our salvation. There are no theological errors in Scripture....The question is solely and alone whether this inerrancy...can and must be extended to *statements of a non-theological kind*, that is, above all, to all *historical accounts* and to all *statements about nature*....” (232f Sasse’s emphasis). He himself makes no secret of it that he answers the latter question in the negative.

This answer requires a thorough examination, above all because it sets no limits as to how far this errancy extends in the areas mentioned. For Sasse himself it, for example, includes the possibility of accepting the descent of man from animal life (239), or the assumption that the feeding of the 4000 and of the 5000 was but one event—despite the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:9f (at least that’s the way I understand the corresponding passage in *Erläuterungen* III), or the questioning of the factuality of the Jonah story—despite

Jesus' words in Matthew 12:40f (110 cp *Erläuterungen* V, par. 2), or the echo of old "myths," "oriental conceptions" and Babylonian "nature speculation" in the Old Testament (99; 104).

Although Sasse frequently stresses that the doctrine of Scripture dare only be taken from Scripture itself, nevertheless the main emphasis of his arguments lies in the domain of the history of dogma. That I first of all subject this area to an examination does not mean that according to my opinion it is in this area that the decision must be found. For an objective, unbiased interrogation of Scripture it would however be necessary to rid oneself of this emphasis which Sasse places on his interpretation of the development of the history of dogma. For an impartial study of Scripture is impossible if in no way the end result *dare be* what the church taught until the 18th century because that is supposed to have been a *pagan theory*. And exactly this is the quintessence of Sasse's historical research. He writes: The early-Christian doctrine of inspiration "as the Apologists first developed it" was "for the most part no more than a heathen theory taken over by way of the synagogue, a theory which was only externally christianized or not at all" (249). It was Augustine who then "brought to its final form the early-Christian conception of Holy Scripture" (250). "This theory developed by Augustine and Jerome and then endorsed by Gregory the Great...became the undisputed doctrine of the church of the Middle Ages and was taken over by the Reformation. It is a real tragedy that in this way a doctrine of the Holy Scripture became the basis of Protestant theology, a doctrine which was not strictly biblical..." (350). In analyzing this thesis and others it is not my purpose to take a stab at a man whose struggle for the validity of the biblical-Lutheran confession was exemplary and against which he can no longer defend himself. I am, however, convinced that he would not have forbidden anyone to wrestle with him concerning this "cause" which was of so deep a concern to him. And after all it does not concern a petty matter, but "God's Book," as Luther calls the Bible (St. L. 9:1071; 22:5). Since he however has expressed himself in so detailed and penetrating a way, one cannot avoid mentioning his name repeatedly.

## 1

### An Examination of Sasse's Dogmatic-Historical View

#### 1.1 The Jewish Doctrine Of Inspiration

On the one hand, Sasse established "that neither Jesus nor the Apostles in judging Scripture as being the errorless Word of God...taught anything new as compared with the viewpoint of their people. Jesus has no other doctrine of inspiration than that of the scribes with whom he debated..." Jesus simply shared "the view of his people in the question of the biblical canon as in other matters..." (213). On the other hand, immediately on the next page we read: "But the synagogue, the Aramaic and even more so the Hellenistic synagogue, was clearly influenced in its viewpoint concerning Holy Scripture and its inspiration by oriental, Hellenistic paganism." We leave undecided whether that means, as it seems to, that Jesus' viewpoint was indirectly influenced by paganism. Unfortunately, we can no longer ask the author. If then we do not draw the deduction so evident, we recognize that there remains a contradiction on this point.

At any rate the risky assertion remains that early Christianity adopted the rabbinical Jewish doctrine of inspiration together with its pagan elements. Even if we distinguish more clearly between Palestinian and Hellenistic synagogues and take only the former into consideration, there can be no serious talk about a Jewish doctrine of inspiration. If Strack-Billerbeck, whom Sasse here appeals to, is correct, there were only two points on which they were agreed: first, the preexistence of the Torah in heaven (Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum NT aus Talmud und Midrasch*, IV/1, p 435). But that is exactly what early Christianity did *not* adopt, as Sasse also confirms. No more did early Christianity adopt the second point, the doctrine so important to the Jews and in general acknowledged by them, namely, that the "sole necessary revelation was the Torah alone," from which the conclusion was drawn "that the Torah is entirely different in its divine origin than the other writings" (*ibid.*; meant are the other writings of the Old Testament). About the way in which God revealed the Torah to Moses the opinions of the rabbis went in different directions. Some said that the Torah together with the laws and the regulations telling how they were to be put into practice, regulations which are not in the Scripture, were transmitted orally. Others said that they were all in toto transmitted in written form on the stone tablets or

were submitted for copying together with the pre-creation Torah copy (*ibid.* 441). Still others taught that God had already revealed all the Old Testament books to Moses on Sinai so that their content later reached their authors by way of tradition (*ibid.* 443). Not a bit of that do we find in the teachings of early Christianity or of Jesus or the apostles. Sasse's appeal to Strack-Billerbeck, in my opinion, is not justified. Even in the quotation cited by Sasse (214) Strack-Billerbeck severely limits the agreement of early Christianity with the rabbis by means of this postscript: "Inasmuch as it agreed with their own opinion." If Jesus and the apostles were in agreement with the majority of the rabbis on *this* point that Moses, David or Isaiah spoke and wrote through the Holy Spirit and therefore also were inspired, they taught so not because they shared the viewpoint of their people, but because they had the same Bible, which precisely bears witness to that very fact. So there also were those among the Jews—also among the scribes—who waited for the Messiah prophesied by the Holy Spirit through the oral and written witness of the prophets. Therefore one simply cannot flatly deny to Judaism or the "synagogue" a correct understanding of inspiration and say: "How could anyone understand the Holy Spirit before Jesus' prophecy of the Paraclete was fulfilled on Pentecost?" (283) This judgment would after all also apply to the prophets! Frankly, they also did not rationally "understand" the mystery of their inspiration any more than we do.

## 1.2 The Apologists

Philo and the Hellenistic synagogue must be distinguished much more clearly from Palestinian Judaism which with the Maccabean revolt overcame the foreign influence of Hellenism. That Philo influenced the Apologists may be so. But not a one of them adopts the description of ecstatic inspiration in all its particulars as found in Philo. (cp J. Beumer, *Die Inspiration der Hl. Schrift*, in *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, published by Schmaus/Grillmeier/Scheffczyk, Volume I, file 3<sup>b</sup>, Freiburg/Basel/Vienna 1968, p 11).

One can hardly form an opinion about the Scripture doctrine of the Apologists on the basis of a few quotations. To do so one would have to examine their complete writings. This I must leave to someone else. I will spare myself this effort. For according to Sasse their influence on the church's doctrine during the following centuries first of all became so great because Augustine adopted their doctrine of inspiration. Therefore we will pay more attention to him.

In any case the quotations cited by Sasse do not justify so devastating a judgment. When Athenagoras says that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets spoke in the state of ecstasy under the influence of the Holy Spirit that which was revealed to them (*Sacra Scriptura* p 248), he may in this connection have thought of their prophecies. For the Apologists were concerned with setting forth the miracle of prophecy and fulfillment. And as far as the prophecies are concerned one must admit that the prophets received them not through their own meditating nor through a personal mental activity guided by the Holy Spirit. Rather they were granted them apart from conscious reflection and only then did they consciously meditate on them (cp 1 Pe 1:10f). This mysterious process is certainly not to be equated with ecstasy, although perhaps at times similar phenomena took place, as Sasse admits (281). One can, however, then not condemn Athenagoras so severely because he could not find a better term for this phenomenon than the generally known term ecstasy. This blunder is certainly not as weighty an element in his teaching as many another. For a mistaken conception of inspiration is certainly not as dangerous as its denial. Besides, the blunder was corrected later on in the church's battle with Montanism, so that it could not lead to further harm.

As far as Pseudo-Justin is concerned, one must first ask why he could not call the personal agents of the Holy Spirit "holy men." Luther after all, following the text available to him, also translated 2 Peter 1:21 thus: "The holy men of God wrote...." And as Zechariah did not shrink from praising God for speaking "through the mouths of his holy prophets" (Lk 1:70), so we also do not shrink from speaking thus of St. Paul. It always depends on whether one therewith means sinless people or people whom God made to be his temple and tools.—And when Pseudo-Justin then pictures the relation of the prophets and apostles to the Holy Spirit as that of a musical instrument, then that is after all just a *picture*: ὡσπερ ὄργανῳ κιθάρᾳς (thus the Greek according to Philippi, *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, Vol. I, Stuttgart 1854, p 177—Emphasis here as also in the following is mine, unless distinctly stated that it is the emphasis of the respective authors).—Why does Sasse not treat that as

a comparison which the word “similar” clearly represents as a comparison, which, as is well known, always depends on the *tertium comparationis*? Naturally the conjecture suggests itself that here the picture is used in the same false sense as in Philo. But proving that would be possible only on the basis of the essay *Cohortatio ad Graecos* itself, from which the quotation is taken. As long as one does not do so or cannot do so, one ought not pass judgment. Many have already taken a position against that (eg., Philippi, 1.c., p 178; J. Greve, *Der Kampf um die heilige Schrift*, Cottbus 1892, p 64; W. Rohnert, *Die Inspiration der heiligen Schrift*, Leipzig 1899, p 96f). More decisive, however, undoubtedly is this point: The church later no longer used this disputed comparison because of its misuse by the Montanists and thereafter rejected the mechanical-ecstatic understanding of inspiration. Although Sasse does not remain silent concerning this development, he nevertheless is of the opinion that Augustine’s doctrine of Scripture can only be understood “against the background of the older Apologists” (250).

### 1.3 Augustine

One cannot deny that Augustine could never totally rid himself of these Neoplatonic eggshells (rubbish). But when one again and again calls him nothing but a Neoplatonist, even a “dangerous Neoplatonist” (216), “who knows nothing at all of *sola scriptura*” (252) one does not do him justice. In his Confessions he after all just in this decisive point set himself apart from Neoplatonism! There he writes that in the Neoplatonic writings he did in fact read sentences similar to these: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...” But words such as: “He came unto his own and his own received him not...” or “The Word was made flesh” he had not read there. True he read there “that the souls ‘received salvation from his fullness’ ...but that he ‘in the fullness of time died for the godless, and that you did not spare your only-begotten Son, but gave him up for us all,’ that does not appear there. ‘For you have hidden it from the wise and revealed it to babes,’ so that to him might come the weary and downtrodden, and he would refresh them; for he is meek ... and forgives us all our sins” (VII, 9—quoted from *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*, published by Reithmayr, Kempten 1871; cp also his polemic against the Neoplatonist Porphyrius in *De civitate Dei*, Book X).—Or consider his prayer for a correct understanding of Scripture: “O Lord, be merciful to me and answer my desires ... that at my knocking the depths of your Word will open themselves. I beg you therefore through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, the man at your right hand, the Son of Man, whom you appointed mediator between yourself and us and through whom you sought us though we were not seeking you...; I plead with you through him, who sits on your right, who is our intercessor with you....It is he also whom I seek in your Scripture” (XI, 2). And that should be an out-and-out Neoplatonist who had no inkling of *sola scriptura* as Luther understood it?

Also the fact that he together with many others counted the Cumaean sibyl as a member of the *civitas dei* because of her supposed prophecy concerning Christ is no proof that in the final analysis he held to a pagan doctrine of inspiration. It is certain that he was as yet in no position to know that this prophecy was a forgery. How could he interpret this prophecy, considered to be true, in any other way than that God in an exceptional case also granted a prophecy to a heathen woman?

“That moreover agrees with the teaching of the Old Testament...” Sasse remarks in studies left behind at his death and points to Balaam and Pharaoh Necho (27f—cp also John 11:49ff). It is difficult to determine whether Sasse with this remark revised his former statement to the effect that Augustine’s assumption of divine inspiration in the case of the sibyl is “the logical extension of the inspiration concept of the Apologists,” whereby he accepted a “relationship between biblical and pagan prophecy,” although he otherwise would have opposed the existence of divine prophecy among heathen (251). At any rate, he did not repeat this judgment. And, in fact, it is not tenable.

Nevertheless the accusation remains that Augustine even as already the Apologists by referring to prophecy and fulfillment wanted to prove to the heathen that the Bible is a book inspired to a higher degree than the books of the heathen, from which it would follow that the God of the Bible is the one and only true God (eg. 251f). To support this the following quotations are cited among others: “...if they (the heathen) call *them* gods who never dared to say anything against this God through their own prophets [*vates*], how should not he be God who not only commanded to topple their idol statues but also through his prophets [*vates*] foretold that these

idol statues would be toppled among all peoples...” (251). Or: “Why should not he be looked upon as God whose prophets not alone gave correct and conclusive answers to questions with which...they were approached, but also to themes about which they were not questioned,...long before such significant things took place, which we now read about or which we actually see?” (280)

First of all, one cannot from the use of the word *vates* for both true and false prophets deduce that therewith both are to be placed on the same level. The Bible after all also uses the same expression for both.—The wording of these and similar passages however also does not justify the conclusion that here in the strict sense of the word something is to be “proved” to the heathen. But one cannot deny that the fulfillment of prophecies is a divine sign that can cause the heathen to listen and so give ear to the Word of God. That is why God himself in the Old Testament in very similar fashion presents the fulfillment of prophecies as a sign that he alone is God (Is 41:21ff; 44:6ff etc.). Only if God himself here employed an inadmissible way of offering proof could one criticize Augustine for pointing to God’s great miracle signs. In no way do I want to maintain—though I cannot resist the impression—that Sasse without being aware of it sees the church father Augustine in such an unfavorable light only because his [Augustine’s] doctrine of inspiration does not please him. And therewith we come to the heart of the matter.

Sasse calls Augustine’s Scripture doctrine “a laboriously Christianized form of a heathen doctrine” (254) because he designates the Evangelists as hands of Christ who wrote the Word “dictated” by the Head, and because he to a large extent replaced the simple biblical expression *Scripture* and *Holy Scriptures* with the expression *divine Scriptures*, an expression derived from paganism (252f). As far as the latter is concerned, it is not at all understandable why one may not speak of “divine Scriptures” if one with Sasse confesses that the Scripture is inspired by God. To be sure, aware of his presupposition that Scripture contains errors, it is understandable why he is not pleased with the expression “divine Scriptures,” an expression, however, that our Confessions employ frequently: CA Foreword 8; XXVIII, 28:43; Foreword to FC, Goett. edition, p 740, 742, 759. Do our Confessions therewith come near to presenting pagan doctrine? Or is the rejection of this expression an indication of a doctrine of Scripture strange to the Confessions?

But what about the alleged psychological, mechanical understanding of inspiration that Augustine is said to have? The quotation on which this accusation above all rests in *Sacra Scriptura* (252) reads thus: “When they [i.e., the Evangelists] wrote what he [i.e., Christ] revealed and spoke [*ostendit et dixit*] one dare not say that he himself did not write it. For his *members* recorded what they learned from the dictating head [*quod dictante capite cognoverunt*]. What he wanted us to read about his deeds and words he commanded them, his hands, to write [*scribendum illis suis manibus imperavit, De consensu evang. I, 35, 54; CSEL 43, 60, 17ff*]” [emphasis by Sasse]—It is regrettable that Sasse did not also quote the preceding sentence in which we read that Christ is for his disciples “the Head *just as* for members of his body” [*tamquam membris sui corporis caput est*]. More regrettable is it that he in the first sentence of the quotation both in the translation as well as in the Latin text (enclosed in parentheses) simply omits the “just as” [*tamquam*], which is present in the edition of the church fathers used by him: *scribendum illis tamquam suis manibus*. That is something I cannot understand. Naturally we can say that it would be self-evident even without the word *tamquam* that we are here concerned with a figure of speech. That would then also be true for Augustine. But when he [Augustine] twice expressly emphasizes that he is using a comparison, he certainly does not want it understood in a thoughtless, but rather in a specific sense. If Sasse had quoted both *tamquams* and at least also stressed them, he would have had to prove that the point of comparison in this *picture* is the *mechanical* execution of the commands of the Head. That however would not have been possible. For from Augustine’s writings it is easy to prove that he in no way thought of excluding the activity of the human spirit or consciousness. With the comparison he only desired to point to the *auctor primarius*. Already in the treatise *De consensu evangelistarum* we find not only the one sentence which contradicts a mechanical understanding, a sentence which Sasse however interprets as a contradiction in Augustine (253). Two further examples: *Ut enim quisque meminerat et ut cuique cordi erat vel brevis vel prolixius eandem tamen explicare sententiam, ita eos explicasse manifestum est* (II, 12.—“It is evident that they [the Evangelists] have reported in such a way as each one recalled and as it was close to his heart to nevertheless express the same meaning—sometimes more briefly, sometimes more extensively.”) Later

it states that the Holy Spirit “allowed one to arrange his report in one fashion and the other in another” (...*alium sic, alium vero sic narrationem suam ordinare permiserit* II, 21.—Both quotations cited according to CSEL 43). In addition a few examples from other writings: “Because he [John] nevertheless was an inspired *man* he did not report everything as it was, but reported what he as a human being was able to” (In John 1:1; quotation according to Beumer, 1.c p 30). “One is accustomed to ask which form and shape of the heavens...is to be assumed. Many say a great deal about these things, which *our authors [auctores] with greater wisdom have omitted*, since they...serve no purpose....Therefore we may briefly state that our authors knew what was true about the form of the heavens, but that the Spirit of God who spoke through them did not want to instruct mankind about that...” (*De Genesi* 2:9; quotation according to Beumer p 30).—Two additional examples from the *Confessions*: I cannot “believe of your most faithful servant Moses that you qualified him to a lesser degree than I would have wished and desired of you if I...had been called by you to serve you *with my spirit and my power of speech* and thus to transmit to the world those teachings that...redound as blessings for all nations...” (XII, 26).—“What all did I not tell you, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, these hymns *full of believing trust, this echo of piety...*” (IX, 4; both passages quoted according to *Biblioth. d. Kirchengvaeter*).

Sasse quotes, as noted, only the one passage, in which Augustine says that the Evangelists sometimes recalled later events earlier and vice versa, all as God wanted to proffer it to their memory (*recordationi suggerere*). From this statement he draws the conclusion that in Augustine’s case a “tension” exists “between the *dictare* that makes a person a tool having no will and the *suggerere* which allows the human spirit a certain participation.” But what is otherwise found in Augustine certainly only permits the conclusion that the figure of speech—a head which dictates to the hands—is to be interpreted by the *suggerere* as well as by all the other expressions.

To my surprise, Sasse also says of that concept of inspiration which permits the human spirit to participate: “A remembrance guided by the Holy Spirit, a decision concerning what is to be related, recognized as totally free and yet actually guided by God, that and no more is left of human authorship” (253). Whoever has no lofty opinion concerning the freedom of mankind as ruined by sin can actually only thank God that the apostles because of their assignment to proclaim the Word of God, valid for all times and alone able to save, were granted so marvelous a guidance through the Holy Spirit. Sasse strangely enough sees such a divine guidance of the biblical authors as altogether too great a limitation of human freedom only in respect to historical accounts, but not in respect to theological content. Therefore he criticizes Augustine only for his attempts to harmonize historical “contradictions,” but not for trying to harmonize theological “contradictions.” But the examination up to this point has certainly demonstrated that one cannot make Augustine’s complete trust in the historical statements of the Bible a matter of doubt by stating that he had a pagan, mechanical doctrine of inspiration. That is out of the question.

The fact that Augustine clung to the Septuagint legend also cannot change that. For this is exactly what he does *not* say in this connection, namely, that the Greek text was dictated by God to these 72 men or that they wrote mechanically in a state of ecstasy. Rather, he speaks of *the learned* who *were adept* in both languages and who each one for himself did the *work of translating*. The result, however, demonstrated *the support* provided by God, who filled and guided the *spirit* of the translators (*De civitate Dei*, XVIII, 42f). Therefore his uncritical attitude toward the Septuagint legend is not the result of a mechanical understanding of inspiration. The real reason is that the Septuagint is quoted in the New Testament. Sasse properly calls attention to that. For at the close of his expositions concerning the Septuagint Augustine writes: “Therefore I also, humble person that I am, following in the footsteps of the apostles, believed I should make use of both texts because they [the apostles] quoted prophetic testimony from both, that is, from the Hebrew and from the Seventy...” (1.c.—cited according to *Biblioth. d. Kirchengvaeter*). To conclude from the example of the apostles that “in both one and the same divine authority resides” was certainly an error. This, however, does not prove that Augustine had a basically false doctrine of inspiration. Not only do the above citations forbid that, but also the fact that Jerome opposed Augustine in the matter of the Septuagint, although he did not teach differently than Augustine concerning the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture and also made use of the picture of dictation (cp Beumer, p 27ff).

## 1.4 Luther

Sasse has said much that is excellent about Luther's doctrine of the Scripture. Especially to be emphasized is that in contrast to many interpreters of Luther he does not pass over in silence or misrepresent the fact that for Luther "Scripture" and "God's Word" were interchangeable concepts (210) and that he acknowledged the inspiration, in fact, the verbal inspiration, of Scripture (233, 298, 304, 314). Quite a few misrepresentations—almost impossible to root out—of remarks by Luther concerning Scripture are corrected by him. To call attention to all of these is not possible in this connection, since we are concerned with examining his overall dogmatic-historical viewpoint. Above all we are interested in seeing how Luther and Orthodoxy are compared and contrasted.

### a) *The basis for the authority of Scripture*

Sasse believes to be able to recognize a basic difference in this that Orthodoxy, as already the Apologists and Augustine, looked upon the recognition of an inerrant Bible as most important because faith in Christ first issued therefrom: "The late Orthodox theologians believed in Christ the Lord because they believed in the Bible" (240). (This atrocious assertion will still have to be examined.) Luther is said to have taken a stand diametrically opposed to that: "Luther believed the Scripture because he believed in Christ the Lord" (*ibid.*), or: "Luther believed in the Scripture as inspired and inerrant because Scripture testified to him concerning Christ the Lord" (234).

If one takes the last two statements by themselves and correctly understands the expression "believe in the Bible," one must agree with them fully, even though Sasse does not support them with any quotation. For how could anyone who does not trust in Christ trust the Word through which Christ speaks to him? And how could anyone trust the word of Scripture and not hate it in the secret recesses of his heart if the Law and not Christ were the center of its contents? Luther however states it very clearly: "If I believe this [namely, that Christ is the Son of God], I now believe that God is truthful in His Word and does not lie" (LW 30:318).

The above statements however become totally false if they are meant to express an antithesis to the endeavor of Orthodoxy to prove the authority of the Scripture from its self-witness. For then they state: Luther saw the reason why the Bible written by men is God's Word only in its contents, Christ. Sasse really does not differentiate between the question through what the Scripture becomes divine authority for the *individual*, and the other question, why Scripture *is* objectively God's Word and of divine authority already before the individual comes to faith in Scripture. Orthodoxy answered the first question thus: the *content* of the Scripture attests itself in man's heart as the Word of God directed to him (*autopistie*). The second question Orthodoxy answered by pointing to the witness of Scripture concerning its ultimate source: inspired *by God*. This answer Sasse rejects and insists that both questions can be answered *only* by referring to the *content* of Scripture. This [i.e., the content] not only assures the individual that the Scripture is God's Word, but actually makes the Scripture to be God's Word: "That *not* the method of its *coming into being*, but *only the content* makes a word to be a genuine prophecy, *to be God's Word*, and this content as to its basic essence is Jesus Christ, that Augustine...was unable to see. *That first Luther understood*" (252). That would mean that the word of the prophetess in Philippi, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved," was *God's Word* because of its content, because it showed the way to salvation in Christ. Paul however expelled the author of this message, the spirit of evil! Sasse's thesis moreover would assert that there is no difference between Scripture which is *eo ipso* God's Word and today's preaching which is only God's Word in so far as it agrees with Scripture. And that is supposed to have been Luther's opinion!

We are concerned about the objective basis of the divine authority of the Scripture not only because Scripture witnesses to that fact. Rather, this is of practical and important significance for faith. Has the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, which comes to us through the *contents* of Scripture nothing to do with its *claim* to be God's Word? And above all: Does trust in the divine authority of the *entire* Scripture base itself only on its central content, Christ, and not also on its self-witness? For Sasse, as far as I can see, only this antithesis exists: Either one bases such trust *solely* on the testimony of its inspiration, as supposedly Orthodoxy does—and that is to be rejected—or *alone* on its content, Christ, and faith in him, as supposedly Luther does—and that alone is

proper. He clearly considers it a superior quality in Luther, M. Chemnitz and the Formula of Concord that they—according to his opinion—do not as Calvin and Flacius *base* the authority of Scripture on its inspiration, but that for them inspiration rather only “was a *presupposition* for the *understanding* of the Bible” (208). That this does not hold for M. Chemnitz can be demonstrated rather quickly. One need only consult his *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, *loc.* I, *sect.* VI, 8. But how about Luther?

It is true that he did not speak in as great a detail about Scripture’s self-witness as did Orthodoxy. But may one simply conclude from that that it had no meaning for him? The reason is rather that he had to battle on totally different fronts (where by the way he emphatically did offer Scripture proof, appealing to the divine authority of Scripture). Scripture itself was not a point of contention. And that is more than a conjecture. Zwingli, for example, did not deny the authority of the traditional words of institution of Jesus, but foisted another meaning on them. And the Roman Church fought with Luther on an identical footing, that of Scripture, which however it understood from the viewpoint of the Law. Thus the Confutation attempted to refute Luther’s doctrine by means of Scripture, so that Melanchthon in the Apology analyzed their “Scripture proof.”

In the days of Orthodoxy the situation was different. The opinions of the Socinians, who considered only the Scripture doctrine of salvation as inerrant Word of God, penetrated even into the student body at Wittenberg (cp J. Baur, *Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium*, Guetersloh 1962, p 179 with supporting citations). That is when the critical methodology of the Enlightenment—based on reason—had its beginning. But also the situation as far as Rome was concerned had changed. Already M. Chemnitz saw himself compelled to expound the doctrine of Scripture in greater detail. He writes in *Examen*: “I am aware that I am exceeding the bounds of brevity which would usually suffice for an examination of this subject matter, ‘Of the Scripture’; but the kind reader will of himself grant me his indulgence when he considers the reason. For today the Papists use an entirely different method of attack than at the time of Eck, Emser and similar persons. For they did not object to using the weapons of Scripture to contend with us. Pighius however discovered that this procedure brought more harm than aid to the papacy. That is why he himself demonstrated a shorter way by which, if they would continue to follow it, they could attain their goal painlessly: that they would with the assistance of all rhetorical art zero in on the smaller area of the incompleteness, insufficiency, ambiguity and obscurity of Scripture and bravely contend for the necessity, validity, completeness, certainty and perspicuity of their unwritten traditions....And this counsel the papal writers...followed with all their might...and it is exactly on this expedient remedy that the Council of Trent bases its arguments....Necessity therefore demands that we deal more exhaustively with the authority of Scripture” (*Examen Conc. Trid.*, part 1, section 4, 1 in translation).

Sasse does not quarrel with this fact and does not trace the absence of a dogmatic presentation of the Scripture in Luther’s writings and in the Lutheran Confessions back to a Lutheran principle, as is usually done. Rather he says emphatically that at Luther’s time the matter of Scripture was “not in dispute or conflict,” but that later a detailed presentation of *De Scriptura* became necessary (207). We thank him for that. In my opinion he however does not sufficiently take this fact into consideration. Above all he does not take into consideration that the renowned dogmaticians of Orthodoxy wrote no mission sermons nor intended to convert any atheists with their works in dogmatics. Otherwise he certainly would not have been able to impute to their statements the false meaning that faith in Christ is derived from the Scripture proof of the authority of the Bible.—The dogmatics of Orthodoxy was above all written with the Lutheran Church in mind, to arm it against the attacks on Scripture. Faith in Christ was presupposed. In addition, Orthodoxy contended with the false Scripture doctrine of theologians who still esteemed the Bible as having divine authority, but not the *entire* Bible or *only* the Bible. That’s why Orthodoxy stressed the self-witness of Scripture.

Luther, as noted, did not as yet do this in so detailed a way. From that Sasse evidently draws the conclusion that this was a matter of indifference to him. Because he mentioned *only* the Scripture’s testimony concerning Christ as basis for his certainty that the entire Scripture and only the Scripture was the inspired, inerrant Word of God. But that would mean: His faith in Christ, created by the Scripture, reasoned out the divine authority of the entire Scripture from itself or that it was granted to him directly, completely independent of the claim and self-witness of Scripture. If that is correct, then all statements of Scripture concerning its inspiration by the Holy Spirit and concerning its reliability would be superfluous. For the *sola scriptura* of the

Reformation every objective and authoritative proof from Scripture itself would be unnecessary. Everyone could then subjectively on the basis of his faith understand *scriptura* as *tota scriptura* or in the sense of a larger or smaller selection. (Just as it is happening!) If that was Luther's opinion—of course just understood as an example—then that in fact would be the presupposition for the following thesis of Sasse to the effect that Luther did not teach the complete inerrancy of Scripture, but only believed it personally. In my opinion that would then actually mean the surrender of *sola scriptura*, which of course is not Sasse's intention. Because so much depends on this, we must examine the question in detail as to whether Luther's trust in the reliability of the entire Scripture really was based *only* on its contents.

That however cannot be so already for the reason that Luther considered only the Scripture as inspired and *per se* errorless and not the ever so evangelical writings of the Fathers nor his own, even though they witnessed to Christ. Even the totally Scripture-based sermon was not the inspired Word of God for him which is not subject to test and is *eo ipso* God's Word. He never quoted from the writings or sermons of the church fathers in the same manner as from Scripture, saying, for example, the Holy Spirit expressed it in that way. No proof need be adduced for that, because that is clear as day in his writings.

The uniqueness of Scripture for him also did not lie in this that the Scripture, respectively the New Testament, was the *first* sermon book of the church. That is of course true after a fashion, but that would only prove that Scripture was being appealed to as a historical source because it was closest in time to the events of salvation. That however cannot be used to prove—and Luther also did not do so—that their witness to Christ is accurate in every detail, to say nothing about the fact that they in their totality together with all precepts and accounts are the book of the Holy Spirit and thus true. The unique divine authority of the entire Bible also cannot be based on—and I am not aware of where Luther ever did so—the fact that in connection with every word of Scripture one in one's heart experiences the original and unique appeal of Christ that works trust. For that happens only through the actual gospel. Whoever senses the call of the Savior in it, of him is true what Sasse writes about the Christians of the Reformation: "He takes Christ at his word when he comes with the saving gospel: Your sins are forgiven you" (234). Doubt concerning the truth of the Word would be impossible together with faith in Christ. To be sure both are simultaneously valid: the Christian believes the gospel because he believes in Christ and believes in Christ because he believes the gospel. One cannot play one off against the other.

Undoubtedly for Luther that included trust in the entire Bible—but not because he postulated or developed the divine authority of the entire Scripture from his faith in Christ, of which Scripture itself says nothing. Rather, the Bible was already of divine authority for him *before that*. In the monastery he already experienced the truth of this claim in the very depth of his being through the killing power of the Law. But then he also experienced the saving divine power of the gospel in the Scripture. Not just any book had taken hold of his heart with its core-statement so that on the basis of such a statement he deduced the divine nature of the entire book. Rather, this book had approached him from the very start with a divine claim and had evidenced the truth of this claim upon his heart.

Every Christian, and thus also Luther, in searching the Scripture stumbles upon passages that seem to be fully redundant, contradictory or unbelievable for reason. Here the question must surface whether the claim of the Bible also extends to such passages. This question cannot be answered directly on the basis of faith in Christ and his gospel. But whoever has already in connection with a number of different passages experienced that the Scripture is the Word of his God and Savior, he will direct this question to the Scripture itself. And there he will, for example, come upon the words of his Lord which he spoke in reference to the Old Testament, the prophets and apostles. And they make him sure of the truth of the entire Scripture—by faith.

Thus Luther's certainty about the divine truth of the entire Scripture was based both on the inner witness of its central content as well as on the claim of Christ's messengers, a claim legitimized by Christ himself, to be the mouthpiece of their Lord, consecrated as such by the Holy Spirit.

Only by drawing on this twofold basis did he also believe that Scripture is in its final analysis always concerned about Christ, also when he was not aware of it; yes, even where the requirements of the Law seem to speak against Christ as the only way to salvation. In that connection he could argue thus: The author of

Scripture can certainly not testify against himself in Scripture! "...even if you were to cite thousands of passages to support justification through works as opposed to justification by faith and were to cry out that Scripture contends against itself, I have the *author* and Lord of Scripture on my side, and I will rather take my stand with him than to believe you; for it is impossible that the Scripture should be at odds with itself, for that can only take place among irrational and obdurate hypocrites" (St. L. 9:356—English by the translator).

However, where a matter does not so immediately concern itself with the center, eg., in connection with the marvelous and often strange appearing events which the Old Testament recounts, he cannot argue in the same manner, beginning with the Savior. Why he also believes Scripture in all these matters he rather simply bases on the fact that Scripture is the "Holy Spirit's Book" or "God's Book," which did "not spring from the soil of the earth" (St. L 9:1775; LW 30:107; 22:484; St. L 14:349, etc.—When Orthodoxy says something like this, it is branded as bibliolatry; in the case of Luther it is put up with or passed over!—Even seemingly redundant repetitions he traces back to the Holy Spirit: "In this passage we see Moses using a great abundance of words and repeating the same things to the point of being tiresome. How often he mentions the animals! How often the entrance into the ark! How often the sons of Noah, who went in at the same time! In this instance the division must be left to men who are spiritual-minded; they alone know and see *that the Holy Spirit repeats nothing in vain* (LW 2:90–91). "For"—and that again is said by Luther and not only by Orthodoxy—"not only the vocables, but also the style used by the Holy Spirit is of God" (St. L 4:1960; English version by the translator; similarly 1:542, 877, 1711; 2:1573, 1987; 3:21, 30, 1895; etc.)

Of no other book—and even if it contains the finest testimony to Christ—can Luther speak thus. Only of this book can he say: it "*is inspired and taught by God himself*" (St. L 9:1852; cp 6:742). And that means for Luther as for Orthodoxy that God is in reality the author, the prophets and apostles however his tools. The Scriptures although "written by [*durch*] men, are neither of men nor *from* men, but from God" (LW 35:153). Inspiration therefore denotes for Luther more than the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for which every preacher may pray. Rather, inspiration was granted only to specific men whom God chose: "*Prophets* preach solely by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and they have not derived their preaching from books or through men; Moses and Amos were such prophets ... they are wise and can make others wise; they can *set forth sacred writings* and interpret them [*Schrift setzen und auslegen*—emphasized] (LW 52:89; cp St. L 3:795)." "For we are not all *apostles*, who by a sure decree of God were sent to us as infallible teachers. For that reason, it is not they, but we, since we are without such a decree, who are able to err and waver in faith" (LW 34:113). (When Luther in the next sentence speaks of *non posse errare in fide*, he does not therewith as an afterthought limit inerrancy to the items of faith in the creed. For shortly before he says that the Apostle Paul was able "to set in order a sort of decalog and judge most correctly about *all* things." Every Christian, full of the Holy Spirit, is able to do so. But the fact is, we are after all of "unequal spirit." Thereupon follows the above quotation.) This distinction between Spirit-filled Christians, on the one hand, and apostles and prophets, on the other hand, Luther makes in numerous places: "Since the fathers have often erred, as you yourself confess, who will make us certain as to wherein they have not erred, assuming their reputation is sufficient and should not be weighed and judged according to *divine* Scriptures?... What if they erred in their interpretation, as well as in their life and writings?... The saints *could* err in their writings and sin in their lives but *the Scriptures cannot err*.... We accept indeed those saints whose praise comes not from men but from God [Ro 2:29]; not those whom the pope raises up, but those whom God raises up; ... that is those whose life and teaching the *divine Scriptures* praise, such as the *patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. Them alone and no others can we surely believe* and cling to, and thus be preserved" (LW 36:136, 137; cf. 32:11, 12).

#### b) *The criteria of canonicity*

Although Sasse also questions the last-but-one quotation above (302), he nevertheless overlooks the proof it offers, namely, that for Luther the certainty that Scripture alone is □□□□□□ the errorless Word of God most definitely depended on the fact that it is the Word of those messengers commissioned by God, empowered and inspired by God. Accordingly the criterion of what for him was canonical was not only the content, as Sasse supposes: "The fact that a book is inspired can be accepted only on the basis of an internal

standard. That was for Luther the celebrated expression: ‘What proclaims Christ’ ” (348 cp 310). I cannot understand how one can so one-sidedly represent statements of Orthodoxy, which completely agree with the above statements of Luther, as though Orthodoxy scarcely concerned itself with the content of Scripture, and vice versa play down the identical statements of Luther, as though he made no distinction between the prophetic-apostolic writings, on the one hand, and the deuterocanonical and other writings, on the other hand.

Did Luther actually on the basis of that which he had internally experienced as God’s gospel also first test those writings of the New Testament which had been unanimously accepted as apostolic by the church which still stood under the authority of the living apostles? That would certainly mean that he had made himself to be an errorless judge of what was pure and fully apostolic gospel and reliable witness to Christ in all points. In the quoted passages Luther however says exactly the opposite: We cannot trust the writings of erring men without putting these writings to a test. We can trust (and that means both according to their context as well as basically: trust without testing) only the divine Scriptures which come from those whom God himself praises in Scripture as such sent by him as errorless teachers. That means, does it not, that they alone are the norm and that there is no norm outside or above them, also no norm of what is gospel, of what belongs to the gospel or of what serves the gospel. As far as Luther is concerned, all *other* writings (also those, as we shall see, whose apostolic authority is not established) are to be tested according to that principle. Sasse’s opinion that Luther did not proceed from those writings which were established as apostolic and therefore normative, but first of all on the basis of the norm discovered by him established which writings were apostolic, is already untenable on the basis of these statements of Luther among others.

What Sasse writes concerning the same question on page 219 of a thesis of the same year does not, to be sure, admit of only one interpretation. One could however read the meaning into it that Luther tested *only* the apocryphal writings and the antilegomena. On page 310 (just dealt with) the context however permits only the meaning that Luther tested the *entire* Scripture according to his principle. For there it clearly reads: “Also the apostles are subject to the Word and must permit themselves to be judged by it. Thus a possibility exists to judge the persons who claim to be bearers of divine revelation [by which, in contrast to the following, only apostles and prophets can be meant], but also the writings which claim to be revelations of God or are claimed to be such: ‘That is the proper touchstone....’ Thus there exists a norm above the *norma normans* of Scripture....”

Worthy of note, however, is that Sasse on page 220 emphasizes: “The Lutheran Church...could only *believe* that also in the writings of the Old Testament, as for example in the Song of Solomon—perhaps very indirectly—testimony is given concerning Christ. But under no circumstances is it permissible to make of Luther’s rule for determining the canon a principle of biblical criticism and to declare only that as God’s Word in the Bible which according to our understanding declares Christ. The entire Old Testament and the entire New Testament, the Bible as a whole and in all its parts proclaims, that is, witnesses to Christ: that is Luther’s view.” Thereupon follows an effective refutation of a misuse of Luther’s statement “*urgemus Christum contra scripturam.*”

How one can at the same time say both: one can only *believe* that the entire Scripture proclaims Christ, and: one must *test* the Scripture according to Luther’s principle, namely, *whether* it proclaims Christ, is a riddle as far as I am concerned. Just as much of a riddle is it that Luther’s *norm for judging* the canonicity of a writing suddenly turns up as a principle of exegesis and vice versa. May abbreviations have corrupted the text here?

Against Sasse’s opinion militates Luther’s actual method of critically evaluating the canon, of which he gives an account in the *Vorreden* (Prefaces). It is not a fact that the application of his principle first led him to “distinguish the correct and assured chief books of the New Testament from the later antilegomena,” as Sasse asserts (310). Rather, he from the very first operated with the difference between homologoumena and antilegomena, which the Early Church had established. At that place in the Prefaces where he passes from the homologoumena over to the antilegomena he immediately says in the first sentence: “Up to this point we have had [to do with] the true and certain chief books of the New Testament. The four which follow have *from ancient times had a different reputation,*” (LW 35:394). Only these books, already disputed in the Early Church, does he subject to scrutiny. First he treats the Letter to the Hebrews. No one can deny that this writing

“proclaims Christ,” and that certainly more than Deuteronomy or the Letter to Philemon. In the same Preface Luther calls it “a marvelously fine epistle” which speaks “masterfully and profoundly” of the highpriesthood of Christ.” Sasse himself argues that Luther in spite of that did not number the Letter to the Hebrews among the chief books and placed it at the periphery of the canon because he did not consider its author an apostle, to whom also therefore the *posse non errare in fide* did not apply. I therefore completely fail to understand how Sasse nevertheless can persist in saying that the principle “What proclaims Christ” was Luther’s only criterion for evaluating the canon. Rather, Luther *first of all* cites Hebrews 2:3 as support for the uncertainty of the Early Church, a passage that has nothing to do with the content but only with the authorship. From this passage, Luther says, it becomes clear that the doctrine of the apostles has come down to the author “perhaps much later.” It is first then that he refers to the “knotty problem,” chapter 12:17, the only passage in which he critiques the content (Esau found no repentance, even though...). If for him according to the witness of the Early Church the apostolic authorship had been certain, he would, as he did in such cases, also have sought for a solution to this knotty problem. I’m sure of that. For he admits that one might indeed “make a comment on it.” But he did not know whether that would be sufficient in view of the wording.—In connection with the Letter of Jude he offers no critique of the contents whatsoever! The author however (he states) evidently quoted from 2 Peter and speaks of the apostles as a disciple would who lived later. That is supposed to have moved the ancient fathers to reject this epistle from among the chief writings. All that is generally assiduously suppressed today. Instead, only the one passage from the Preface to the Letter of James is quoted and torn out of the entire context of the Prefaces, is then interpreted thus: Luther on the basis of his principle, “What declares Christ,” declared apostolic writings non-apostolic and writings of other authors as apostolic. At least he paid attention only to the evangelical content, but not to the author or to the witness of the Early Church concerning it. Unfortunately Sasse also adopts this strange procedure. But in that oft-quoted Preface Luther by no means says: James may have been an apostle, but his letter is not apostolic or canonical because he does not proclaim Christ. Rather, he *first of all* establishes the fact that this epistle “was rejected by the ancients.” And he also does not consider it “the writing of an apostle.” For that he again offers a *twofold* reason. The one concerns the content, the other directly concerns the authorship. With the first, the most decisive issue for him is that James in two passages *distinctly contradicts* the Apostle Paul. For the same reason Hebrews 12:17 was for him such a knotty problem, because this passage seemed to contradict the Gospels and the letters of Paul. “What proclaims Christ,” therefore, does not for him unconditionally mean that much is directly said about Christ’s work of salvation. A deuterocanonical writing, however, simply cannot be an apostolic writing if it contradicts the gospel found in those writings which are assuredly apostolic. As formal reasons against its apostolic authorship Luther then offers a list of passages which James evidently copied from the letters of Peter and Paul. That he could not have done if he had been the Apostle James executed by Herod.

Therefore it is impossible both on the basis of the passages cited in section a) as well as on the basis of the context of the Prefaces to understand this oft-quoted passage in the sense referred to above or even in such a way that Luther should have used his “principle” for distinguishing what is evangelical and what is unevangelical in the proto-canonical writings. The passage reads: “That is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ for all the Scriptures show us Christ.... Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Paul or St. Peter does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic even if Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod were doing it” (EA 63:157; LW 32:396; cited according to Sasse, 310).

The subjunctive makes it clear that Luther is speaking hypothetically, thus is developing a case, much as Paul did in Galatians 1:8. Nowhere however did he assert that an apostle actually could teach in an unevangelical way or that Annas could preach Christ, but always the opposite. That is why this very passage also does not appear in the Prefaces to the “completely assured chief books”; from which fact it becomes clear that he (Luther) examined the content in the case of the antilegomena, but only in their case, even though the Letter of James was accepted as an apostolic writing by the Roman Church of his day. He did not do so, however, on the basis of a gospel norm superseding the Scripture, but—as we saw—by using certain assured chief writings as norm “inasmuch as all Scripture proclaims Christ.” If it had been otherwise, then certainly

somewhere or other in Luther's writings we would at least once come across a critique exercised on the homologoumena or a statement to the effect that he had tested them. But since no such statement is to be found, only this passage, torn out of its context, is cited as proof of Luther's alleged critique of the Bible.

Sasse, it is true, believes he has found another passage that supports his interpretation: "*Where it concerns the question, 'what is to be considered as holy Writ and an article of faith,'* there we wish to, says Luther..., 'cleave to the rule St. Paul teaches us in Romans 12:7 [v. 6 in the KJV and NIV], All prophecy shall be "similar to faith." Those teachers who teach what conforms to the faith in Christ, them we will teach and hold to. Any teacher, however, who does not teach what conforms to the faith, him we will neither hear nor see'" (LW 34:396). That actually does give the appearance as though Luther employed the analogy of faith of which Romans 12:7 [6] speaks as the norm to judge the *entire canon*, to determine what should actually "be considered as Scripture and articles of faith." Only Sasse was guilty of a crass error in citing this passage. For the first sentence, of which he quotes only a portion, in its entirety reads in Luther as follows: "There are coarse, disgraceful papal asses who mouth lies and themselves do not realize what they say and how their lies always disgrace their own selves and despite that command us *to accept such statements as holy Writ and articles of faith.* We want to abide by this principle...." (*idem*). Here therefore there is no talk concerning books of the Bible, but concerning the lies of the pope, whether they are to be accepted as holy Writ and articles of faith. Only in that Sasse places this quotation into a false context does it seem to prove, as he (Sasse) then further expounds, that Luther used the analogy of faith at times as an aid to exegesis and at times as a norm, in fact, the only norm, for his Bible criticism. But that just isn't a fact!

### c) *The authenticity of the traditional authors*

As far as Luther was concerned, the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word and therefore the full canonicity of a writing were closely connected with the person called by God to speak and write the Word. Although Sasse himself accepts that fact in connection with the Letter to the Hebrews, he shortly thereafter can nevertheless state: "In the question concerning the *genuineness of the traditional names of the authors* Luther was, as is well known, very broadminded" (303). Faced with the expression, "as is well known," [I suppose] one ought really as a rather small light in the church maintain a respectful silence! In addition, Sasse however now quotes four more passages that are meant to support this thesis. Three are taken from Luther's Table Talk, which in itself already makes it a doubtful matter. The only one taken from Luther's own writings actually says nothing at all to contradict that Ecclesiastes actually contains Solomon's own sayings. It says only that Solomon did not record them himself, but that this was done by such persons who had heard them "from his mouth." Despite this, they are for Luther similarly not as unreliable as the Table Talk for us. For the following sentences, which Sasse does not quote, state:

As they (the scholars who recorded Solomon's statements) themselves admit at the end of the book where they say, "These words of the wise are like goads and nails, fixed by the masters of the congregation and given by one shepherd" [Ec 12:11]. That is to say, certain persons were at that time appointed to fix and arrange this and other books that were handed down by Solomon, the one shepherd. They did this so that not everyone would have to be making books as he pleased, as they also lament in that same place "of the making of books there is no end" [Ec 12:2]; they forbid the acceptance of others.... Of course the Jewish people had an external government that was instituted by God, which is why such a thing as this could be done surely and properly (LW 35:263).

A publication of books done "surely and properly" by such a body of scholars certainly also included that the authors agreed with their contents.

Of the three quotations from the Table Talk, the third evidences only that for Luther the Pentateuch was Moses' book, even if he did not write it with his own hand. Also the first passage from the Table Talk does not deny the authorship of the person whose name the book bears (we'll come back to this passage later). This only

the second passage does, which therewith is the only passage which could support Sasse's thesis—if, as is the case, it again were not based on a gross error. Sasse quotes from EA. This edition however was published before the Latin original of the transcriptions of Cordatus and Lauterbach were discovered (Cp Introduction to the Table Talk, St. L. 22). These could be used for comparison purposes for the first time with the St. Louis edition. In that connection the most curious distortions and additions became evident in the German translation of Aurifaber, which the EA had adopted. In the case before us, Luther according to Aurifaber should have stated that Ecclesiastes was not composed by Solomon, but written "by Sirach at the time of the Maccabees....In addition, it's like a Talmud, selected from many different books, possibly from the library of Pharaoh Ptolemy Euergetis in Egypt" (EA 62:128; cited according to Sasse, 303). The St. Louis edition adds in parentheses the Latin name the book referred to bore in the original, namely, Ecclesiasticus = Jesus Sirach, that Aurifaber evidently mistook for Ecclesiastes (= *Prediger Solomo*) and also changed many other things. Thus this Table Talk in St. L. 22:1411 now reads: "I believe that the book by Jesus Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) was written at the time of the Maccabees...etc." (English by translator). That, to be sure, is a totally different matter. WA does not print this Table Talk in Volume VI among those reported by Aurifaber because it is so distorted, but in its original form as given by Cordatus. There this passage reads exactly as it is translated in W<sup>2</sup>: *Ecclesiasticum puto tempore Machabaeorum esse scriptum...* (Ti II, p 653, No 2777).

There remains the Table Talk first cited. As stated previously, it indeed does not question the authorship of Solomon, but critiques from another quarter: "About Ecclesiastes he said...: the book ought to be more complete; too much has been omitted. It has neither boots nor spurs, but rides only on sticks, even as I did while I was a monk in the monastery" (St. L. 22:1411—English by translator). Sasse interprets this thus: "That is, the book lacks that understanding of the gospel which was already present in the Old Testament." I can only express my surprise about the definiteness with which Sasse presents his opinion as *the* interpretation, although it has nothing whereby it can be substantiated. Did not Luther rather have in mind the incomplete nature and somewhat paltry style of its external presentation and arrangement of material and compare that with his wretched outward condition in the monastery? That, too, of course is just a guess. But it at least has this going for it that it corresponds exactly to what Luther offers in his own introductions to Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Above all, however, it is more than questionable whether he here actually spoke about Ecclesiastes. In St. L. there is this footnote in connection with it: "Perhaps here too there is a confusion between Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus (Jesus Sirach) as in Cordatus No 130. See Appendix No II" (English by translator). There a Table Talk is printed according to the transcript of Cordatus where the same confusion *can be demonstrated* to have taken place as with Aurifaber, in that he attributes to Solomon a statement which actually belongs to Jesus Sirach. In conclusion then, after accurately checking, not a single bit of evidence remains that Luther was easy-going as far as the genuineness of the traditional names of the authors is concerned.

#### d) *The inerrancy of Scripture*

Sasse sees still another important difference between Luther and Orthodoxy, namely, in respect to the *inerrancy* of Scripture. To be sure—and that must be noted—he does not, as is usually the case with others, make Luther out to be the one who prepared the way for historical criticism. He emphasizes that Luther acknowledged the inerrancy of Scripture, also of its historical accounts: "He is convinced that only a 'disarray' is present in the sequence and that certainly an explanation can be found for that which seems to be a difference or a contradiction....He believes the Scripture also in those matters that do not have to do with faith....It is not difficult to demonstrate that he also in support of the correctness of the historical statements of the Bible appealed to the unqualified trustworthiness of the Holy Scripture as the true, inerrant Word of God" (313f).

In a different vein Sasse writes: "Naturally Luther also meant, and we agree with him in this, that the entire Bible is inspired. The new element [in Orthodoxy] consists in this that here it is determined: It *must* be so" (234). So also Pieper is supposed to have misinterpreted the Reformer when he renders his interpretation thus: "The Scripture is the only book in which no historical errors *can* occur" (314f). In the only quotation cited by Pieper, Luther however was not speaking—[so says Sasse]—"of that which Scripture can or cannot do, but he speaks of that which Scripture according to his conviction does" (315). Wilhelm Walther is supposed to have

understood him better when he says that Luther only expressed his opinion, did not however demand of others the same opinion. In support of that, to be sure, only a single passage is cited, and that from the German commentary on Zechariah. Sasse is of the opinion that he can on the basis of Stephan Roth's notes on Luther's Latin lectures on Zechariah go a step farther. For there the expression *levis error* is found. Thus one would have to assert the "historical fact that Martin Luther, the believing childlike reader and expositor of Holy Scripture, could combine the assertion of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture with the assumption that in some passages a solution of the scrupuli...is not possible any other way than by the assumption of a *levis error*" (317).

Do all these deductions really follow so unequivocally that one can speak of them as historical facts? First of all: Does a difference actually exist between Luther on the one hand and Orthodoxy and Pieper on the other because these latter said that the Scripture *cannot* err? Then Sasse would contradict himself. For he writes at another place: "Here Orthodoxy asserts: Since the Bible is God's Word, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is its author, it *can* contain neither errors nor contradictions....That also was the conviction of Luther as well as of the entire church of all centuries until the beginning of the modern era" (233). And *in that* Sasse is undoubtedly correct. There are sufficient quotations available to prove that. Already in a) we cited a passage which says: "The Scripture *cannot* err" (LW 36:137). "The church itself does not follow its own work and word, but the Word of God. It knows that it can err and blunder and that it must amend and change such blunder and error according to God's Word which alone cannot err" (LW 13:383). And for Luther that Word of God according to which the church judges itself is self-evidently the Word of Scripture. When therefore the command to baptize and the promise attached thereto are found in Scripture, then that can be neither an error nor a lie: "...I and my neighbor and in short all men may err and deceive, but the Word of God *cannot* deceive" (*nec potest errare nec fallere* Large Catechism IV:57).—Likewise Luther not only says that Scripture does not contradict itself, but that "it is *impossible* that Scripture should disagree with itself" (St. L. 9:356—English by translator). Thus also Moses and Paul *cannot* contradict one another: "Both *must* write the truth." And the reason: "for the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself" (St. L. 3:1911—English by translator). For Luther the inerrancy of Scripture stands *a priori* sure, and in fact on the basis of its inspiration, a fact Sasse also admits in the *Erlaeuterungen III*: "The fathers, the scholastics, the Reformers and the Orthodox Lutheran theologians agree in this that the *perfectio sacrae scripturae*, which includes the absence of errors, is a consequence of inspiration."—For Luther however *everything* in the canonical Scriptures was inspired, a fact for which Sasse also offers examples. That is also true of passages that according to form or content are offensive and of quotations from the Old Testament which do not seem to fit: "Thereupon follow the words of the Evangelist, which are offensive enough especially to the learned....If we cannot justify them according to the ability of our reason, then we must let the Holy Spirit be the Master, when he wants to test us on the basis of some single passage and make fools of us....Therefore also here: although this passage (as it seems) is not necessary, yet the Holy Spirit knows why he cited it" (St. L. 7:209—English by translator; cp 2:479; 3:560; 8:968). Even the contradiction which seemingly results in adding together the ages given in the case of Abraham, Luther traces back to God's "sure counsel." That is why he does not declare it as simply his own opinion that there is no error here but rejects the opposite opinion as a presumption: "It is senseless to imitate the foolhardy geniuses who immediately shout that an obvious error has been committed whenever such a difficulty arises and who unabashedly dare emend books that are not their own....Therefore with due and humble admission of my lack of knowledge (for it is the Holy Spirit alone who knows and understands all things) I offer the conjecture that in the case of Abraham God wanted these sixty years to be lost because of a definite plan, that no one might venture to foretell anything definite about the end of the world on the basis of an accurate calculation of the years of the world" (LW 2:239). On the same basis it is for *him* not only subjectively impossible but objectively impossible that Scripture should be at odds with itself. Scripture is that only "in the minds of irrational and hardened hypocrites" (St. L. 9:356—English by translator; cited in its context under a). Because the Scripture is God's Word and God's Word *cannot* err, Luther could not by any means concede to others the acceptance of errors and contradictions, even if he naturally did not express that every time, as he had in the above passages. That is why W. Walther's interpretation of Luther's exegesis of Zechariah 11:12f is questionable from the very start. If indeed this passage explicitly stated that a Christian is permitted to speak of an error, one would have to state that Luther here contradicts himself.

But there can be no talk of that. According to the context Luther wants to ward off the unprofitable and endless discussions concerning a question which we can scarcely solve but must leave to the Holy Spirit. After all, if the sense of the prophetic quotation is not changed despite the change of the *wording* by Matthew, how much less through the *name* of the prophet, even if one supposed that Matthew did not accurately hit upon the name of the prophet. Therewith is not said that Luther accepts such a supposition as correct and leaves it open—in contradiction to his usual statements. Only so much is stated that it isn't worth the effort to refute such an assumption in detail, inasmuch as one can here only believe and not prove that no error exists.—Or is it forbidden to interpret and understand Luther by means of Luther?

Even much less justified is Sasse's assertion that Luther himself admitted a *levis error* in Matthew. Prior to the sentences quoted by Sasse, Luther states: "I have *nothing else* to respond than this common answer that the prophet perhaps had two names or that in the custom of other evangelists, too, Matthew was quoting generally, without any concern for the name of the prophet. Augustine (qv.) discusses this passage *carefully*" (WA 20:125 cp the quotation from Augustine in Sasse 258f). Thereupon he states emphatically that he *cannot* accept a mixup in the names, since "learned men, filled with the Spirit" would also have called Matthew's attention to this. And now the decisive passage: "Admonished by their advice, he could have corrected the slight error, had he wished or had he thought it important." According to the context Luther did not at all claim that here actually an unintended mixup, a *levis error*, took place. Rather, he says emphatically that he does not accept a mixup. For if it had been a mixup, then Matthew, made aware of the error, would have been able to correct himself. But that he did not do. Therefore he wanted this name to remain, be it that the prophet had two names, or be it that he wanted to stress that it does not depend on a certain name, but on the unity of the prophets, as Luther previously carried out, referring to Augustine.

As a conclusion we must affirm that Sasse's proofs for a contradiction between Luther and Orthodoxy in the doctrine of Scripture can hold in none of the points examined. With this conclusion we do not want to attack Sasse personally nor diminish the great services he has rendered. But, on the other hand, one cannot in this important matter simply accept everything without question because of high personal esteem for him. That would be disastrous if—as is generally the case—also his false presentations would be copied without examination, because one after all is counting on the capacity of Scripture to err, but not with the possibility that Sasse could err. As a conclusion we must affirm that Sasse's proofs for a contradiction between Luther and Orthodoxy in the doctrine of Scripture can hold in none of the points examined. With this conclusion we do not want to attack Sasse personally nor diminish the great services he has rendered. But, on the other hand, one cannot in this important matter simply accept everything without question because of high personal esteem for him. That would be disastrous if—as is generally the case—also his false presentations would be copied without examination, because one after all is counting on the capacity of Scripture to err, but not with the possibility that Sasse could err.

### 1.5 Lutheran Orthodoxy

Joerg Baur begins his examination of the theology of Quenstedt as follows: "Evangelical theology still stands in a split relationship to the era of Orthodoxy. Certainly the historical understanding of every bygone personality is affected by the distance of final unapproachability. The thought processes of the old Protestant fathers also share in this general obscurity of the historical. But the theology of Orthodoxy is something hidden in a very special measure even beyond that. The alienation of Pietism from this first post-Reformation period and the aversion of the approaching Enlightenment against these strange...thought processes created over against the theology of the 17th century a basic feeling of negative prejudice. The validity of this judgment is evident down to the present." Fr. H. R. Frank has come up with a striking critique of this 'understanding': "The ignorance in this respect [supply: in matters relating to Orthodoxy] is presently almost as great as the aversion...One must therefore desist from the unpromising attempt to judge the theology of the fathers according to the degree in which they address themselves to our theological problems....That they speak of that about which evangelical theology must also concern itself today, namely, about the way salvation was understood by the Lutheran Reformation subject to the truth of the biblical Word, is on the one hand a problem

of...analysis, on the other hand however a matter of the certainty of faith which knows itself and the fathers to be members in the *ecclesia perpetuo mansura*" (*Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium*, Guetersloh 1962, 7.15).

Such an attempt at a sympathetic understanding of our Lutheran fathers, who after all for almost 200 years protected the Lutheran church against the attacks of rationalism which became ever stronger since the days of Socinus and Zwingli, sorry to say, is something I miss in Sasse. He on the one hand indeed lauds their personal piety, but on the other hand, using the severest kind of polemics, sketches such an offensive picture of their theology that one—if one believes him—must feel horrified in their presence and that of their followers, e.g., all "Missourians."

#### a) *The Scripture principle*

Sasse writes: "The great difference between him [Luther] and the theologians of late Orthodoxy consists in this that Luther in simple faith considered the Bible to be inerrant, whereas they set up a theory as to why Scripture is inerrant and why it had to be inerrant. Luther would never have understood the statement with which Quenstedt supports inerrancy: *Principium debet esse certum, indubitatum, infallibile...* What is new about this is that here it is established: It *must* be so. The Scripture principle demands it" (233f). Unfortunately Sasse does not explain what Orthodoxy meant by a *principium*. Since one today by principle usually understands a philosophical basis, and since Orthodoxy is spoken of—also by Sasse—as having fallen subject to Aristotelian philosophy, readers who have not investigated Orthodoxy more closely—and that's the majority—are compelled to understand Sasse's presentation thus—and I know that it is understood thus: Quenstedt and his associates first elevated the Scripture in a philosophical way to be the principle of theology. Then they concluded: Since a principle must be sure and inerrant, or otherwise not be one, therefore the Scripture must be inerrant truth.

In verifying the Quenstedt quotation as cited by Sasse a *levis error* became evident. The quotation is to be found on exactly the page cited, but in Calov (*Systema locorum theologicorum*, Wittenberg 1655). To understand this passage it is first of all important to note that it is not to be found in a basic passage expounding the doctrine of Scripture. Rather, it is found in a disputation about a doctrine of the Socinians. Calov previously cites the opinion of Socinus that there is no firm basis for the Christian (to believe) that Scripture must be for him the sole and divine source of authority. Thus the passage does not concern itself with the question whether Scripture witnesses to the fact that it is errorless truth, but rather whether one dare be or should be unconditionally certain about the truth of this or any other witness of Scripture concerning itself. That's why Calov at this point does not refer to inspiration, but to the fact that God himself has established the Scripture as the only source and only foundation or *principium* of faith. To support that he cites, among others, Isaiah 8:20 (To the law and to the testimony), Luke 16:29 (They have Moses and the Prophets), John 20:31 (But these are written that you may believe...), John 5:39 (Diligently study the Scriptures) and Romans 10:17 (Faith comes from hearing the message...). Quenstedt in connection with the same question points in addition to Deuteronomy 4:2 (Do not add to what I command you and do not...) and Joshua 23:6 (Be careful to obey all that is written...) (*Theologia didactico-polemica*, Wittenberg 1685, I, ch. 3, 2, p 33).

With Sasse one may—as he says—perhaps regret "the unavoidable development" that the later orthodox theologians adopted the then customary way of expressing thoughts and therewith also the concept of a *principium*. But one must concede that they did not leave unclear what they understood thereby, namely, according to the meaning of the Latin word (beginning, origin, basis), the source and foundation of that which we believe and teach. That is already shown by the Scripture passages cited. Moreover, besides, the concept *fundamentum* is used as a synonym, often in the same sentence or, as in the above quotation from Calov, in the following sentences. At the places where they discuss the matter in greater detail, it becomes totally clear what they mean by *principium*, namely, the source (*origo*) of faith and perception which can be nourished from no other source; the foundation on which the faith, teaching and life of the church are based, which itself however does not require any substantiation; the norm (*regula*, canon) by which all doctrine is judged, which itself however needs no testing nor can be tested. Hitting the nail on the head, C.H. Ratschow writes (although he

draws false conclusions from it in the footnote) “that the characterization of Scripture as a *principium* at any rate includes that Scripture cannot be expounded on the basis of any superior element above or beyond it” (*Luth. Dogmatik zw. Ref. u. Aufklärung I, Guetersloh 1964, 72*). Therewith actually—we add as an aside—the claim is refuted that Orthodoxy wanted to prove the divinity of Scripture with rationalistic arguments.

In the sense in which the great theologians of Orthodoxy understood the concept—God be thanked!—Scripture is indeed the glorious *principium* and will remain that until the last day, as Christ has prophesied. Oh, that *we* may only remain faithful to this one source, in which God himself comes to us and saves us. If we desert it, another *principium* takes its place which however really is none. *That* then becomes the untested presupposition and basis of all our thinking and dealing and claims for itself all that which is said about Scripture. And because that is the case, it was not really so unfounded to use the same term for both of them, for God’s holy Word and for all that which in the world and in philosophy serves as a hypothesis. Thereby it became truly evident that we Christians do not just have this or that point of view, but that we stand on an entirely different basis and argue our case on the basis of an utterly different source, which can neither be understood nor refuted by other hypotheses. Basically it was for similar reasons that the Apostle John expressly did *not* avoid the *Logos* concept.

Already from the fact that Calov’s argumentation *consists* of Scripture passages it follows that Orthodoxy did not in a philosophical manner *elevate* the Scripture itself to a *principium*, as e.g. Ratschow is of the opinion (*ibid.*, p 73). Quenstedt says emphatically that is proved “from Scripture, which directs us to no other source or basis (*principium*) than to Scripture itself as to the only guide (*regula*) of faith, life and worship” (*ibid.*, p 33). And the Scripture passages which Calov adduces are above all such, as we saw, in which Christ himself refers to Scripture. And now follows the passage cited by Sasse: *Principium autem debet esse certum...* On the basis of the context and the Scripture passages adduced that can only mean: If Christ himself and his apostles and prophets direct us to Scripture as the source of faith and the foundation of that which we may believe and should preach, then Scripture *must* be divinely certain and true, otherwise it could not be a foundation and Christ would not have directed us to it. Besides, no other foundation besides this one—as Calov properly continues—is given us by God for our faith. If one could therefore only, as Socinus claims, believe as *probable* what Scripture says and promises (cf. point 6 in Calov), then faith would not be that which it is according to Scripture (Hebrews 11:1). *Thus* it continues following the sentence quoted by Sasse. (What he, on the other hand, cites in German as a continuation, beginning at the bottom of p 233, I am unable to find either on the page indicated or in the wider context.)

After closer examination of the concept *principium* and the context, the least we can say for Sasse’s interpretation of Calov’s statement is that it can be very easily misunderstood: “The Scripture principle...demands absolute inerrancy.” Beyond that the impression that Calov postulated the inerrancy of Scripture in the manner of a philosophical principle is further strengthened by the fact that another passage from Calov is added in mistranslation, which reads: “No error, not even in trivial matters, no lapse of memory...*dare* take place in the entire holy Scripture.” This passage in Calov appears 28 pages before the page cited, in fact, in his disputation with Calixt, the Socinians and some Calvinists who assumed the presence of errors in holy Writ, above all in historical matters. (It is therefore not true that the acceptance of errors is Lutheran and that the confession of inerrancy is Calvinistic.) Over against them Calov, however, postulates nothing but simply confesses! For the quotation, to begin with, reads thus in Latin, as Sasse included it in parentheses in his translation: *Nullus error vel in leviculis, nullus memoriae lapsus*. But then it continues: *ullum locum habere potest in universa Scriptura Sacra*. If it read: “No error *dare* appear,” that would indeed be an assumption. But it reads, “*can* appear,” and that expresses the same certainty of faith Luther had and based on inspiration. And exactly this proof follows immediately in Calov: Why is Scripture inerrant? “I. *quia S. literarum autores non scripserunt humana voluntate, sed ὑπὸ πνεύματος...* 2 Peter 1:21...II. *Quicquid divinitus inspiratum est, id non potest falsum, vel erroneum esse, nisi quis velit impie Deo errorem adscribere. At non quaedam tantum Scripturae particula, sed πᾶσα γραφή divinitus inspirata. Nihil ergo in Scriptura potest falsi, vel erronei esse...* (Jn 16:13; Ro 10:18; Ga 1:12; 1 Th 1:3—Nu 23:19; He 6:18).”

The chief basis for inerrancy is for Calov as for Luther inspiration. Both take their reason captive and confess with a new understanding derived from faith that the inspired Word of God cannot err. And if at the same time this Word of God comforts us with the fact that it is a solid foundation for the church, then it truly is that. It cannot then be compared with a foundation of sand on which one cannot build because all over, perhaps with the exception of its very center, an error may be lurking. Certainly Quenstedt, for example, also at times compares the foundation of the church with the principles on which philosophy and science build. And if these do not agree, the entire scientific structure collapses. But Luther also drew the same parallel: “In philosophy, a tiny error in the beginning is very great at the end. Thus in theology a tiny error overthrows the whole teaching” (LW. 27:37). Therewith Luther just as little as Orthodoxy wanted to place Christian doctrine on the same level with philosophy.

Even less did Orthodoxy with this comparison want to offer a proof from reason for the authority of Scripture. Orthodoxy after all substantiated the truth of the entire Scripture with *Scripture* passages. That already presupposed a certainty of faith. And this had its basis, as they themselves state, in the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*, by which the central content of Scripture made itself believable to their hearts. Quenstedt writes: The Word of the Holy Spirit is “*the gospel of Christ, which is the peculiar work and voice of the Holy Spirit and according to that is also called the office of the Spirit (Evangelium de Christo, quod est peculiare ἔργον et ὄργανον Spiritus S., unde et ministerium Spiritus vocatur 2 Cor 3:6)*. And it is specifically this gospel which thus receives attestation as to its truth through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which he gives us internally in our hearts. That testimony however comes from the Holy Spirit in this way that he through Scripture and from Scripture and in the Scripture expresses his divine thoughts!...(*Hoc ipsum itaque evangelium de veritate sua attestationem accipit ex Spiritus S. testimonio, quod is intus in cordibus nostris perhibet. Est autem illud testimonium... ‘a Spiritu S. per Scripturam et ex Scriptura et in Scriptura sensus suos divinos imprimente promanans...’*)” (*idem.*, I, chapter 4, section 2, question 9, page 100; cp J. W. Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, ed. Walther, St. Louis 1879, Proleg. page 135). That person in whom the Holy Spirit through the gospel in the Scripture has won heart and trust for Christ, not only believes the gospel but the entire Scripture, because it is attested by Christ without any reservations. That is why Quenstedt in another passage can say about the reliability of Scripture: ... *ultima ratio, sub qua et propter quam fide divina et infallibile credimus, verbum dei esse verbum dei, est ipsa intrinseca vis et efficacia verbi divini et spiritus s. in scriptura et per scripturam loquentis testificatio et obsignatio*” (I, c. 4, s. 2, q. 7; cited according to W. Rohnert, *Die Inspiration der Hl. Schrift*, Leipzig 1889. In English: “...the main reason whereby and why we believe with divine and inerrant trust that the Word of God is the Word of God is exactly the inner power and effectiveness of the divine Word, and the witness and seal of the Holy Spirit who speaks in and through the Scripture”). And again at another place we read: *Hancque veritatem et auctoritatem suam Scriptura...per se ipsam demonstrat, sibi que ipsi fidem facit* (“And this its truth and authority the Scripture proves through itself and procures faith in itself” [I, c. 3, s. 2, p. 34]). Therefore not only by the way, but with emphasis and repeatedly does Quenstedt come to speak about the certainty of faith through the witness of the Holy Spirit. Likewise other theologians of Orthodoxy have also stressed this in the same manner. One need only consider the wonderful confession to the self-attestation (*autopistie*) of Scripture in Johann Gerhard, from which “for the sake of brevity” I will quote only two passages: ...*quia est θεόπνευστος divina inspiratione edita et promulgata, ideo est αυτόπιστος, τὸ πίστιν ἀφ’ ἑαυτῆς ἔξουσα...Qui sunt in ecclesia, illi sponte agnoscunt divinam scripturam auctoritatem, easdemque αυτόπιστον et ἀξιόπιστιον esse statuunt*” (*Loci Theologici*, Leipzig 1885, loc. 1, chapter 3, paragraph 33ff.; reprinted by Ratschow, *ibid.*, p 109f.; in German loosely translated by Rohnert, *ibid.*, p 191). Since Sasse however particularly attacks Quenstedt, I have especially let him speak. And particularly he stresses the fact that the certainty of faith issues from the gospel. I simply cannot understand how Sasse can completely ignore or overlook these expositions among others of Quenstedt concerning the *testimonium spiritus sancti*. They refute his assertion with which he places Quenstedt and Calov on the same level with the scribes and the Pharisees: They demanded—as did the man of the 17th century Baroque on the whole—of Christ first of all “a written authorization. Is this one really the Christ? Does he have the authority to forgive

sins?...Perhaps he is not the Christ at all. Already the sceptics are on the go. Calov and Quenstedt must already deal with rationalists. That is why the Lord must first demonstrate his authority. And woe to us if something therein does not agree with reality! First if we have convinced ourselves that all is in order, that all accounts agree and that there is no error, no contradiction in the basic document, only then does one bend the knee before him” (234). Perhaps one cannot insult a Christian any worse than that. For whoever first demands proof does not believe. But this insult, considering the evidence, simply collapses (cp also the refutation by H. Echternach, *Die Lehre von der Autopistie der Hl. Schrift*, in ELKZ 1952, Vol 6, No 6–8).

#### b) Monophysitism?

Still another reproach is raised by Sasse against Orthodoxy: It is supposed to have espoused a “Monophysitic docetic understanding of Scripture that destroyed the human character of the Bible.” And further: “This destruction began the moment the human writers of a biblical book were made out to be automatic tools of the Holy Spirit who was dictating the Scripture. Thus Abraham Calov drew the conclusion from the ‘not...by the will of man’ (KJV) in 2 Peter 1:21 that the biblical writers took nothing from their own memory, nothing from the accounts of others, but received everything by dictation of the Holy Spirit (Syst. 10c theol. I, 1655, p 551, 554, 556), and Quenstedt, Hollaz, as well as the Reformed theology of the late 17th century share this theory.” This teaching is “more than a simple theological error, more than an exaggeration.” “It actually means that that understanding of inspiration and that cult of an inspired book has again made its way into the church that had already in antiquity surfaced within the church in the form of Jewish and pagan concepts of inspiration, religious concepts that clearly belong to the religion of natural man” (230ff.).

This polemic leaves nothing to be desired in biting and caustic severity! But how about its proof? It doesn’t hold water! One need only consult the passages in Calov’s work and read them in context. Then everyone can convince himself that Calov did not at all assert that the biblical writers took nothing from their own memory or the accounts of others. Even on page 554, referred to by Sasse, Calov rather holds to the opinion that Luke had learned something from the Virgin Mary and some of the apostles, yet nevertheless wrote just this by the “dictation” (we will come to the meaning of this word later) and impulse of the Holy Spirit. Yes, in a completely general way this is valid as far as he is concerned: *Quamquam enim aliqua eorum* (namely, of that which is written) *aliunde cognita Scriptoribus S. fuerint, nihilominus tamen et illa in actu isto scribendi a Spiritu S. tum suggesta et inspirata fuisse, credendum est...* (*ibid.*). For Calov the one does not exclude the other: The biblical authors recorded much that was known to them from elsewhere, but at the same time the Holy Spirit inspired them as they did so, so that they wrote it in such a way as God desired it. (The question why there is no discussion here about oral preaching is one that we shall exclude for the moment.) One may naturally probe the question whether in that way the relationship of the Spirit of God to the spirit of man as it pertains to inspiration is correctly presented, that is, in its scriptural sense. But one may simply not contrary to the context present it as the opinion of Calov that human mental activity was excluded on the part of biblical authors. And when Calov then on page 556 states that the holy writers did not draw from other accounts or from their memory, then one dare not tear this passage out of the wider context sketched above nor keep silent about the fact that it stands under the rubric *a causa principali*. Calov therefore does not at all want to contest that the memory of the “*ministeriales autores*,” as he calls them on page 453, were taken into service by God. Rather, he contests only—exactly as Luther—that men with their memories, thinking and willing were strictly speaking the actual authors and, in the final analysis, the responsible writers of that which is written. With other words he says exactly the same that Luther stated using a different expression and another picture: The Bible is the book of the Holy Spirit which did not grow on earth. If, for example, the apostles had brought forth from their memory everything possible they had experienced and which seemed important *to them*, then the Gospels would certainly have a different form. We would then perhaps have what *they* wanted to tell us, but not without qualification that which *God* wanted to tell us and the world till the last day. There could then be no talk of inspiration as Scripture presents it. That is why Calov on page 556 adds that in them *not only* the memory of that was awakened which they had heard and seen (*non excitatur in illis tantum memoria eorum*).

Already therewith it becomes clear that with the expressions *dictare, manus, calamus, amanuenses*, etc., no mechanical doctrine of inspiration is to be taught, by which prophets and apostles become tools without a will of their own. Explicitly this misunderstanding is even warded off. Since I do not have the time to look for the corresponding passages in Calov and in others, I am confining myself to Quenstedt, who is also accused by Sasse in no less a degree. Rohnert, summarizing his interpretation (*ibid.*, chap 4, sect 1, thesis 7) and keeping very close to the original wording, has rendered it thus: “The statement ‘never has a prophecy been produced by the human will’ does *not* mean that the holy writers wrote mechanically, without and contrary to their will (*ac si citra et contra voluntatem suam inscii ac inviti scripserunt*); rather this statement is to be understood thus that they did not write guided by their human discretion (*humano suo arbitrio*), nor by their ‘natural’ will...nor by their ‘born again’ will...in writing, but they spoke *from the will which the Holy Spirit set in motion* through an extraordinary impulse....But when it says of the holy writers: they were moved by the Spirit,...it should not be said therewith, that they in writing did not make use of their senses, as is said of the enthusiasts and pagan seers, or as if the prophets themselves did not even understand the prophecies which they recorded” (*ibid.*, p 197). Quenstedt also does not contest that the Apostles were moved to write their letters by external stimuli, but only that these were accidental: *scripserunt quandoque apostoli ex occasione, sed non fortuita, sed a Deo subministrata* (cited according to Baier, *ibid.*, p 99). J. Baur (*ibid.*, p 119) briefly describes Quenstedt’s concept of inspiration thus: “The Holy Spirit in the formation of Holy Scripture does not exclude the reason and will of the writers. The following is to be said about the inspired sentences of Scripture: *intellectui eorum quasi in calamum dictitata sunt* (I, chapter IV, section II Q IIIth).” In this brief passage Quenstedt in three ways excludes a mechanical dictation theory: 1. thereby that he employs *dictitare* which simply means “say,” 2. that he places a *quasi* before *in calamum dictitate* whereby he expresses the thought that this is only a picture of a mysterious working of the Spirit, and 3. that through this working of the Holy Spirit he does not see the writing hand of the author being moved mechanically, but rather sees the spiritual powers (*intellectus*) of the author moved.

Since Scripture as the Word of God through the word of men is a mystery, one can speak about it only in sentences that seem contradictory. Philippi uses as comparison the inexplicable relationship of God’s will over toward man’s will in conversion. Our Confessions say on the one hand that faith is *velle et accipere*. And yet the will of man is not the basic reason that a man comes to faith. On the contrary, that is the will of God which moves the will of man. When it therefore comes to stating what this truth signifies in respect to men, the Confessions can state only that he is *pure passive*. But one dare not take this statement by itself and conclude from it that the Confessions make these persons into a “stone or block” without a will. *So also here*. The relatively weak emphasis on human activity has its basis simply therein that the attacks against which Orthodoxy had to defend itself were not directed against the activity of the human authors, but against the decisive activity of the Holy Spirit. This had to be emphasized in exactly the same way as in the fight against synergism.

### c) Notes on further criticisms

The objection (raised by Sasse with certain limitations, p 144–152) that Orthodoxy through the doctrine of the natural knowledge of God paved the way for rationalism (the religion of reason) demands a thorough examination. According to my knowledge of Orthodoxy one cannot hold that, though I cannot go into this more deeply at this point. Also J. Baur comes to this conclusion in his discussion of Quenstedt: “The chapter *de notitia naturali Dei* is full of severe inner tensions....Nevertheless the theocentric understanding is so very decisive and the statements concerning the obscuring of reason through sin so convincing, that this doctrinal article cannot be understood as the precursor of a natural religion of reason” (*ibid.*, p 181). In this connection it is my duty to defend Pieper, to whom I am greatly indebted. Sasse attacks him severely because he states that there is no proof of the existence of God only for that person who forgoes the use of his reason. Sasse’s insulting commentary on that follows: “*Tandem vicisti, Thomas, one would like to cry out*” (146). The questionable statement appears in the following context: Previously Pieper writes that atheism does not depend on “enlightenment” or “science,” but on the repression of the natural knowledge of God τῶν τῆν ἀλήθειαν ἐν

ἀδικία κατεχόντων (Romans 1:18). “Only he who suppresses his reason (νοῦς) can assert that there are no proofs for the existence of God. Scripture says that God’s invisible nature and His eternal power and deity are clearly perceived from the things that have been made, τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα (Ro 1:20)” (*Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1950, I, 373). The context therefore demonstrates that Pieper did not mean human proofs of God’s existence, but God’s own witness to his existence in the things he created. Through them man according to Romans 1:20 can in fact “apprehend” God’s existence, power and deity, as TDNT 4, 950 translates νοεῖν in this passage. Therefore as far as the Bible is concerned, it is foolishness to deny the existence of God, whether directly or indirectly through deifying the creature (Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:22). I see nothing unbiblical in Pieper’s statement. This has nothing to do with Thomas. For Pieper does not present this knowledge of God as the basic foundation upon which the true knowledge of God builds as a knowledge only some degrees higher. Furthermore, in distinction to Thomas, he (Pieper) knew something about the law-gospel contrast. That is why there exists for him, as he immediately thereafter sets forth (p 374), between a knowledge of an uncanny and demanding God and the knowledge of the gracious Father through the gospel not only a difference as broad as the heavens, but a total contrast. The natural knowledge of God does “not extend beyond a bad conscience.” According to that it is for him not even a starting point for the preaching of the gospel, but only for the preaching of the law. Furthermore, he also knows that man after the fall can do nothing else than to suppress this for him terrifying knowledge and look upon idol- and law-religion as that which is reasonable (1.c., p 19f.).

As Pieper so also Orthodoxy did not have it in mind to bring people to *faith* by means of proofs of God’s existence nor did it want to demonstrate and prove the authority of Scripture by means of rational proofs (a matter often presented as parallel), neither in dealing with the Christian nor with the unbeliever. We have seen that already its witness concerning *autopistie* testifies against that. A more comprehensive review of its doctrine on this point (with documentation) is given by H. Schmid: “...for the church and its members no such proof is needed, since the entire existence of the church rests on this belief and this belief precedes all proofs...Even to the former (those outside the church) no proof can be given from which they could not distance themselves, for the only totally binding proof lies in this that the Holy Spirit bears witness to himself in the heart of the individual and so the individual through the power and might which the Word of God exerts on him is convinced of its divine nature. If however this is to come to pass, the individual also dare not withdraw himself from the tugging of the Holy Spirit and, should the opposite happen, even the witness of the Holy Spirit will have no power of conviction for him. All other so-called proofs are then only rather testimonies for the divine nature of the Holy Scripture that can make it plausible for the individual and can invite him to give himself over to the working of the Holy Spirit in order personally to experience the same which the church has experienced” (*Die Dogmatik der Ev.-Luth. Kirche*, Guetersloh 1893, 27f.). In the footnote adduced a quotation from Quenstedt for the last statement reads: *Motiva illa...non gignunt fidem divinam sed humanam, non certitudinem immotam sed credibilitatem saltem vel opinionem admodum probabilem*. Not in the least did he want to adduce rational proofs for inspiration by means of Scripture passages. That a person for whom the Scripture was not already authoritative would not allow anything to be proved to him on the basis of Scripture was not something new for him. The witness of Scripture to itself would only help overcome controversies within the church, where basically the living authority of Scripture is acknowledged, e.g., that everything in Scripture is an authoritative Word of God: *...si quis infidelis prae fracte (inflexibly) negat, Scripturam esse verbum Dei: certum est, huius controversiae Scripturam non posse esse idoneum iudicem aut normam....Si cum illo, qui est in ecclesia, de auctoritate Scripturae disceptatur, is ex ipsa Scriptura convinci debet, haecque controversia ex Scriptura dijudicari potest...* (p. I, c. 4, s. 2, q. 15; cf. Baier, *ibid.*, p 184). These facts simply cannot be ignored if one criticizes Orthodoxy. (Only in the case of a few have derailments taken place.)

One would have to write a book if one would want to take up all the matters in detail that Sasse criticizes about Orthodoxy just in passing. But I still want to zero in on two items briefly. Sasse states: “The chief difference between Luther’s doctrine of inspiration and that of the later Orthodox theologians lies in this that for them the actual miracle of inspiration occurs in the act of writing, whereas for Luther the writing is only the putting in fixed form of the inspired Word which was already present. Naturally also the later theologians

know that the writers are the inspired men. And Luther knows that Moses wrote the Pentateuch at the impulse of and as the tool of the Holy Spirit and that through this recording of them many texts first became God's Word. But the emphasis in the case of Orthodoxy lies on the (written) Scripture...and in the case of Luther on the Word, that is, on the Word that truly became Scripture and that we would not have without Scripture, but that already existed before Scripture" (297f.).—But here we again certainly dare not overlook that Luther had to do battle on fronts different from those faced by Orthodoxy. In their time the struggle was after all not about whether the apostles and prophets were filled with the Holy Spirit! This question was naturally affirmed by Rome in order to support the reliability of alleged oral traditions containing apostolic words. And by the Socinians (among others) that also was not denied. Attacked however were the *sola scriptura* and the *tota scriptura*. Therefore in the case of Orthodoxy the emphasis had to be put on this that the *written Scripture* is God's Word. Therewith however Orthodoxy did not deny that also the oral word of the prophets and apostles was God's inspired Word. On the contrary! Johann Gerhard writes: *Inter verbum Dei et Scripturam sacram materialiter acceptam non esse reale aliquod discrimen...Idem ac nihil aliud prophetae et apostoli scripserunt, quod divina inspiratione edocti prius viva voce praedicaverunt*. This is followed by an entire list of Scripture passages, of which 1 John 1:4f. is given particular prominence: *Quod vidimus et audivimus, annunciamus vobis v. 4. Et haec scribimus vobis (ibid., p 14)*. On this theme J. Gerhard writes an entire page and stresses that it does not affect the essence of the Word of God in any way, *sive praedicationis sive scriptionis modo nobis innotescat (ibid.)*. In the next chapter he takes up the question: *Quare Deus verbum suum prius viva voce propagatum in Scripturas redigi voluerit? Ostendit chronologia, per 2454 annos coelestem doctrinam per vivae vocis traditionem sine Scripturam adminiculo fuisse conservatam...* To that he then gives an answer substantiated by numerous arguments. The later dogmaticians (Calov's work appeared some 30 years after the *Loci*) did not need to repeat this in such detail since this was not the focus of attack on the part of the opponents and since Gerhard's *Loci* enjoyed great respect. But they did not teach anything that was different (cp Baier, *Proleg.* ch. II, par 5a, *ibid.*, p 105f.: *quam ob rem Deus doctrinam coelestem, aliquamdiu per vivae vocis traditionem sine Scripturarum adminiculo conservaram, literis mandari voluerit* 1c. Par 3, p 93, quotation from Quenstedt). At two other places in the old dogmatics the very thing is stated which Sasse misses so greatly, namely, that Christ speaks and operates till the end of days through the Gospel proclaimed orally by those who preach it. This is spoken of in connection with the *munus propheticum* of Christ and the *media salutis*. J. Gerhard first of all speaks of the immediate prophetic office of Christ. Then he continues: *Mediate est institutio et conservatio ministerii in apostolis et apostolorum successoribus usque ad diem novissimum. Christus enim non solum in propria persona praedicavit, sed etiam quum...in gloriam suam intrare vellet, docendi ministerium prius apostolis commendavit...et adhuc bodie exaltatus ad Dei dextram dat ecclesiae suae doctores et pastores...Ad hoc igitur officium Christi pertinet...in evangelio promulgatio, ministerii ecclesiastici institutio et conservatio...* (*Loci* IV, ch. 15, 332, *ibid.*, p 602f.; cp the quotation from Quenstedt in Schmid, *ibid.*, p 249f.).

One cannot expect that the Orthodox dogmaticians would again repeat all of this in connection with the doctrine of Scripture. At that time this above all had to be stressed as to why Scripture merits a normative authority as part of the correct tradition of the divine Word.—One could indeed still understand if Sasse criticized only that the testimonies of Scripture concerning the inspiration of the prophets were applied too precipitously to the Old Testament, in fact, to the entire Old Testament. But his criticism does not direct itself against that. For he correctly states: "What is stated by these words (2 Peter 1:21)? It is stated that the cause of the origin of Scripture is not to be sought in man's will but in the activity of the Holy Spirit, but that the speakers were men. No weight is to be placed on the fact that the passage from 2 Peter speaks of *prophecy* whereas 2 Timothy 3 speaks of the Scripture. For the ancient linguistic usage which the evangelists are still conversant with and which understands by *prophets* all biblical writers from Moses down to the authors of the later writings demonstrates how the word can be used in a very general sense. In this sense the word is also used in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum when in the article concerning the Holy Spirit inspiration is elevated to the doctrine of the whole universal catholic church in the words: *Qui locutus est per prophetas* (226). Then one can certainly not reproach Orthodoxy for stressing the following over against the Roman doctrine of oral

tradition: The Word of God orally communicated by the prophets and apostles could have been corrupted by transmission from mouth to mouth through many middle men, but in the Scripture we have it in its pure form because the written message of the prophets and apostles was inspired in exactly the same way as the oral message, namely, immediately.

Sasse however also attacks the term *immediate*, e.g., in referring to Hollaz: “The evidence adduced by Hollaz for the inerrancy of Scripture is as follows: 1. Everything that came from God immediately (directly) must be totally true, for he is the ultimate truth (*quidquid a Deo, prima veritate, immediate perfectum est, illud oportet esse verissimum*).... Whether the major premise is correct and at all applicable to the Holy Scripture is not asked, even though the word *immediate* here ought to disconcert one since it clearly does not apply to the Word of God written by men, if one does not consider man as a mechanical tool (Hollaz, *Exam. Theol. Acr.* etc. *Prolegomena* III, q. 18; edition of 1712, p 94)” (236f.). But Hollaz self-evidently did not with that statement want to exclude the activity of the human authors. In fact, he says so directly in a previous passage: *In definitione s. scripturae verbum Dei formaliter notat sententiam Dei...de salute hominum immediate prophetis et apostolis, atque mediante eorum ministerio, universo generi humano manifestatum* (cited according to Schmid, *ibid.*, p 19).—But Hollaz also does not mean that in being inspired only *unknown material* was revealed immediately to the authors, as one could conclude from Sasse’s very free translation of *perfectum* as *ausgegangen* (proceeded from). For Hollaz expressly emphasizes at another place that *much was previously known* to them, but that despite that they were inspired as to *what of these matters* (and of the accompanying circumstances) they should record and *with which words* (cp the quotation from Hollaz in Schmid, *ibid.*, p 23: *Res, quae scriptoribus s. fuerunt notae...*).

When Hollaz immediately before the sentence quoted by Sasse speaks of *immediata suggestio* in the case of the prophets and apostles or at another place speaks of *immediata inspiratio* then he does so because for him—exactly as for Luther—they were special tools of God “who preached by *pure* inspiration of the Holy Spirit and did *not derive it from Scripture or through men*” (cp the quotation from Luther on page 15 of this essay, also the parallel passages referred to where Luther says: “A prophet is one who has received his understanding from God *without any means*, the Holy Spirit putting the word in his mouth”). Thus the Holy Spirit also reminded the apostles in an immediate way, and not through the Old Testament or through people, about what they had experienced and gave them the proper words to report about it. That is Hollaz’s opinion. One dare not place a different meaning into the word *immediate* than the context permits.

In spite of all this, the dogmaticians of Lutheran Orthodoxy should in no wise be defended in every respect. Surely, e.g., it was not good that every doctrinal topic was pressed into the pattern: *causa efficiens*, etc., to *finis*. Surely it was an error that some of them considered the Hebrew vowel signs as inspired or, in the case of the Gospels, adopted a chronological order not at all affirmed by them and then harmonized accordingly. But on the other hand, one cannot simply assert as fact that these were not extreme refinements but symptoms of a doctrine of Scripture basically different from that of Luther. First this assertion would have to be proved. The “evidences” adduced during the last 100 years (cp e.g. Dieckhoff, *Die Inspiration u. Irrtumslosigkeit d. Schrift*, Leipzig 1891) do not become more convincing by repetition. They do not stand up under re-examination. A one-sided dogmatic-historical view, contradictory and provably false in essential points, dare in no way mislead us to accept, more or less consciously, prejudiced judgments in exegetical and dogmatical questions.

## 2

### Sasse’s Basis for His Doctrine of the Relative Inerrancy of Scripture

#### 2.1 Otherwise A “Logical-Rational” Understanding

An ever recurring argument supporting the opinion that the Bible is inerrant only in “theological statements” but is not absolutely inerrant (232) states that the opposite teaching betrays a “logical-rational” understanding (259). “Where is it written that the Bible is true then, only when such differences (as e.g. the different accounts given for the hour of crucifixion) do not take place? That is something written by the pagan Porphyrius, not in God’s Word. It is the truth-concept of Aristotle, not of Holy Scripture” (258).—In response

to that we first state: It is not at all a matter of asking whether “the Bible is true then, only when...” That it is true in its central message of salvation the Christian has personally experienced through the *testimonium spiritus sancti*. That does not first become true for him (even if his name is Quenstedt) when the reliability of all other statements of Scripture stands firm for him. The question is rather whether he on the basis of the Bible’s claim to truth, whose reliability he has experienced in its central doctrine, must exclude the peripheral statements and assertions, or if he like Paul (Acts 24:14) may believe everything that is written (in which he also includes the historical accounts, as his treatment of the Old Testament demonstrates). The latter is not then already excluded if one does not share the psychological or mechanical concept of inspiration, as Sasse thinks (259). Even if one imputes such an opinion to Orthodoxy, one would still have to admit that Luther had no mechanical conception of inspiration and despite that accepted everything that was written with a childlike faith. And many Christians today also hold with Luther in this. One dare not defame such a trust *contrary to logic* as being logical-rational. At the very least, one could with the same justification say: whoever on the basis of the major premise, that the Bible was written by men, and the minor premise, that to err is human, draws the conclusion that one must certainly count on errors in the Bible—at least in matters of secondary importance—he also approaches Scripture in a logical-rational way (cp 232). But such reproaches do not solve the matter. Decisive rather is whether the Bible itself justifies or forbids such thought sequences, whether therefore the one who believes Scripture in all matters grants the Scripture *too much* trust, also in those matters where the Scripture does not claim any reliability. One cannot without further ado declare as false either the statement: “God’s Word, the Bible, cannot err,” or the other: “The Bible written by *men* can err,” or the synthesis of both: “The Bible is errorless in divine matters as God’s Word and erring in human matters as the word of man,” only because all of these statements have something to do with logical thinking. Sasse, who not without employing logic, prefers the stated synthesis, condemns the first statement offhand with the argument that it rests on Aristotelian logic.

Obviously it is his opinion that Aristotelian and biblical concepts of truth have nothing at all in common. Now certainly every Christian will agree with him that one cannot simply equate the Bible understanding of truth with that of Aristotle or any other philosopher. Sasse however concludes from that that the two of them cannot agree in any point whatsoever. For in *Erlaeuterungen* (p 1) he also questions the basic axiom of Aristotle, “that one and the same thing at the same time cannot both exist and be non-existent.” That however is not really specifically Aristotelian, but a basic human insight without which human thinking and mutual understanding and trust would not be possible at all. For otherwise every statement—also every Word of God—could at the same time mean the very opposite. How shall one understand and trust, if the statement: God so loved the world that he...does not exclude the opposite, but can at the same time mean: God did not love the world, so that he did not...? That is why it self-evidently also for the Bible belongs to the truth of a statement that it excludes the opposite, but not because that is Aristotelian but simply because that is a presupposition for understanding and trusting. On the basis of this presupposition Paul can therefore build his argumentation in I Corinthians 15: If a resurrection is impossible, then it cannot at the same time be possible, then also Christ could not have risen. So also for Christ the statement that God is a God of the living excludes the opposite. He however goes a step still farther and deduces from the two statements a third statement: God is a God of the living—God calls himself the God of Abraham—therefore Abraham will rise to life again. Not even such conclusions may therefore flatly be prohibited.

Our poor reason, it is true, often draws false conclusions, especially when divine secrets are involved. Whether these false conclusions only seem logical to us or actually are logical is a question we can let lie. In any case, they are not correct if Scripture contradicts them. In this matter, by the way, there is also absolutely no difference between Luther and Orthodoxy, whose principle particularly over against postulates of reason was: *quod ergo in verbo Dei non est revelatum, non est theologicum* (J. Gerhard, *Loci, De creatione* Par. 3). In the doctrine of the Trinity, Gerhard answers the logical argument that where there are three persons there are also three essences in the following manner, among others: *Fides Christiana simplicissime respondet: Deus a nobis sic agnoscendus, colendus et invocandus est, ut se in verbo patefecit, et contra hanc patefactionem in verbo factam non sunt audiendae rationis humanae argutiae* (*ibid.*, Loc III, Chap. 13, 3, p 445). Quenstedt expressly

draws a line of demarcation between himself and the scholastics whose theological method he characterizes thus: *In summis enim fidei mysteriis Scholastici ex principiis logicis...praetermissis* [passed over] *vel levi manu tactis Scripturae dictis, conclusiones suas accersunt* [deriving] (*ibid.*, P.I., chap. 3, sect. 2; quoted according to Baier, *ibid.*, I, p 82). Hollaz also rejects the assertion of the Socinians that reason on the basis of the universally valid proposition concerning contradiction is a judge over Scripture (*Exam. theol., Proleg. III, q. 4*; see Baier, *ibid.*, p 182f.). In spite of that they did not declare inapplicable the rules governing human thinking and understanding where Scripture itself did not urge them to do so. So also Luther did not, because of the witness of Scripture concerning the Trinity, declare one-times-one-equals-one as totally invalid and, for example, insist that Father, Son and Holy Spirit could also be four persons, or only one. But: “When I hear the Word sound out as from above, then I believe it, even if I cannot grasp it nor understand it and it does not want to penetrate my thick skull—as I can with my reason grasp that two plus five are seven and permit no one to tell me otherwise. But if He from above would say: No, but they are eight, then I would have to believe it contrary to my reason and feeling” (WA 35, 40, 5ff.—English by translator). Luther undoubtedly on the basis of Scripture corrected many a conclusion which seemed logical to reason; but I don’t know of a single passage in which he on the basis of a word of God declared invalid the proposition concerning contradiction, without which it would be impossible to trust God’s Word. Rather, he always took pains to solve contradictions. That the statements of Paul and James, which exclude one another, and which he (Luther) looked upon as contradictions, could both be true at the same time, just didn’t dawn on him. Also in the quotation which Sasse cites in *Erläuterungen* (I, p 2) he expressly did not assert that God could be both righteous and unrighteous at the same time. No Scripture passage is known to me which suspends the proposition concerning contradictions. The statements concerning God’s three-fold nature also do not do so. They expressly do not state that there is *one* God and at the same time *not* one God, but three *Gods*. In this case it rather has to do with a paradox (see the following), which also Orthodoxy distinguishes very well from contradictions.

It’s not clear to me why Sasse attacks the proposition concerning contradictions. For I observe nowhere that he himself rejects it. He does not insist, e.g., that Christ was simultaneously crucified at different hours. Despite that, even purely theoretical attacks cannot remain unanswered. For if it were right, neither trust in a passage of God’s Word nor a confession which excludes the opposite doctrine would be possible. Thus various contradictory doctrines could be considered valid in the church at the same time.

J. Baur also devoted a section to the matter of contradictions. There he criticizes Quenstedt for rejecting a simultaneous validity for the following two statements: Christ is a sinless human being—Christ is not a sinless human being. He writes: “The validity of the principle of contradiction therewith established demonstrates in distinction from Luther a definite endeavor to contrast the theological thesis with the paradox. For the simplest determination of what is paradoxical is the violation by what is stated in it against the proposition of contradictions—a violation which becomes necessary because the contradictory item is found in a totally different system of relationship. The inability to understand this kind of paradoxical statement hangs together with the already established underdevelopment of the relational. Alongside these there exists also another kind of paradox. We meet up with it if in connection with the one item which certainly is contradictory there is another reality which is incomprehensible, logically not defensible, which can be expressed only in contradiction to the statement” (*ibid.* p 115). —in response to this it must first be established that Baur also points to principles (laws) which our reason must take into account to distinguish seeming contradictions from actual contradictions. Secondly, shortly before (p 108f) he himself demonstrated in connection with one point how Quenstedt throughout was aware “that thinking must risk paradoxes.” For he taught on the basis of Scripture that God is present in all things and still at the same time does not want to be present in all things in the sense of the *unio mystica*, and says concerning that: *effari* [express] *non possum sed firmiter credo*. Quenstedt therefore distinguished quite well between this “different kind of paradox” of which Baur spoke above (one in which a still inexplicable reality is added) and a true contradiction. But he also was not so underdeveloped (in his understanding) that he would have known nothing about statements which appear contradictory, depending on the connection in which they appear. After all, he did believe that Christ, who knew no sin, who was made sin for us, therefore was sinless and yet—laden down with our sins—stood before

the Father as a sinner. Disregarding the momentary situation, he objected only to denoting Christ simply as sinless and as sinful at the same time. I believe just vice versa, that ignoring this relationship leads to not understanding how Orthodoxy could say: Man converts himself—and yet this conversion is not the work of man; or, The Bible was composed by men and yet is not man’s word.

No one will be able to prove that Luther thought otherwise, as Baur supposes. Luther could never have said: Christ was per se a sinful man, and at the same time sinless. Also when he says that the Christian is simultaneously *justus et peccator*, the Christian is *justus* under another aspect than he is found *peccator*. Just as little as Orthodoxy, could he simultaneously acknowledge statements that excluded one another, since God after all has spoken to us in understandable words and wills that we steadfastly trust them.

Worthy of note is what we find on this in *Meusel*: Rules of thought also have significance for the church “insofar as also in the church revealed divine truth must be comprised in human thought sequence.” Particularly “those advocating mediating directions” have developed their doctrines “more or less subject to limitations of, or to a risked reformulation of, the general rules of thought” (*Kirchl. Handlexikon*, Leipzig 1887ff. under *Logik*). This matter too must be dealt with in detail some day.

But logic here, logic there: A Christian, who has no knowledge whatsoever concerning Aristotle or logic, simply *cannot* do otherwise than believe everything Christ has said, since he believes that he is trustworthy and therefore self-evidently speaks the truth. Nor does Sasse contest that, although the logician would in reference to this sentence speak of a logical conclusion. For Sasse states: “And we accept in faith and obedience all that he tells us. Not only that which we find as words attributed to him in the Gospels, but also that which he, the eternal Word, the Lord of the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit says in the entire Scripture” (242f.). The point of attack for Sasse lies totally elsewhere, namely, in the question whether everything in Scripture actually is said by Christ. For he continues: “But we are of the opinion that one must ask and must know what he says to us and what he does not say, where he places before us a dogma and where he does not. It is not proper for us to turn every statement which Jesus utters in the Gospels or that we find elsewhere in the Bible into a doctrinal precept and proclaim (it) as a dogma.” —Unfortunately, at the close of the quotation he again veers away from the real question. The question is not at all whether everything in Scripture, e.g., the destruction of Sodom, is a doctrine of the church. In contrast to this passage, Sasse has also elsewhere stated very clearly and very well: “Not every statement of Scripture is raised to an article of faith, but that does not mean that one may question the truthfulness of Scripture. The creed does not state everything that the church believes, but in brief statements expresses the central truths of the divine revelation in Holy Scripture...” (86f). He also points out that J. Gerhard made the same distinction (138). *Thus the old basic question still remains as the question that demands an answer, namely, whether God actually said all that is written, in other words, whether everything in Scripture is God’s Word, or whether the statements concerning nature and history must be credited to erring men.* That is substantiated by the fact that Sasse, as we saw, in the case of Hollaz did not at all criticize the conclusion, but only that he did not inquire as to whether the *major premise* was valid and whether it was really at all applicable to Holy Scripture (236f.). The statement: “God cannot err—The Bible is God’s Word—Therefore the Bible cannot err” is one no Christian would condemn just because it resembles a logical conclusion. And Sasse doesn’t reject this deduction in the case of Luther either. (No one would find fault—as has however happened—that in connection with this a further conclusion is presupposed, namely: It belongs to God’s *essence* that he does not err—God’s *Word* agrees with his *essence*—therefore God’s Word is inerrant. Precisely understood, the conclusion that the Bible does not err can first of all only follow from the equation: The Bible is God’s Word. No one however would take offense at such an abbreviated mode of expression if this equation were as self-evident to him as it was for Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.) *The actual stumblingblock is rather this equalization of the Word of God and Scripture.* We still have to come to grips with this.—Sasse however, despite his reservation about the equalization of these, does not—as the liberals do—want to eliminate the erring word of man from the Scripture. In some way or other it nevertheless belongs to the Word of God. But can one then still speak of it as truth in spite of the errors in it?

## 2.2 The Bible’s Special Concept of Truth

Only if the Bible has a special *concept of truth*, and in fact not only in respect to the proposition concerning contradictions. And that is precisely Sasse's interpretation (244). With truth the Bible (according to Sasse) means something much deeper than agreement with historical reality.—It is indeed true that the biblical concept of truth is deeper and broader than the usual concept of truth. But therewith is not said that the usual understanding of “truth” is excluded. When Scripture speaks of divine mysteries, of God's nature and thoughts, then that is true in the sense that it agrees with the *invisible divine reality*. But God's Word in Scripture specifically and above all witnesses of God's dealing in *history* and offers *historical* examples of human dealings as warnings and examples. And in these cases it certainly depends on whether this witness is true, that is, whether it agrees with the *historical reality*. One cannot without proof maintain that Scripture is not concerned about that, since it has a different understanding of truth. Paul rather states that his witness to the Risen One would be a false witness if Christ had not actually risen (1 Corinthians 15:15). That however is true not only concerning the fundamental events of salvation. Thus Peter emphasizes that the account of the transfiguration of Jesus was not a legend with a divine kernel of truth, but a historical fact that actually happened. He himself is the eye and ear witness of it (2 Peter 1:16–18). And even a small non-essential matter that took place before Jesus was taken down from the cross John substantiates with the words: “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the *truth*” (John 19:35). A look into TDNT confirms that with the word “true” both the Old Testament and the New Testament always mean agreement with that reality which is spoken of in the context: legal, historical, divine reality. Kittel writes: “The word אמת...is used absolutely to denote a reality which is to be regarded as אמון ‘firm,’ and therefore ‘solid,’ ‘valid,’ or ‘binding.’ It thus signifies what is ‘true.’ When used of persons, it sometimes expresses that which predominantly characterizes their speech, action or thought. The אמת ש] is one whose conduct falls under the norm of truth and therefore a man of integrity.” To this point we read in footnote 2: “the translation ‘faithfulness’ nowhere commends itself” (I 232, 233, 242f, cp footnote 12). Kittel states further:

The translation אמת basically describes “the actual truth of a process or cause,” most clearly in legal terminology....Dt 22:20:...“if the matter rests on authentic facts,” on truth and not calumny, as in the previous case....Again, the legal term appears in the paraphrase...“it is really as I have heard” (1 Kgs 10:6; 2 Chr 9:5)... A אמת עד is a witness to the true facts which are to be disclosed by a judicial trial....Not always, however, are the particular facts which count as אמת...supplied....In such cases the word indicates a general and indefinite validity....This rational and pedagogic tendency of the word, which is linked with its legal nature, is plainly at work when it is said by way of instruction that the Word and Law of Yahweh are for man both the truth and the source of knowledge of the truth. In Ps 119:160 the sum or quintessence of the words of God is אמת....It seems that the reference here is to Holy Scripture, and this conjecture is supported when an apocalyptic book may be simply described as אמת בכתב, the “record of truth” (Dn 10:21) (233–236).

Also Cremer (*Woerterb. d. nt1. Graecitaet* 6th ed. p 110) comes to the conclusion that אמת can only in a derived sense mean *faithfulness* (*Treue*). In reference to its being used in connection with a discourse he writes: “As in Joshua 2:12 it is attached to a sign, so in other places אמת is added to a word or to discourse = a word that is stable, firm, sure and also *true*; *reports that turn out to correspond with reality*; prophecies, promises that prove to be true...” (English by translator).

Concerning the original Greek usage even Bultmann writes in TDNT: “Etymologically ἀλήθεια has the meaning of non-concealment. It thus indicates a matter or state to the extent that it is seen, indicated or expressed, and that in such seeing, indication, expression it is disclosed, or discloses itself, as it really is, with the implication, of course, that it might be concealed, falsified, truncated, or suppressed. ἀλήθεια, therefore

denotes the ‘full or real state of affairs,’ ... As in judicial language the ἀλήθεια is the actual state of affairs to be maintained against different statements, so historians use it to denote real events as distinct from myths...” (238). In early Christian usage Bultmann establishes, in addition to the fact that its meaning was influenced by the Hebrew (in which matter he does not completely agree with Kittel’s conclusion), that ἀλήθεια means the *real state of affairs* or the *truth of statement*. Correspondingly ἐν ἀληθείᾳ means real...whereas κατὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν (Ro 2:2) means *in accordance with reality*.” In John’s usage ἀλήθεια means “genuineness, divine reality, revelation,” in which of course the usual meaning is incorporated: “...when Jesus speaks the ἀλήθεια, this has first the formal meaning of ‘*speaking the truth*’ but it also means ‘bringing the revelation in words’...” (243–245).

Basically Sasse also does not at all want to contest the agreement of the biblical accounts with historical reality. He writes in *Erlaeuerungen* (II, Thesis 8): “The constancy of God, his faithfulness to his people is inseparable from historical facts. The historicity of the call of Abraham and of his faith, the historicity of the events of the Exodus, to mention only these examples, is the necessary presupposition to the saving truth of God that is witnessed to in these events.” Or in *Sacra Scriptura*: “The great interest of the church in historical faithfulness based on facts is basically rooted in the Bible. How carefully the events of salvation-history are dated....But what is actual historical reliability for the biblical authors? That is one of the main questions....It cannot be settled by asserting that reliability in Scripture has a deeper and more comprehensive meaning than truth (*veritas*)....At the same time biblical reliability cannot exist without what we call basic truth or historical fact, because otherwise the revelation of Scripture would be reduced to myth” (288).

If the interest in historical faithfulness based on facts is rooted basically in the Bible, then we cannot at all solve the question as to how far historical faithfulness extends—as Sasse does elsewhere—by again insisting over against the full historical faithfulness that the truth is a Person and that this Person is the content of Scripture, since the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ in Scripture (244, 283ff, 351). That can only then involve a limitation of the historical faithfulness if one does not count as part of the content of God’s Word in Scripture all passages in Scripture where one cannot personally find any reference to Christ. But therewith one lapses into subjectivism just as Castellio and Acontius of whom Sasse writes: They “want to be good Reformed Christians. As such, they accept the Scripture principle of the Reformation. But they weaken it. Thus Castellio finds in Scripture offenses, contradictions and errors. By so doing he reverts to the opinions of many humanists....Thus they had to reduce Christianity to that which seemed essential to them. But where is the norm to be found on the basis of which one can distinguish the essential from the non-essential?...But since they have no objective criterion, it is after all nothing more than subjective taste that determines what is essential” (126).

### 2.3 A Priori or a Posteriori?

Decisive for the understanding of the “inerrancy of Scripture” is whether it is gained *a priori* or *a posteriori*. In *Erlaeuterungen* Sasse takes up the question directed to him (II, Thesis 5): “Is it proper to define the inerrancy of Scripture on the basis of a human examination of the difficulties (*a posteriori*) or must it be defined solely on the basis of the statements of Scripture concerning itself?” He answers: It is a rule that every doctrine of the church must be based on clear Scripture passages. “To the great amazement of many there is no passage in Scripture that clearly and directly teaches the inerrancy of Holy Scripture.” And this absence of direct Scripture statements makes the “*a priori* method impossible.”—But it is by no means a rigid rule that the same terms in which the church confesses a Scripture truth necessarily must occur in the Bible. The scripturalness of the doctrine of the Trinity, of Christology or anthropology, does not depend on whether the Bible uses the terms *trinity* or *genus majesticum* or *original sin*. So also the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture does not depend on whether the term is biblical. Not even such testimony of Scripture is necessary that the same thing is expressed directly by means of another word (e.g., infallibility). (I, of course, feel that we have such testimony.) For example, I am not aware of any passage in which the Bible directly states: God answers prayers for material help in his own way and at his own time. But Scripture shows us that indirectly by

examples. That is why we may and must teach this. Otherwise we would not have met our obligation toward or over against those who in time of temptation doubt God. At the same time this is an example of the fact that one who in faith reflects on the Word of God *must* by inference combine different statements of Scripture. When God's Word promises an answer to every prayer of faith, then it is *a priori* certain for faith that that is true and that it cannot be canceled by anything. If other Scripture passages show that God often gives something else than what was asked for, then this cannot destroy the believer's *a priori* certainty. But they do protect him from making false deductions concerning the how and the when. He can therefore only combine both statements in the above manner. We have already seen that Christ and the apostles drew such conclusions. Why then shouldn't the believer, e.g., draw the following conclusion: Since the angels, of whom both the Old Testament and the New Testament tell us, carried out God's word when so ordered, but God's word does not err or lie, then therefore their tidings were inerrant truth. Whoever believes the Scripture statements about God and about the angels, for him that is *a priori* certain. That is not a prohibited conclusion, as far as he is concerned. What is more, he is held captive to both statements by his trust. Otherwise he would have to doubt the one statement or the other. In the same way the conclusion that the Bible does not err is necessary for faith if the Bible is a Word of God equally as valid as the angel message. Of course, there is a great difference between angels and sinful men. But angels, on the one hand, are just as little mechanical tools without their own wills as are human beings and, on the other hand, without a doubt the Creator, the Holy Spirit, can also make human messengers of God into witnesses so reliable that their word is at least just as reliable as that of an angel (Ga 1:8). However, if according to the testimony of Scripture that is not just a theoretical possibility, but a reality, then the inerrancy of Scripture is for faith *a priori* reliable. The *a priori* dogmatic statement cannot be suspended on the basis of the existing manner of biblical reporting or by individual Scripture passages, but only protected by them against misconceptions. Only if the equating of God's Word and Scripture does not hold is the conclusion also naturally false. Here it again becomes clear that the decisive question is in what sense the Bible is God's Word, in the full sense and without limitation or only in respect to specific contents or a central truth.

#### 2.4 The Analogy of the Two-Nature Doctrine

Can *the analogy of the two-nature doctrine* of Christology help us make progress in giving an answer? Sasse answers this question affirmatively:

But the time will perhaps soon come when the Christological decision at Chalcedon will become a pattern for a solution in regard to the doctrine of Holy Scripture and its inspiration. We must walk a narrow path between the two errors represented by the Monophysites and the Fundamentalists, who have no understanding for the human nature of the Bible, and the Nestorians in modern Protestant and Anglican theology, who recognize the two natures but are blind over against the unity of Scripture as a simultaneous fully divine and fully human book. We dare in doing so never forget what Chalcedon declared authoritatively in relation to the doctrine of the enhypostasy. The human nature has its hypostasis (substantive existence) in the divine. In that way and in no other is the Holy Scripture primarily and essentially God's Word. The human word in Scripture has no independent significance (289).

In a similar way he expresses himself on pages 233ff and there also adduces the well-known Luther statement: "The Holy Scripture is *God's Word, written and (if I may say so) spelled out and formed in letters of the alphabet*, exactly as Christ the eternal *Word of God is clothed in his humanity*...and exactly as Christ is treated and dealt with in the world, so it is also the case with God's written Word. It is considered a worm and no book in comparison with other books" (comment on Psalm 22:7; 1541) (emphasis by Sasse). In connection with this passage it is to be noted that Luther does not develop his doctrine of Scripture out of Christology or in an analogous manner. He was a stranger to such systematizing. He simply compares two facts which for him stand firm independent of one another, namely, the entrance of God's Word into human language and, on the other hand, the incarnation of the Logos. In doing so, a similarity suggests itself to him. But he doesn't then

draw the conclusion from this that the case of Christ and that of the Scripture are in every respect analogous. Rather, he establishes a further analogy: As Christ was despised in his state of humiliation, so also the Scripture is despised. Both are also facts that cannot be contested individually.

Over against that it seems as though Sasse demands the necessity of an agreement of the doctrine of Scripture with the two-nature doctrine and even extending as far as the doctrine of enhypostasy. Why then not include the *genus majesticum*? That far, it is evident, he however does not wish to go. Yes, even in connection with the analogy to the doctrine of enhypostasy he already seems to make some exceptions. For how can one admit that it was God's Word which determined the process of putting Scripture into writing, as it was the eternal Son of God who determined the personification of Christ incarnate (for that is what enhypostasy asserts), and in contrast thereto condemn the doctrine of Orthodoxy (and of Missouri), which says *exactly the same* only in other words, as monophysitism? (230f, 159). And that even when one would consider the writers of Scripture as secretaries and "again grant to their personalities, their knowledge and their own will, their thinking and feeling, a greater part in the coming into being of the text" (232). How can one deny to the human word an *independent* significance and at the same time say: "The *claim* that the human side of the Holy Scripture is *to be acknowledged with the same earnestness* as the divine side is first then satisfied if the biblical writings *without limitation* are acknowledged and understood in the sense of human literature as works of the specific authors...." (*ibid.*). He, to be sure, adds: "even if with the reservation that behind these books and their origin there stands...the mystery of divine inspiration." But this reservation is very modest compared with the emphasis on the unlimited *independence* of the human authors. Concretely that means for Sasse that the biblical authors undoubtedly had an exemplary memory. "But it was a human memory with all the limits of a human memory....In inspiring them God did not impart to them any new knowledge of astronomical, geological, physical and biological matters....Thus it only remains for us to trust the Lord God that he did it properly and did not lie to us when he permitted the biblical authors to abide in their 'errors' " (238f).

Here there is much that is thoroughly confusing. Who in the Lutheran church has ever, contrary to 1 Corinthians 1:16 and other passages, claimed that the apostles had an unlimited memory? Who has affirmed that they possessed a new and complete knowledge in the areas mentioned by Sasse? It after all depends only on whether the Holy Spirit could and did so guide these forgetful, and in many areas ignorant, prophets and apostles so that they in matters they reported taking place in nature and in history, and that are recorded for our comfort and warning, did so as they actually happened. Whether they in some instances use approximate numbers, whether they report everything in chronological order, whether they report Jesus' words word for word or according to their sense—and similar questions, which Sasse introduces here and there, do not at all belong to the theme "inerrancy." It is also not a matter of debate whether they reported in the manner of an historian or a physicist. One can, after all, report in a very simple way, without scientific expressions and scientific arguments, what one has seen, e.g., that the sun lost its light, and this can accurately reflect what actually was seen. But just that, that the biblical accounts correspond to reality, is what Sasse disputes in many places. The argument that to err is human does not apply. For if he correctly acknowledges the inspiration of the entire Scripture (210, 288), he would also have to show cause why the act of inspiration protected against error in theological matters, but not in historical matters.

But also the analogy to Christology cannot be adduced as proof that Scripture can be subject to error, as Sasse does: "Do errors and contradictions belong to the human side of the Bible, as the frailty of the flesh belongs to the essence of the human nature of Christ?" (232). His answer in what follows reads: Yes! (esp. 238f). When he claims that many would like to answer this with No because they desire a book "from which the glory of God shines forth" (237), then that again is an answer that leads astray. For if anyone *contrary to* all reason, sense and seeing simply *believes* that this book, despite the condescending smiles of many scientists, is true in everything, then that has absolutely nothing to do with the desire referred to. If anyone believes the earthly Christ in everything he said, despite his weakness and humiliation, it is also not because of a desire to surround him with visible glory. And therewith we have arrived at the point from which we started out, namely, the point of comparison. One can compare the *external* weakness and humiliation of Jesus with the *external* weakness and humility of the Scripture and see therein an analogy as Luther did. One can also compare the

*truth* of Jesus' own words with the *truth* of his Spirit-given word in the Scripture. But one cannot compare the *external* weakness of Jesus with the content of the Bible, from the former postulate errors in the Bible and then draw an analogy there from that places two totally different items on the same level.

Why doesn't Sasse ask whether possibly the following analogy does not come to pass: The despised Jesus with his human mouth and in human speech spoke the truth in all matters and in every respect; in exactly the same way the despised Word of God, proclaimed and recorded by men in the power of the Holy Spirit, is in every respect the truth? It seems to me that one reason for that lies in the fact that he simply does not proceed from that which the passages dealing with divine inspiration state and from the ways Christ and the apostles accordingly deal with the Old Testament. According to his opinion we should "contrariwise conclude from the state of the inspired Word what...is possible within the compass of divine inspiration" (317). In doing so, he comes up with this finding: "The actual state of the Scripture together with...all the irreconcilable traditions suggests that the Bible is not free of contradictions" (*ibid.*). (But only if every ever so enlightening solution of seeming contradictions is forbidden and ridiculed with examples of exaggerated and unnecessary attempts to harmonize, can one on the basis of an *a posteriori* principle come up with such a one-sided finding.)

Even as Sasse here clearly elevates the "results" of the historical-critical method of Scripture research as judge over the truth of Scripture, so also the results of scientific research in general. For he believes that many statements of the Bible cannot hold up under critical examination on the basis of the "*facts* which research in the area of pre-history and paleontology place before us" (106)! If this method, that of making critical discernment and human science a judge over the written Word of God, is admissible as far as the Word of God is concerned, then one can also apply it to the *ipsissima verba Christi*. And doesn't Sasse also do that very thing? He definitively underscores his opinion that there can be no talk of a complete inerrancy of Scripture with the statement: "Also in the person of Jesus Christ both stand side by side: his participation in divine omniscience and his forgoing of its use as indicated in Mark 13:32" (318). This statement only has any significance in connection with the former if the temporary forgoing of the use of omniscience in the case of Christ would result in his saying something erroneous. This understanding, in my opinion, is supported by the fact that Sasse at the very least questions whether the events recorded in the book of Jonah as facts that actually happened were really true, even though Jesus substantiated them. If Christ had erred, then naturally we would have an analogy to an erring Scripture at hand. One asks whether this is perhaps the deeper reason why Sasse can contest the absolute truth of Scripture and at the same time emphasize the analogy between the doctrine of Scripture and Christology? But that shall remain a question.

In any case, one ought to be more careful in accusing the Scripture doctrine of the Early Church and early Protestantism of being Monophysitic, if one affirms the Christology of Chalcedon and the Formula of Concord as scriptural. For this accusation is understandably raised by those who also consider the doctrine of the Formula of Concord on enhypostasis and the *genus majesticum* as Monophysitic. They claim that the Formula of Concord denies the true humanity of Christ, since a person who has no human "self" of his own and, on the other hand, shares in the divine attributes is not a human being. (So e.g. P. Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, Guetersloh<sup>5</sup> 1959, 448.) Seen from the vantage point of our knowledge and experience that is indeed logical reasoning, but not as seen from the vantage point of Scripture. Would not a similar conclusion—based on our usual experience with the words of men—lie before us, if without proof supported by statements Scripture makes of itself we insisted that absolutely inerrant words simply are not words of men? Is it really robbing the apostles and prophets of their humanity if they in carrying out their great commission were so filled and guided in their spirit by the Spirit of God that their witness was totally reliable? If we, in any case, just as little exclude the possibility of a miracle in connection with the *inverbatio* as in the case of the *incarnatio*, then we are taking the statements seriously which Scripture makes about itself—statements which we will now study.

### 3

#### Scripture's Claim to Be Truth

When I expound the Bible's claim to truth, I must count on being misunderstood exactly as Orthodoxy was. That is why it must be emphasized at the very start that I do not intend to convince anyone of the truth of Holy Scriptures so that he may then believe in Christ. I also do not want to set aside the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* nor do I want to deny that Christ in Scripture by means of his call to repentance and his call of grace directly addresses man and touches his heart so that he needs no proof, also no Scripture proof, for the legitimacy of this address. Moreover it is presupposed that the reader believes in Christ because he was addressed by him through the Scriptures. Only such a one will at all permit the statements of Scripture concerning itself to remain standing as valid. But he needs them too! For it concerns also the question whether Scripture also where it does not inwardly convince him concerning its truth still actually is God's Word and truth. And ever since Karl Barth the question has been whether only God's actual speaking to the heart is God's Word or whether also the written word of the apostles and prophets, through which God has spoken to him, is God's Word and truth, and in fact with all that it states in matters spiritual and eternal and in matters earthly and historical. That these questions cannot be answered through the testimony of the spirit within the Christian is often overlooked. Therefore it must once again be stated and supported, this time in the words of Philippi:

How important the recognition is that in the Holy Scripture we not only have a Word of God that through the Spirit has penetrated into us and lives within us, but also a Word standing outside and above us, is demonstrated particularly in the hours of temptation....when the witness of the Spirit within us is very subdued and we nevertheless in obedience cling to the word of Holy Scripture....*Always* however Scripture is only in part light, in part still darkness; demanded therefore is a solid guarantee coming from without to the effect that Scripture is in and of itself light, if we are not to permit ourselves to be misled to assume that that which seems only dark and contradictory to us actually is darkness and contradiction in and of itself...A certain analogy is offered here by the doctrine of the so-called third use of the law. In the spirit the reborn person is inwardly at one with the law of God. Nevertheless he still needs it as an external norm standing above him....Moreover, there also are certain very essential doctrines of Holy Scripture which are sealed to us not by the Spirit, but rather only by the Word of God....That the body and blood of the Lord are truly and essentially present under the bread and wine is something we do not experience in the spirit, but solely through Christ's Word (*ibid.* p 117f).

### 3.1 The Equating of Scripture and the Word of God

Of great significance is that this equating does not stem from Luther or from the Lutheran Confessions, but is found in the Bible itself. Psalm 119, for example, with its "your Word" denotes the Holy Scripture as far as it was in writing up to then, as is evident from the synonyms used, *decrees, statutes, law*, among others. Procksch (TDNT IV, 100) likewise draws the conclusion from it "that the author *is thinking especially of* the Pentateuch as the written Word of God." Concerning the introductory formula of a number of prophetic books: "The Word of the Lord that came to..." Procksch writes: "In any case this formula signifies that the respective prophetic book in toto was considered as  $\text{דְּבַר יְהוָה}$ —in the Bible therefore no distinction is made between God's voice within the prophet and its being set forth in the form of poetry, proverbs and addresses. It is the transition to the outcome that not only the individual books of prophecy but the entire Scripture of the Old Testament was looked upon as God's Word" (*ibid.*). Of Jeremiah it is further stated: "In his address Jahwe's Word takes on flesh and blood from the very first revelation (Jr 1:11, 12), and likewise the scroll which he wrote with the help of Baruch contains only and altogether God's words (36:2)" (p 96 in ThWNT—English by translator). What Kittel wrote (ThWNT IV, 109ff) about the Old Testament "Word" in the New Testament agrees with that:

The NT quotes the OT either as Scripture or as Word. Our present concern is with the latter formula.... In many cases mention of the divine subject is facilitated by the fact that the OT passage quoted is itself an I-saying.... But the examples go further by quoting sayings from the

prophets and Psalms as spoken by God (Mt 1:22; Ac 4:25; He 1:5ff etc.) They show that God Himself is firmly regarded as the one who speaks in Scripture. The only point is that this insight is not a theory which denies or excludes the human authors.... but for Paul it implies no diminution whatever of the divine nature of Scripture, or the authority of demonstration from Scripture, to speak very concretely of the *κράζει* or the *ἀποτολμᾷ καὶ λέγει* of Is. (Ro 9:27; 10:20).... Similarly, adoption of traditional forms with *λέγει* (without subject) or the passive cannot possibly mean evasion of the divine nature of the saying quoted” (TDNT IV:III—cp CTQ, October 1979, 328f).

In this connection it is to be noted that not only a specific content is designated as God’s Word, but the entire Old Testament or an entire book of the same. Concerning the human word of the authors nothing is ever said to the effect that it only now and then *becomes* God’s Word or that it only has some divine thoughts or deeds of salvation as its content or that God’s Word in some way or other stands *behind* it, but that it is God’s Word, also therefore one with him or—as Proksch expresses it—an incarnation of God’s Word. The comparison with the Son of God, who is one with the human nature he assumed, as it were, embodied in it, suggests itself. For as Scripture says: The man Jesus of Nazareth *is* God’s Son, so it also says: The word of the prophets and apostles *is* God’s Word. The one must be taken just as seriously as the other! As one cannot accuse the Son of God of erroneous acts on the basis of his humanity, so one also cannot state that God’s Word of the Scripture contains errors because it is embodied in human words.

### 3.2 God’s Word is True

Already the equating of Scripture and God’s Word grants the believer the assurance that Scripture is true in all things. Therewith he does not arbitrarily apply God’s attributes (perhaps all of them, eg. also omnipresence) to the written Word of God. But he is certain of those attributes of the Word which it has in common with God’s inner essence. *The Word is in general an expression of the innermost essence, the ethos, as also of the thoughts, of the wisdom and knowledge of the one who speaks it. That is something every child knows without having learned it or thought about it.* As long as a child who trusts his father knows nothing about his limitations, he believes everything that he says. That the good and wise father could lie or say something false doesn’t even enter his thinking. How much more is one who trusts God justified to speak with Paul: I believe everything...that is written (Ac 24:14). That is the way faith speaks *a priori*, even as the centurion at Capernaum was *a priori* certain that the commanding word of Christ *could not be* powerless (Mt 8:8f).

God’s Word, which came to us through men, can indeed exhibit external deficiencies and weaknesses which are characteristic of human language: It need not be a word shining with heavenly glory. It can be despised or here and there be misunderstood or even not be understood at all. That such external lowliness does not contradict the nature of God is demonstrated by the Son of God’s state of humiliation. But if the Word of the Scripture though employing human thinking and speech actually is God’s Word, then it can be neither evil, loveless nor untruthful, nor inwardly powerless, nor lying, misleading or stupid, just as little as the Word of God which the Son of God spoke using his human spirit and mouth. It shares the authority of God even as a command of the government shares its authority. Whoever therefore despises the Word of God despises God himself (Nu 15:30f; Lk 10:16).

Against that some raise the objection: Since Scripture is to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tm 3:15), one could after all expect unconditional reliability only for *that* biblical content which serves this aim. Disregarding for a moment that Paul immediately in the following sentence says that the *entire* Scripture serves this goal, (let us note) that the limitation referred to is impossible also for other reasons. In no case may one differentiate thus: Everything historical is unreliable, everything theological is reliable. For faith does not stand fast without the great facts of salvation. One would then have to restrict the reliability both to the

events of history as *also* to the theological content which the individual considers a truth necessary for salvation. What the result of this would be, everyone can determine by studying so-called modern theology.

It remains a fact: Because the Bible is God's Word, it is true in all things. Psalm 119 also confirms this emphatically in that it says of the Pentateuch: "Your Word is nothing but truth" (v 160) [KJV: "Thy Word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever"]. Christ however repeats this sentence and applies it to the Word of the Father which he gave the disciples so that until the day of judgment men might come to faith in him through the Word of God attested by them. To the Word of God that works faith also belong the Gospel accounts about Christ (Jn 17:8, 17–20; 20:30f).—As the examination of the Bible's concept of truth demonstrates, "truth" denotes agreement with the reality attested to in that context. Since here "truth" is asserted of the Pentateuch in general, likewise of the entire prophetic-apostolic Word of God, one cannot restrict the concept to a specific definition. Respect for God's Word forbids an arbitrary limitation.

Therewith we have here that clear witness of Scripture to its inerrancy which Sasse fails to find. For the word "truth" here as elsewhere excludes that that which is attested as true actually is false, that is, does not agree with reality, regardless of whether the falsehood is based on a lie or an error.

"The Word of the Lord is true." That not only excludes erroneous promises that do not become reality, but also erroneous accounts that do not agree with what took place. Faith is sure of this not only because the accounts are God's Word just as much as the prophecies, and because the Word of God's claim to truth does not permit itself to be limited arbitrarily. Rather, Christ himself supports this truth by the manner and way he uses the Old Testament accounts (cp 3; 4). And for the accounts of the Evangelists the apostles of the Lord are guarantors, to whose word he has directed us. They assure us that they do not relate any well-meant but mistaken and misleading legends, but exactly that which they themselves experienced. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched...we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard...we write this..." (1 Jn 1:1–4 cp Jn 1:14; 19:35; 21:23ff—consult Th. Zahn, *ibid.*, p 702ff; Luke 1:2; 1 Cor 15:5ff; 2 Pe 1:16). That their faulty memory should have made their accounts untrustworthy is something we need not fear (Jn 14:26).

### 3.3 The Antithesis of God's Word and Man's Word

The Scripture however not only combines into one the word of Scripture written by men and the Word of God, but also contrasts man's word and God's Word: "And we also thank God continuously because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it *not* as the *word of men*, but as it actually is, *the Word of God*..." (1 Th 2:13; cp Jr 23:16, 31; 1 Cor 2:4, 13; Ga 1:11f; Mt 15:1ff).

Also this fact prevents us from constructing *any kind* of an analogy between Christology and the doctrine of Scripture. For Scripture never says Christ is God and not man, but does say that the prophetic-apostolic word is God's Word and not man's word. But the same is valid of Christ's own *word*, which is not man's word, but divine word, spirit and life. But since the Bible denies human nature to neither Christ nor his messengers, the antithesis can only consist in this: The decisive factor in Christ's words, giving them their unique quality, truthfulness and power, is *not* derived from his humanity, but from his deity, whose majesty his humanity to be sure shares (Jn 1:18; 3:31–34; 6:63, etc.; cp FC VIII). In a similar way (not in the identical way, for the *unio personis* occurs but once) the prophetic-apostolic word does not have its source in man, but in God. But just as Christ's true humanity is likewise the instrument of his deity, in which the entire fullness of the deity resides as in its body, so the biblical authors with their will, their spirit and their language are instruments of the Holy Spirit. "For it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Mt 10:20 cp v 1). To be sure, in the Bible sometimes only God and sometimes only the messenger is introduced as the speaker. But everywhere where both are mentioned God the Father or God the Holy Spirit is designated as the actual speaker, who puts his word into the mouth of the messenger and thus lets *his* word be spoken and recorded *through* the messenger: Exodus 4:12; 2 Samuel 23:2 cp Psalm 45:2; Isaiah 34:16; 59:21; Jeremiah 1:9; Hosea 1:2; Mark 12:36; Romans 9:25; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 28:25. This disparate activity of God and his messengers in connection with the origin of the word of Scripture is expressed in an especially clear way in Matthew 2:15

where an ever-reoccurring expression of the Gospels is given in this form: “And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said [Greek: spoken by (ὑπὸ) the Lord] through (διὰ) the prophets.”

The Bible, however, according to its witness concerning itself as cited so far, is *entirely* God’s Word and *entirely* truth. Even though it also has human authors, yet in spite of that it is *not* the word of man. For men are not independent and fully unrestricted authors beside God who on their own added their mistaken opinions or obscured and falsified God’s Word with mistaken expressions. Rather, the actual author is God, who has assumed *full responsibility* for the content and for the wording which adequately expresses the content. He therefore through his Holy Spirit filled, supported and guided the spirit of the authors so that every Scripture word is designated by Paul as God-breathed. One simply cannot imagine a stronger expression for the creative activity of the Holy Spirit. (Cp Blass/Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentl. Griechisch*<sup>8</sup>1949, par. 117, 2: “But also nouns are prefixed to verbal adjectives; they then designate the *authors* of the passive action:

...θεοδίδακτος...θεόπνευστος...” In opposition to this Sasse: “...θεόπνευστος obviously means that God’s Spirit is present in the Scripture..., without one’s inferring anything with certainty about the origin of the Scripture.”)—In opposition to 2 Timothy 3:16 Philo distinguished between *logia theochrista* and *logia deuteria*, and many have followed him in that, but certainly not Lutheran Orthodoxy (cp W. Koelling, *Theopneustik*, Breslau 1891, 18f). But Paul leaves no room for such a distinction. Also when he then speaks of what Scripture is profitable for, he does not limit the *πᾶσα γραφή*. In fact, he himself often stressed that the historical accounts of the Old Testament are profitable for doctrine, for warning, for comfort. He also does not exclude from the wording of the text “God-breathed” even as he also does not do so in connection with his own (oral and written, 2 Th 2:15) messages: “This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:13). In this connection it is to be noted that Paul often alternates between “I” and “we,” without changing the speaker (1 Cor 2:1–6, 10; Ga 1:8–12). That is why he can also designate his instructions as the Lord’s commands (1 Cor 14:37f), yes, flatly state that Christ speaks in and through him (2 Cor 13:3).

Where in all the world shall one then in the face of so overpowering a Scripture witness interject human errors? Where in the Bible do you find even the slightest hint that anything in the Bible could be humanly unreliable? The opposite is the case!

All these passages make it impossible—if one accepts them seriously—to interpret the *sedes doctrinae* of the doctrine of inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Peter 1:10–12) according to one’s own whim as if they stated only that in some way or other God’s Spirit was a co-author of Scripture, a fact which would not exclude errors on the part of the human authors. In whatever manner one pictures this theory to oneself, it nevertheless results—even if one does not admit that—in tearing asunder the unity of the divine and human word, in differentiating between human and divine statements in the Bible or in assuming in one and the same statement a divine word behind the human word. Thus one can place a distance between oneself and the wording (text) when it contradicts reason and science, and ascribe it to the fallibility of the human author. That God himself is the author of errors undoubtedly no Christian will dare to claim.

### 3.4 Christ’s Testimony to the Old Testament

We have the highest possible testimony for the reliability of Scripture, namely, the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever he cites the Old Testament, he always cites it as divine authority that ends every discussion, one that even Satan must give way to. He does not say: That belongs to the unbreakable theological content of Scripture, but simply states: “It is written.” And what is written, that is valid. No one can so emphatically introduce the “It is written” into combat against satanic lies who feels that he must first research what in Scripture is divinely reliable or humanly unreliable. M. Franzmann correctly establishes: “Jesus...nowhere doubts or calls into question any event recorded in the Old Testament. He argues from the factuality of the Old Testament event, not about it. He argues from what God said about man and woman at creation, not about it. He argues from the fact that men of Nineveh listened to the word of Jonah, not about it. Even when the Old Testament record is used by others to embarrass and contradict Him (Matt. 19:7, 8), Jesus does indeed correct their misquotation of the record (‘Moses permitted’), but He does not question the accuracy

of the record; He does not operate critically on the record” (cited by P. A. Zimmermann, “The Word of God,” in Kiehl/Werning, *Evang. Directions for the Lutheran Church*, Chicago 1970, p 11).

Some further examples supporting this: “I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like...” (Matthew 6:29). “Haven’t you read what David *did*...” (12:3). “There were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time...yet Elijah *was* not *sent* to any of them, but to...” (Luke 4:25f). That the reality of the recorded events stood firm for Jesus becomes abundantly evident when he draws a parallel between them and future events where everything depends on the fact that they will actually happen that way (at times, already have happened that way): “For *as* Jonah *was* three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, *so* the Son of Man *will be*...” (Matthew 12:40). “*Just as* Moses *lifted up* the snake in the desert, *so* the Son of Man *must be* lifted up” (John 3:14). “*Just as it was* in the days of Noah, *so also it will be* in the days of the Son of Man...*It was the same* in the days of Lot...*It will be just like this*...Remember Lot’s wife!” (Luke 17:26–32). Here everything depends directly on this that the last day will come just as surely, even though the majority does not count on it, as the judgment of the Deluge and the judgment of Sodom *took place*, even though also at that time the majority did not figure on it. Also the other warnings of Jesus completely lose their significance and force if the warning examples did not take place. How shall the blood of a legendary figure come upon anyone (Matthew 23:35)?—How shall the men of Nineveh rise up as accusers on the last day, if they did not repent after the sermon of Jonah? Likewise how shall the queen of Sheba rise up if she did not come from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom (Matthew 12:41f)? Naturally, one can also issue warnings by means of parables, but only if the hearers recognize them as parables supporting a universally valid truth. Never but never did the Son of God deceive his hearers in that he warned them by using myths which however they themselves considered as events that actually happened.

In the same way Jesus substantiates prophecies as prophecies, e.g., the ones concerning the Baptist (Matthew 11:10f) and concerning Israel (13:14f; 15:7). Above all, it is in connection with the messianic prophecies that Jesus makes it clear that they *must* not only be fulfilled according to their “theological content,” but *must* become *historical* reality down to the smallest detail. When it is written: “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered,” then the disciples *will* take offense at their Lord and flee (Matthew 26:31). “*Everything* that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled” (Luke 18:31). “It is written: ‘and he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this *must be fulfilled* in me” (Luke 22:37 cp 24:26f, 44 and John 19:28).—Even if Jesus did not interpret the prophetic pictures literally, he nevertheless never attacked their divine authority or twisted them in any way. Fr. Hashagen cites the opinion of the critics concerning this: “When Jesus designated himself as the Messiah, he therewith declared as false the prophecies of the prophets which were spoken in the name of Jahwe, the prophecies predicting a glorious earthly kingdom for the Jews. He clearly does not see God’s Word in these prophetic prophecies.” To that he answers: “When however the Lord, to say nothing about all his other statements which reject this, after his resurrection assures the Emmaus disciples: ‘Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ he bases this on Moses, all the prophets (e.g. Is 53), all the writings of the Old Testament that were spoken concerning him. In this matter those critics have fallen captive to an unholy, basically destructive delusion. An unavoidable conclusion of their misinterpretation of the Old Testament prophecies is: the Jews were fully justified to nail Jesus to the cross!’ (*Christi Bekenntnis zum Alten Testament, als zum Worte Gottes, bindet jeden gläubigen Christen* [Christ’s Avowal of the Old Testament as the Word of God Binds Every Believing Christian] Luenenburg 1925;<sup>2</sup> 1937, 17). Since this writing of the Rostock University professor, the title of which already expresses an undeniable truth, unfortunately is not well known, I will cite another passage: “...one asserts: The Lord has absolute authority only in his proclamation of religious and moral truth, but contrariwise in regard to his natural and historical knowledge, e.g. concerning the authorship, the time of writing, the truthfulness and the integrity of the individual books of the Old Testament, he was limited by his humanity, thought as his contemporaries did, and was subject to the same errors they were subject to. But, to select only one item, the authorship of Psalm 110 by David is no religious truth, yet the Lord bases a convincing proof of his divine-human Messiahship on that point (Mr 22:41–46)...If religious and moral truths are based on natural and historical errors and falsehoods, they forfeit their essence and their power, and become empty

dreams. To distinguish between Jesus' otherwise absolute authority and his being subject to error, to assume errors in his case in natural and historical matters, is something impossible to carry out and must result in a shipwreck of faith" (*ibid.* p 20).

Jesus' acknowledgement of the divine authority of all statements of the Old Testament is briefly summarized in John 10:34f: "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods' to whom the Word of God came—and *the Scripture cannot be broken*—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?" It was reserved for a more recent age also to twist this passage (e.g. Bultmann). With an appeal to the expression "in your Law" some claim that Jesus here did not at all express his understanding of the Old Testament, but accommodated himself to the method which the scribes used in arguing, in order to destroy them with their own weapons. Th. Zahn, one of the most thorough exegetes, in his commentary on the Gospel of John writes concerning this passage that the designation "your Law" (cp 8:17) was derived "from the fact that the Jews in their strife with Jesus based all their accusations...on the Law. That he however therewith does not want to denigrate the Old Testament or declare it as not binding for him is amply demonstrated by the parenthetical remark that the Scripture cannot be broken, cannot be robbed of its validity" (*ibid.*, p 461). One inversely surely cannot represent as a fact a supposition attached to the expression "your Law," and then arbitrarily supplement the following contrary statement in this manner: And the Scripture cannot according to your opinion, which I naturally do not share, be broken! This would also contradict everything that was set forth above about Jesus' attitude over toward the Old Testament. He also never in these disputes fights the opponents with their own weapons, neither the Sadducees with their arguments from reason (Matthew 22:23ff) nor the scribes with their precepts (15:1–9), but always with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Also the claim that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and in the dispute concerning the keeping of the Sabbath gave [his opponents] to understand that the Law in Scripture did not have divine authority for him is a pure invention. If he opposes an unbending application of the Sabbath-law, an application which violates the law of love, when he in the Sermon on the Mount expounds the commandments in their deeper sense, "interprets them spiritually"—as our Confessions say—and if he refers to the time of the new covenant, when the ceremonial law of the old covenant will have fulfilled its assignment (John 4:21–23), then he has certainly therewith not attacked the fact that the Law is God's Word.

Although Sasse does not align himself with Bultmann's arbitrary exegesis of John 10:35, he nevertheless does not find expressed in it Jesus' testimony to the full reliability of Scripture (296f; 317). That is unintelligible. For according to his usual interpretation it would be entirely conceivable that the Psalmist here used a wrong expression or that it deals with "residues or influences of pagan polytheism," as Buechsel supposes (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes* /NTD/. Goettingen<sup>4</sup> 1946, 122). Such a minute falsehood (according to him) would be no theological error and of no consequence to salvation. But Jesus substantiates the indissoluble validity of also this single expression. Likewise in Matthew 5:17f he bears witness that "not the smallest part of the Law will perish and thereby be lost from the Law." Therewith he opposes "the opinion that one may according to pleasure let some sentences pass as binding and suspend others as not binding" (Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matth.*, Leipzig<sup>4</sup> 1922, 212, 217).

But if the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, has so clearly confirmed the divine authority of the entire Old Testament together with its prophecies, its reports, laws and individual expressions, and himself submitted to it in his earthly life and sufferings, how could we set up ourselves as judges of the very same Word of God or of that of the New Testament? And if we, to keep peace, would want to enter upon a compromise, we simply cannot get around the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. We bind ourselves, even as he did, to the entire Scripture and do so gladly because it is our saving life-line.

Certainly Sasse is correct that Luther and Orthodoxy did not as yet cite John 10:35 as the basis for inerrancy. For Orthodoxy inspiration is a sufficient basis. This seems to me to be a sign of their childlike faith, to which the "theological" sophistry of a divinely inspired error really could not suggest itself. Luther however also offered other testimonies of Jesus for the Old Testament, even for the Law, as his exegesis of Matthew 5:17ff demonstrates. Above all, he emphasized the testimony of the apostles, which we merely referred to.

Concerning Galatians 1:9 he writes: Here you have “a clear text and a thunderbolt. Here Paul subordinates himself, an angel from heaven, teachers on earth, and any other masters at all to Sacred Scripture. This queen must rule, and everyone must obey, and be subject to her. The pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges, or arbiters, but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture. Nor should any doctrine be taught or heard in the church except the pure Word of God (LW 26:57, 58).

### 3.5 Theological Truth and Historical Reality Inseparable

Correctly Sasse on the one hand emphasizes that the Bible not only contains God’s Word, but *is* God’s Word (210), that the following even applies to all that is reported using the “methods of a prescientific way of writing history”: “All is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (288). How then can he elsewhere maintain that not all that is in Scripture is told us by the Lord (243), that quite a few accounts about events in nature and history are humanly unreliable? He offers us no proof from Scripture in opposing Scripture’s claim to be true, a claim supported by Christ.

This tearing apart of theological truth and historical reality is also impossible for other reasons.

#### a) *God’s dealing in judgment and grace is indissolubly interwoven with history*

The God of the Bible is not an idea residing behind and above history, but a Person who has acted in history and has particularly therein proved himself to be who he is, a fact his Word then reveals to us and teaches us to understand. One not without the other! Not Scripture, but philosophy teaches the principle *finitum non capax infiniti*, from which the opinion of many renowned Reformed theologians is derived that God’s deeds of salvation touch on history only here and there, or tangentially.—But the entire Old Testament, that starts with creation as the beginning of history, is a book of the deeds of God in history. God threatens with judgments and lets them palpably come into being. He reveals prophecies which already are visibly fulfilled in this world and therewith are guarantees for the fulfilling of the prophecies concerning future acts of salvation. In Christ, however, God himself entered into history and spoke words that were imbedded in historical events or had historical events as their content or brought about historical events. Therefore these events do not permit themselves to be separated from his Word. How can one, for example, separate his word to the youth at Nain from the event at which it was spoken and which it brought about? If the event did not really take place, then the word connected with it becomes senseless. To the Gospel belong not only the words of grace and prophecy, but also the accounts of that which happened in the presence of, through and with Christ. If the accounts are unreliable, then the Gospel is unreliable. If we deny that the reported facts happened and that they happened in that way, and if we try to restrict ourselves to the so-called theological content, then we stand in danger of reading our own theological opinion into it and to devise for ourselves a different God and Savior. The history of theology down to our day offers frightening material for us to contemplate.

Certainly Sasse (and those who share his opinion) in no way wants to conjure up this danger. But from the dominating form of Bible criticism he adopts the basically false shifting stand which bears such dangers within it. At the close we will see that he himself does not remain with trifles such as a few accounts containing false dates and numbers. Undoubtedly it wouldn’t also pay to write very much in defense of the opinion that only very few and very insignificant tiny errors can occur in the Bible.

#### b) *God’s addressing us is indissolubly united with the accounts of history*

The distinction between “information” and “God’s address,” which would also strike us if the information were false, cannot appeal to Scripture for support. The Scripture rather tells us that God communicates information on historical events to us just because he would therewith touch our consciences, comfort us and give us direction and hope. That this applies to the great events of salvation, such as the cross and the resurrection, is again being recognized more frequently in today’s theology. But God can and wants to speak to us, teach us, warn us and encourage us also with examples of how *human beings* have acted in history (cp Ro 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tm 3:16). The force of these examples lies particularly in this that they *actually*

took place and did so under these and these circumstances. It is after all an immense difference if an idealizing or a degrading legend informs me how someone possibly could have behaved himself or if God tells me how a certain human being of flesh and blood dealt in a concrete historical situation, failed, was converted and won the victory by faith or suffered for Christ. In doing so, God can by means of a reported individual case specifically address me in my situation. How can he who questions the reality of the event still with certainty perceive what God wants to tell him by means of it? But doubt has a way of spreading even farther. If I feel that I dare no longer trust what Scripture reports concerning past events, how can I then fully trust what it says about *future* events till the end of time? Isn't the fact that in Christendom today a progressive utopia has taken the place of the biblical picture of the future connected with that? If the biblical authors could err in the area of history, then not only in reference to the past but also in reference to the future. And why not then also in theological matters?

Thus the critical alienation from Scripture becomes ever greater, which makes hearing it ever more difficult and threatens the very center of faith. Critical alienation however will not thereby be overcome that we try to clear up for our reason all seeming outward contradictions in the Scripture, as if trust were based on proof. Rather, it is overcome through the Holy Spirit, for whom we may pray with the certainty of being heard. Critical alienation, the foe of trust, actually is nourished, however, if one declares statements of Scripture which seem to contradict one another or seem to contradict historical reality to be actual contradictions and errors. To this point Luther writes:

For all the other interpreters and especially Lyra and Augustine, involve themselves in no little difficulty with this passage, and so much so that Augustine nearly begins to have troubles and doubts about the authority of Holy Scripture. The same thing usually befalls those who concern themselves with contradictions, *who try hard to shake the reliability of sacred history*. If ever they fall on passages of this kind, they stick to them very closely and cry out that the holy sermons and histories hang together poorly and that all is confused and uncertain. Therefore they never reach the true light and knowledge of sacred things (on Gn 37:1—LW 6:314).

The opinion that God could certainly also address us and bring us to faith by means of “accounts” of events that did not happen as recorded is a *philosophical* evasion meant to make all the miracle accounts of the Bible (including the creation account) palatable to reason. Just recently I happened upon an essay by the former Erlangen philosopher Paul Hensel in which this becomes very evident: *Kausalitaet und Wunder* (special reprint from the *Badische Schulzeitung* No 14: 1931). For Hensel miracles do *not* exist as a “breach of natural cause and effect” evoked by God. According to his opinion biblical accounts of events, which the pious narrator *experienced* as “miracles,” although they naturally were part of the this-worldly cause and effect syndrome, can also be *experienced* by others as “miracles” and as events pointing to God. It is only questionable whether we can for ourselves adopt the point of view of the narrator. If we are unable to do so, then we would sadly have to admit that this path to God is closed for us. Toward the close of his essay he illustrates that with the following example: “For example, what about the miracles reported by Vespasian...and countless others, which are at least just as well documented as those of the Gospels which we refuse to believe? The only answer to this is that we have no basis whatsoever to doubt that these miracles once opened the way to God for believers, and..., it is to be hoped, have led many people to God and in their day were true miracles for these people. For us they no longer are that...” (p 12). But there are still other “fingers” that “God extends to us to draw us to himself” (p 9).

Even though it has become widely customary in theology to accept pointers or words of God *on the basis of myths* which report only the pious subjective experience of the narrator, but not objective, historical events, nevertheless such “speaking” by God is only analogous to the god of the philosophers, not to the God of the Bible. That is also true of “God’s speaking” through pious creation accounts which ostensibly do not report any revealed facts.

*c) The gospel is indissolubly united with the message of creation and the fall*

It is in connection with Sasse's correcting the creation account that it becomes most clearly evident whether his teaching of a relative inerrancy of the Scripture leads. We do not wish to assume that inversely the acceptance of the theory of evolution misled him to accommodate the doctrine of Scripture to it. But many others will welcome this seeming way out just because they trust science.

For Sasse it is self-evident that differing accounts of creation lie before us in Genesis 1 and 2 whose literary beauty would be lost through harmonization (55–57). Naturally the second account was not composed by Moses (just as little as the first) on the basis of divine revelation, but by a “master in the oriental art of storytelling” (57). Accordingly, his picturesque language obviously can be interpreted as one pleases. What then could possibly be meant by “ground” out of which God created man? “May it perhaps have been a *living being, evolved from the animal world*, which God predestined to become man, the bearer of his image” (59)? On the following page those who combat evolutionism are accused of a “false biblicism which defends untenable positions.” For if the majority of the natural scientists assert that man has over many hundreds of thousands of years evolved biologically from the animal world, then for Sasse every opposing position is untenable to begin with. Then the creation account, which only subsists of “fragments of ancient tradition” (99), simply cannot report the *creation of man*, but must rather—without any textual support—be interpreted as reporting the *animal's becoming a human being*: “Whatever the anthropology of natural science may view as the beginnings of man in distinction from the prehuman creature, such as the invention...of tools (*homo faber*) or the control of fire, *man* in the theological sense *begins with God's summons*, who calls him into existence as his own image and as his representative in governing the earthly creature” (108). On the one hand, he is of the opinion that the “two” creation accounts defy every attempt at harmonization (*ibid.*), although an interpretation that sees no contradiction whatever in Genesis 1 and 2 does not do any violence to the text whatsoever (cp K. Rabast, *Die Genesis*, Berlin 1951; 74, 86ff.; H. Moeller, *Der Anfang der Bibel*, Berlin 1978: 28, 35; W. Moeller, *Alttestamentl. Einleitung*, Berlin 1958: 16f. As noted here, not only Keil and Hengstenberg, but also Strack and Gunkel, among others, were of the same opinion). On the other hand, he attempts to *harmonize* Genesis 1 and 2 with the dominant theory of natural science, one that simply disregards the text. That this should be the better system of harmonizing is difficult to comprehend. Most certainly the warning is to be taken to heart not to read an ancient human world view into the Bible and on that basis to take a firm stand against facts that have been discovered. But one also dare not—in contradiction to the facts attested by Scripture—read into Scripture every new theory about the origin of the world, which basically is the pagan evolutionary theory of the Greek nature philosophers.

Sasse is of the opinion that through his interpretation of the creation account “neither the *creatio ex nihilo* would be surrendered, nor the *creatio specialis* of mankind” (286). If we take for granted that by *creatio ex nihilo* he means only the creation of the primary matter, then he is right. But he does surrender the unique primary creation which one in the wider sense can denote as a *creatio ex nihilo*. With what justification does he reduce the one-time creative acts of God at the beginning to the *one* act of creating the primary matter? If Genesis 1 is God's Word and revelation, how can one simply cancel the difference attested to therein between the primary creation and the *creatio continua*? That is after all the unique element in connection with the acts of creation at the beginning that God brings into being completely new creatures without any preexisting forms and ancestors, to which he then first gives the blessing of procreation. Then first does God provide for the *continuing existence* of the world through the propagation of the existing creatures. And Scripture makes a clear division between *that* creation and the preservation by speaking of the completion of creation in connection with the sixth day of creation. “Therefore Moses' statement, ‘God rested from His work,’ is not to be understood of that course of events which involves their preservation and government but simply of the beginning, namely, that God had ceased creating classes, as they say in common speech, and new species or new creatures” (Luther on Gn 2:2—LW 1:76). And shortly before: “In Adam the human race had its beginning; in the earth the animal race, to use this expression, *had its beginning through the Word*; and in the sea that of the fish and of the birds had its beginning. But in Adam and in the first little beasts or animals they did not reach their end. Until today there abides the Word which was pronounced over the human race: ‘Grow and multiply’”(LW 1:75).

Together with the *creatio proper* Sasse also surrenders the *creatio specialis* of man, as Scripture pictures it. That after all subsists in a special act of *creation* which one cannot change into an act of *transformation*. No animal was addressed and thereby (transformed into) a man, a partner and image of God. Rather, man's body was created from the ground in an act totally separate from the creation of the animals and, because of sin, must therefore return to the ground from which he was taken (and not to an animal). Just as little as we can make the bodily recreation or transformation of man on the last day, which according to 1 Corinthians 15:51f. will take place "in the twinkling of an eye," contrary to the wording of Scripture and contrary to all rules of exegesis into a process taking thousands of years, just so little man's physical creation the first time. God is neither *primum movens* of an evolutionary process resulting in a new world in which righteousness dwells (as modern theologians want to make us believe) nor *primum movens* of evolution!

Unfortunately I have found nothing in Sasse's writings about his concept of the original state of things. Without affirming the original state one cannot accept the fall [into sin] as an historical event, as Sasse wants to. If the first two people were not sinless, then there can be no talk of a fall into sin. And *only* if in the original state they were not subject to death, can one maintain that death first followed the fall into sin as punishment. But how does Sasse wish to combine the biblical testimony about the original state of man with the theistic doctrine of evolution? Did the animal pair, which God is said to have addressed and thereby made into his image, suddenly become completely holy, so that it alone did not join in the murderous struggle of the stronger against the weaker? Was it suddenly freed from the necessity of dying, which after all according to the theory of evolution was a law of nature from the very beginning, a law which all of its ancestors also were subject to?—Such phantasies stand in contradiction both to the doctrine of evolution and to the Scripture. However Sasse may have pictured it to himself, even he could not combine the doctrine of evolution, the first state (in Eden) and the historical fall into sin without the help of arguments full of contradictions. How he justified this, I do not know. Most persons, however, cannot live with such contradictions. If they do not fully return to Scripture, they travel the road they have entered upon to its very end, cancel the original state of man, simply make of Adam and Eve symbols of mankind, transform the fall into sin into an event outside of time, death to a law of creation (= law of evolution) and therewith also expunge the biblical doctrine of original sin as an obsolete theory. Not even Romans 5:12ff. can hinder them from doing so. For there, just as in Genesis 1–3, it concerns itself about statements concerning nature and ancient history, wherein at the very least Paul certainly could err—if not actually in all things. But if there was no original state and no fall into sin, then the lost *gift* of God's image is transformed into a *task* that is to be achieved. That therewith also the gospel becomes another gospel is the necessary result, as everyone sees before his very eyes in the theology dominant today. They lose Christ!

Sasse, who was always concerned about the gospel of Christ, wanted to ward off this downfall. But his compromise between trusting God's Word and Bible criticism is understandably not suited to accomplish that. The *sola gratia propter Christum* cannot abide in the church without the *sola scriptura*.

Therefore I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred;...therefore, necessity forces us to run to the Bible with the writings of all teachers, and to obtain there a verdict and judgment upon them. Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? (Luther, *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*—LW 32:11, 12).