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THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

--Prof. H. Hanko--

The debate concerning the inspiration of Scripture which has rocked the Church for the last decade or so is not, in the first place, a debate which centers in the doctrine of inspiration, and is not, in the first place, a question of plenary inspiration, or verbal inspiration or mechanical vs. organic inspiration. The deeper root of this controversy is the question of the authority of Scripture. To this most basic question the Church has addressed itself. The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is really a corollary of the truth of the authority of Scripture. Those who have made repeated attacks on the doctrine of inspiration have done this in order to escape, in one way or another, Scripture's authority. And those who have defended the truth of inspiration have done so to defend the truth of the absolute authority of the Word of God.

There are many who, while denying the truth of infallible inspiration, nevertheless contend that they maintain the truth of the authority of Scripture. But a close examination of their views leads nevertheless, to the conclusion that the doctrine of the authority of Scripture is denied in some key respects. An example of these is to be found in the position of those who deny that the first chapters of Genesis are sober history. They will defend their position on the authority of Scripture by saying that while Scripture is authoritative with respect to the truth of the gospel, it is not authoritative in matters of science. The error of this is clear. An altogether false disjunction is made between the truth of the gospel and science. And, while some of Scripture is put into the pigeon-hole of "the truth of the gospel", other parts of Scripture, such as Genesis 1 - 3, are put into the pigeon-hole of science. This is wrong. The first three chapters of Genesis belong as much to the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ as any other part of Scripture. But the point is that, in this way, a serious limitation is placed upon the truth of Scripture's authority.

It is well to note from the outset of our paper that this becomes a spiritual question. The doctrine of inspiration, if

isolated from any other doctrine, can be treated, in the abstract, as a purely doctrinal question. But the whole truth of authority is an aspect of the question which cannot be isolated so easily from questions of inspiration. And then the question is a spiritual question. For the doctrine of Scripture is not a doctrinal question which can be discussed from a purely intellectual viewpoint. It is a question of the Word of God. A man can conceivably (as many have done) discuss from a purely intellectual viewpoint whether or not Homer is the author of the Illiad; and it makes no essential difference in one's life what one's conclusion is on the matter. But the scriptures (regardless of what men may say about them) are not to be compared with Homer's Illiad. They are the very Word of God. One's attitude towards them and position overagainst them are but outward manifestations of one's attitude towards God Himself. The Scriptures demand allegiance and faith in themselves. Not in order that a book may be worshipped; but because God requires faith in His own divine being. The issues are issues of life or death, heaven or hell. Rejection of the Scriptures is sin and rebellion which cannot and will not go unpunished.

And this is the issue at stake in the question of authority. Will one attempt in whatever way possible to escape from the authority of Scripture? Many do; and their way of doing this is to attack the Scriptures themselves and deny in some measure the truth that the Scriptures are God's Word. Their rebellion is not against a book; it is against God Himself. The believer is therefore, intent on defending the truth of inspiration as verbal and infallible, not because he delights in the abstract doctrine itself; not because he is intent on preserving some vestige of Bibliolatry; but because this truth is an essential part of the truth of Scripture's authority. And it is his desire to bow, as a humble child, in complete obedience before God's Word, and, in this way, before God Himself.

When the authority of Scripture as the Word of God is abandoned, men turn inevitably to another authority. Sometimes this authority is the mystical and subjective experience of man.

A man's own personal religious experiences may become an authority in their own right. This was (and is) true of the mysticism which has periodically appeared in the Church. At other times, the reason of man has been raised to a position of supreme authority in man's life. This is the fundamental principle of all rationalism and is surely, the undergirding commitment of humanism. There have been periods since the time of the Reformation when the creeds of the Church have been lifted up to a position of authority above the Scriptures. The result of this is dead orthodoxy. It is a danger to be resisted. But perhaps the greatest evil of our present day is the rise of science as an authority in its own right. This is but another form of rationalism and the principle that reason is the supreme arbiter of life. But, especially within the Church, this danger has been the chief cause of the unrelenting attacks upon the Scriptures. The error has its roots in the rationalism of the 17th and 18th Centuries; it came to expression in the Deism which ran rampant in England especially and which attacked from its basic commitment to reason, the whole truth of God's sovereign rule in His creation; it received a mighty push from the higher criticism of the following centuries and it continues unabated today with the modern explosion of scientific knowledge. It, more than anything, is the immediate cause of the violent attacks which have been made against the Scriptures even within Reformed circles.

It lies in man's nature as a creature that he needs an authority of one sort or another. He is created as a dependent creature, and he cannot escape his consciousness of dependence. Even while he raises his own mind to a position of final authority, he still acknowledges, though it be in sin, that authority is necessary in his life. For the authority which must govern man is an authority which demands of man commitment to a body of knowledge which is at the same time regulative for his life.

It is the purpose of this essay to examine the teachings of the Reformation on the truth of the authority of Scriptures, and, thus, to emphasize that those only are faithful to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century who maintain this absolute authority of the Word of God.

* * * * *

The Reformation was, above all else, a return to the holy Scriptures. It was, of course, many other things. It was a return to the truth of God. In the case of Martin Luther, the monk of Wittenburg, it was a return to the central truth of justification by faith alone. The Reformation was a reformation of the Church as institute and a liberation of the Church from Romish hierarchy. But, though it was all these things and more, it was essentially a return to Scripture. A reformation in doctrine and Church polity was possible only because the Reformers, without exception, brought the Church back to the fountain of the truth and the rule for all the government of the Church--the sacred Scriptures. Already when Luther nailed his theses to the chapel door of the Church at Wittenburg, when all thoughts of breaking with Rome were farthest from his mind, he wrote in thesis 62: "The true treasure of the Church is the holy gospel of the glory and the grace of God." And when he stood at the Diet of Worms before the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and all the might and power of Rome, he summed up the whole of the Reformation in the dramatic and prophetic words: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason,¹ I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God." "Captive to God's Word"; this was indeed to become the battlecry of the Reformation.

¹By adding the words "by clear reason", Luther did not intend to raise the power of reason to a position of authority in its own right. This is evident from all of Luther's writings on the subject of Scripture. Cf. A. Skevington Wood's important book: "Captive To The Word"; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969. This is also evident from Luther's sharp denunciation of the use of unaided and unenlightened reason which he could unblushingly call: "the devil's whore". Almost all church historians are agreed on this point.

There were many aspects to this doctrine of the Scriptures which the Reformers developed; for they possessed a thorough and complete view of the truth of Scripture. This included their view of Scripture's infallible inspiration, Scripture's authority, perspicuity and canonicity. But we limit ourselves to a discussion of their view of the authority of Scripture.

In their emphasis on this truth, the Reformers were establishing a principle concerning the Scriptures which was denied by Roman Catholicism. In the Roman Catholic Church had gradually developed the idea of tradition as an authority in its own right. This idea had not come about overnight, but was the end of a long development of Romish thought closely bound up with other ideas. Nor had the Romish Church ever definitely settled its ideas on this score; and there remained differences of opinion on the subject. But, in general, the prevailing view of Roman Catholicism was that tradition occupied a position of, at least, equal authority with the Scriptures. By tradition was meant the whole body of teachings which had originated with the apostles, but had not been included in the Scriptures; the teachings of the church fathers; the pronouncements of church councils; and the declarations of the magisterium, or teaching Church, especially as the Church spoke through the pope. While, in many cases, this body of tradition was based upon Scripture and was interpretation of Scripture, at some important points it went beyond what Scripture itself taught either explicitly or implicitly. But even when this body of tradition was, in the opinion of the theologians of the Church, based upon Scripture, its authority was not derivative (i.e., based upon the authority of Scripture, and authoritative only insofar as it expressed what Scripture taught), but its authority was an authority which it possessed in its own right having received the seal of authority from the Church.

But it was inevitable that, in many periods of the history of the Church, this authority of tradition was not simply placed on a par with that of Scripture, but became an authority which surpassed the authority of the Word of God.

This had important and far-reaching consequences in the Church. Exegesis of Scripture was bound by this tradition and the interpretation of Scripture was no longer free; it was shackled to the Church. If anyone within the Church wanted to explain the Scriptures, he was bound, first of all, to consult mother Church and learn what mother Church taught. He might not make any interpretation of Scripture which would disagree, even so much as a fraction, with what the Church held to be the truth. If it was learned that tradition went beyond the Scriptures (as it did, e.g., in its doctrine of purgatory), or if it was learned that tradition even contradicted the Scriptures (as it did, e.g., in its doctrine of the works of merit), this made no essential difference. The exegete who set himself to the task of explaining Holy Writ was bound by the Church to interpret God's Word in full harmony with the Church's teaching. Even William of Occam (c. 1280-1349), who emphatically set forth the truth of the sole authority of Scripture and insisted that Scripture's authority was based on its infallible inspiration, nevertheless taught that the foundation of Christian truth is not the Bible alone, but also the apostolic tradition and the continuing disclosures of the Holy Spirit.²

This idea of the authority of tradition has never finally been settled in Romish thinking. The Council of Trent which met to answer the Reformation faced this problem and spoke concerning it. While the decisions of the Council were not particularly addressed to this problem, nevertheless, a certain authority was ascribed to tradition. In the "Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures" adopted at the Fourth Session held April 8, 1546, the Council said:

The sacred and holy, oecumenical, and general Synod of Trent,--lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same three legates of the Apostolic See presiding therein,--keeping this always in view, that, errors being removed, the purity itself of the Gospel be preserved in the Church: which (Gospel), before promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth, and then commanded to be preached by

²Cf. Wood, op. cit., pp. 33-35.

His Apostles to every creature, as the fountain of all, both saving truth and moral discipline; and seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand: (the Synod) following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament--seeing that one God is the author of both--as also the said traditions, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession.³

The Vatican Council, held in 1870, also spoke to this issue. In Chapter II, the Chapter "Of Revelation", the Council reiterated what Trent had said; and then added:

And as the things which the holy Synod of Trent decreed for the good of souls concerning the interpretation of Divine Scripture, in order to curb rebellious spirits, have been wrongly explained by some, we, renewing the said decree, declare this to be their sense, that, in matters of faith and morals, appertaining to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true sense of Holy Scripture which our holy Mother Church held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scripture; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret the Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense, nor likewise, contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.⁴

Again in Chapter III, "On Faith". the Council declared:

³ Quoted from "Creeds of Christendom", Vol. II, by Philip Schaff, Harper & Bros., New York. The underlining is mine.

⁴ Schaff, op. cit.

Further, all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and which ordinary and universal magisterium, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.

The Second Vatican Council which was called together by Pope John XXIII also adopted a paper on "Divine Revelation" in which this subject was treated. Since the time of the Reformation, two streams of thought were present in the Romish Church. One school, while not denying what Trent had said concerning the role of the Church and its authority in matters of faith, nevertheless held to the idea that Scripture was the sole source of truth. Even this school however, while denying an authority on a par with Scripture in tradition, nevertheless held to the supreme authority of the magisterium over Scripture. Another school of thought held to "the two sources theory" which taught that both Scripture and tradition are sources of truth. The Council deliberately steered away from this burning issue in the Church and made no effort to settle it. But it did make some striking statements concerning the role of tradition.

After explaining, in Paragraph 8, what the Council meant by "tradition", the Council goes on to write in Paragraph 9:

Holy tradition, then, and Holy Scripture are closely interconnected and they intercommunicate. For flowing from the same divine source, they both somehow join into one and run toward the same end. Holy Scripture is God's own speech as written under the influx of the divine Spirit; by holy Tradition, God's Word, entrusted to the apostles by the Lord Christ and the Holy Spirit, is relayed integrally to their successors, so that, following the light of the Spirit of truth, these may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it in their discourses. Consequently, the Church does not draw her certainty about all that is revealed with the help of Holy Scripture alone. Both are, therefore, to be received and venerated with equal pious affection

⁵Schaff, op. cit.

and reverence.⁶

One commentator of this paper writes concerning these words:

The theory known as "the two sources of revelation" (Scripture and Tradition) is missing from the text; if one confines oneself to the Dogmatic Constitution and the interventions which explain it, one cannot say that revealed truths are handed on by Tradition alone, and which Scripture does not contain in any way. Yet Tradition is not assigned a role that is merely interpretative of Scripture. It seems that an advance is being made towards the idea that revelation is found wholly in Scripture and wholly in Tradition, which are therefore not two distinct sources but two conjoined forms, both of which yield the whole revealed truth, the Gospel of Christ, according to modes that are different and proper to each.⁷

Whether the commentator interprets correctly the conciliar decision may be open to question. But the fact is that the paragraph speaks of a tradition which has authority in its own right apart from Scripture.

This idea is strengthened by what the council says in Paragraph 10:

Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture form the one sacred deposit of God's Word which has been entrusted to the Church. . . .

The task of providing an authentic interpretation of God's Word in Scripture or Tradition has been entrusted only to the Church's living magisterium, whose authority is wielded in the name of Jesus Christ. This magisterium is not above God's Word; it rather serves the Word, teaching only what has been transmitted, as, by divine mandate and with the Holy Spirit's assistance, it listens to God's Word with piety, keeps it

⁶ Quoted from "Revelation, A Protestant View. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation." Roger Schutz and Max Thurian; Newman Press, 1968, p. 89.

⁷ Schutz and Thurian, op.cit., pp. 40,41

in awe and expounds it with fidelity. All that it puts forward to be believed as divinely revealed, it draws from this one deposit of faith. Patently, therefore, Holy Tradition, Holy Scripture and the Church's magisterium are, according to God's wise design, so interconnected and united that none can stand without the others, and that all together effectively contribute, each in its own way, under the motion of the one Holy Spirit, to the salvation of souls. ⁸

Again, in Paragraph 21, the Council speaks of "Holy Tradition as the supreme rule of faith." While the Council never spelled out clearly the relation between Scripture and tradition, the commentators referred to above suggest the possibility that the idea is of Scripture enlightened by tradition. But whatever may be the details of interpretation, one thing is clear: Rome has not moved in any significant respects, from the position against which the Reformers rebelled.

In connection with this position of the Romish Church, and closely related to it, was the position of Rome that the Scriptures were an obscure book. The Medieval Roman Church denied the perspicuity of the Scriptures and took the position that the Scriptures were so dark and obscure that they were incapable of being understood by anyone except a trained clergy led by an infallible pope. It was dangerous in the extreme for anyone to take the Scriptures into his own hands.

That this position is closely related to the idea of the authority of tradition and the authority of the Church institute is clear. Only the Church is able to speak authoritatively on the meaning of Scripture. The "laity" cannot understand it. The clergy alone, through the sacrament of ordination, are qualified to ascertain Scripture's meaning. The laity must accept, without question, what the Church teaches.

Luther himself rebuked Erasmus, the Prince of the Humanists, for teaching "that impudent and blasphemous saying, 'the Scriptures are obscure.'" ⁹

⁸ Schutz and Thurian, op. cit.

⁹ Wood, op. cit., p. 135. - 10 -

And in close connection with this was the Romish denial of the priesthood of all believers. The Spirit of Christ which is the Spirit of truth is not given to any except the clergy. Hence, the "laity" were in no position to take the Scriptures in their own hands and interpret them. It was sheer folly and crass irresponsibility to give the Scriptures to people who were incapable of understanding them anyway; and the results could only be disastrous.

There have been some modern claims among Romish theologians that the Church never took the Scriptures away from the people. And, while this may be true if one seeks an authoritative church declaration on the subject, the overwhelming mass of evidence is that Rome did exactly this. Only this can explain, for example, why the Romish Church raised such vehement objections against the translations in the common tongue which came from the pens of Wycliffe and Luther.

And it is clear why Rome would do this. The magisterium was responsible for all the teaching of the Church and for determining the content of the faith of her members. For the supreme authority of faith and life rested with the Church itself. To put the Scriptures in the hands of the "laity" could easily result in a discovering of ideas which the Church considered heretical. The people were permitted no free thinking or free exegesis of Scripture. Scripture was not, in its own right and standing alone, authoritative. The people were to bow before the teaching Church.

The result of this was a complete denial of the fundamental principle of free interpretation of Scripture. Interpretation was bound by an authority outside Scripture and Scripture's authority was subjected to the Church as the custodian of tradition.

* * * *

A fundamental principle of the Reformation was the principle of the absolute authority of Scripture and the principle of the free interpretation of the Word of God.

What did this principle mean?

The Reformers, without exception, repudiated the position of Rome. They pointed out that the church fathers, the councils

And the popes had all erred. This, in itself, was proof that tradition could not be authoritative. The Reformers did not, with a careless wave, dismiss all tradition to the junk heaps of history. They did not dispense with all tradition and brand it all as useless. Rather they claimed that tradition had no authority in its own right. Only that part of tradition had authority and could be accepted as the content of faith which properly expressed the truth of Scripture itself. Then its authority was not autonomous; its authority was derivative. The authority of the traditions of the Church was the authority of Scripture itself.

This was even true of the great confessions of the Church. The Reformers did not repudiate these confessions. On the contrary, with veneration for the confessions, the years of the Reformation were the greatest years in church history for confessional writings. But they insisted that the Confessions could only lead us to the Scriptures. They must be constantly tested by and compared with Scripture, and the authority they carry must be the authority of the Word of God.

But this same principle of the Reformers was opposed to the principle of the authority of the teaching Church as well. It had to be. If the Reformers repudiated the idea of the authority of tradition and stood upon the principle of the authority of Scripture, then it was but a logical and necessary step to deny the authority of the magisterium, the institutional keeper of tradition.

It is a striking fact that on these points all the Reformers were in complete agreement. They had their differences on various subjects. E.g., Luther and Calvin disagreed on the doctrine of the Lord's supper. But all the Reformers both on the continent and in England and Scotland were agreed on these fundamental questions.

And because they were agreed on these questions, they were agreed on the positive teachings of Scripture on the other questions as well. The Reformers saw very clearly that this implied the principle of the free interpretation of Scripture. Absolutely nothing could stand between the interpreter and the Word of God. Nothing could dictate to him how Scripture had to be

explained. Nothing and no one could bind him when he came to Scripture. The principle of absolutely free exegesis was inherent in the whole concept of authority. If the Church interposed itself or the traditions of the apostles, fathers, councils or popes between the interpreter and the Word of God, it was guilty of a serious and heinous crime.

And from this it followed that the Scriptures were, in their own right, perspicuous. It is plain that this follows. It is only if Scripture is dark and obscure, difficult of interpretation, that it needs an authoritative interpreter outside itself. But if the Scriptures are authoritative in their own right and claim free interpretation, this can alone be because they are clear and easily interpreted. They are understandable even by small children.

And so it was but natural that the Reformers reasserted the principle of the priesthood of all believers. This meant many things, to be sure, especially overagainst Roman Catholic sacerdotalism. But, in this connection, it meant that all believers have the Spirit and are able to interpret the Scriptures. This work must not and cannot be left to the theologians of the Church. All believers can and must participate in this labor.

* * * * *

It was soon apparent to Rome and to the Reformers that this principle involved a very serious problem. Basically, the problem was that such a view as this is extremely dangerous. On the one hand, Rome early warned that this principle would lead inevitably to a situation in which every man would interpret the Scriptures as he saw fit. If the Bible was given to every man and every man was his own interpreter, the result would be chaos and anarchy as every man interpreted God's Word according to his own personal ideas. No longer would there be any uniformity and agreement of belief. Rome repeatedly warned the Churches of the Reformation that this would be the inevitable result.

On the other hand, this would, in turn, lead to a fragmenting of the Church. It would lead to denominationalism and a fracturing of the body of Christ. And Rome was quick to point out

gleefully that this was precisely what did happen and proof of the worthlessness of the principle.

Hence it was asserted by Rome that there must be some authoritative voice other than Scripture. The Church can serve in such a capacity and prevent such anarchy from taking place. And always the temptation is strong to follow Rome's siren call. Always, even in our own day, there is a strong tendency to set up some authority which can dictate belief and impose uniformity of faith in matters of Scriptural interpretation. The fears which Rome expressed and the criticism levelled against the Reformation have continued to trouble Protestantism.¹⁰

But what was the answer of the Reformers to this problem?

They did not simply dodge the problem and act as if it did not exist in the hope that it would go away. They did not simply refuse to answer it. Nor did they take the position as is sometimes maintained, that, while it is true that there is risk involved in this principle, the risk is well worth taking. Some have asserted this. They have acknowledged that risk exists; but they have thought the principle important enough to take the risk.¹¹ To take this position is a tacit admission that the principle is defective.

What Rome said was the weakness of this position of the Reformers was not acknowledged by them to be so in fact. The Reformers were pleading for freedom and were willing to lay down their lives for it. Rome interpreted this plea for freedom as a kind of licentiousness. Rome was saying that by abandoning the authority

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There is another solution to this problem posed by modern ecumenism. This solution maintains that what a man believes is of secondary importance. His actions are all that really count. Every man may, for the most part, interpret Scripture as he pleases. And in this way all Churches can find shelter under the same ecclesiastical roof. This is supposed to be the supreme virtue of tolerance. And many tend, to a great or lesser degree, in this direction. But what is striking about such modern tolerance is that, while it embraces every deviation and heresy invented by men, it is frightfully intolerant of the truth. There is room under such an ecclesiastical roof for anyone who believes anything, except the man who bows before the truth. This man is the exception, and for him there is no room.

11

Schaff seems to suggest this idea in his "History of the Christian Church." Vol. VII, pp. 48-50. Wm.B.Eerdmans Publishing Company.

of the Church, the Reformers were denying all authority, for this is essentially what licentiousness is. But this was not true and a slander of the position which the Reformers had taken. They did not say that interpretation of Scripture was without authority. They insisted emphatically that the authority of interpretation was the authority of Scripture itself. To deny an outside authority which impinges upon the Scriptures, is not to deny all authority. The Scriptures are authoritative in their own right. And because this is true, they are the authority of all interpretation. It is before Scripture alone that we must bow.

How did all this work out in the actual development of this truth? There were two principles which the Reformers developed in this connection--both of great importance.

The first principle is the truth that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Because Scripture is, in its own right, authoritative, Scripture is also its own interpreter. This is true because of the nature of Scripture. It is not a book like any other book which has been written. It stands among all books as unique. Scripture is a unity, an organism, a whole. Even though written over the course of some two thousand years, it nevertheless is one complete book to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away.

It is such an organism because God is its one Author. The Scriptures are the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Together they constitute a whole. Without any single part, the picture is incomplete. For this reason, Scripture cannot contradict itself. And for this reason, Scripture interprets itself. Every single part of Scripture must be interpreted in the light of the rest of Scripture. Just as no single piece of a jigsaw puzzle makes any sense taken by itself, so also does not Scripture make any sense if each piece is taken in separation from the rest. Just as any piece of a jigsaw puzzle has meaning and significance only as it is a part of the whole, so also does each part of Scripture have meaning and significance only when taken with the whole.

It is in this connection that the Reformers spoke of the analogia fidei, the analogy of faith. By this they meant that the

whole of Scripture must be taken into account in the interpretation of any given passage. As Luther himself wrote:

Such is the way of the whole Scripture: it wants to be interpreted by a comparison of passages from everywhere, and understood under its own direction. The safest of all methods for discerning the meaning of Scripture is to work for it by drawing together and scrutinizing passages.¹²

The Reformers never wearied of reminding their audiences that this was the way the Lord Himself dealt with Scripture and that this was the constant practice of the New Testament writers in their treatment of the Old Testament.

It was always characteristic of heretics that they ignore this fundamental principle. They base their erroneous views on selected passages without interpreting them in the light of all Scripture. Any heresy can thus be proved. Luther was well aware of this. He wrote:

The abominable sophists . . . support themselves with Scripture because they would look laughable if they tried to force only their own dreams on men; but they do not quote Scripture in its entirety. They always snatch up what appears to favour them; but what is against them they either cleverly conceal or corrupt with their cunning glosses.¹³

This principle of the analogia fidei however, implies a much more fundamental principle. That principle is that the only Interpreter of Scripture is God Himself. He is Scripture's Author; He alone can interpret Scripture. He does so by means of the Scripture itself. As Luther wrote;

God alone can interpret the Scriptures. If God does not open and explain Holy Writ, no one can understand it; it will remain a closed book, enveloped in darkness.¹⁴

12

Wood, op.cit., pp. 161, 162.

13

Ibid., p. 163

Not even the believer can, of himself, interpret God's Word. Because God is the Author, God is the Interpreter. This every believer must recognize or he will never understand what Scripture says.

Among Christians the rule is not to argue or investigate, not to be a smart aleck or a rationalistic know-it-all; but to hear, believe, and persevere in the Word of God, through which alone we obtain whatever knowledge we have of God and divine things. We are not to determine out of ourselves what we must believe about Him, but to hear and learn it from Him.¹⁵

The Anabaptists think that they can measure the word of God . . . with their own yardstick and judge it on the basis of their own education and their own notion as to its meaning. This settles it for them, and God ends up playing the role of pupil to all men.¹⁶

This then, is the first principle so emphatically insisted upon by the Reformers when their position on Scripture's authority was challenged by Rome.

The second principle is that the believer is the only one who is able to understand the Scriptures. This is closely related to the first principle, for the point is not that the believer possesses this power in himself; rather he possesses this power because of the operation of the Holy Spirit in his heart. Thus the point of connection is that God always remains the sole interpreter of Holy Writ. Objectively, He interprets the Scriptures by the Scriptures. Subjectively, He gives His people power to interpret the Scriptures by means of the Spirit of Christ. This is the Spirit promised by Christ Himself Who would lead into all truth.

On this point too, the Reformers were very insistent. Luther writes:

¹⁴
Ibid., p. 160

¹⁵
Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶
Ibid., p. 121.

God's Word has to be the most marvellous thing in heaven and on earth. That is why it must at one and the same time do two opposite things, namely, give perfect light and glory to those who believe it, and bring utter blindness and shame upon those who believe it not. To the former it must be the most certain and best known of all things; to the latter it must be the most unknown and obscure of all things. The former must extol and praise it above all things; the latter must blaspheme and slander it above all things. So does it operate to perfection and achieve in the hearts of men no insignificant works, but strange and terrible works.¹⁷

And again:

Understanding of these words (of Scripture) that I hear must be wrought in me by the Holy Spirit. He makes me spiritual too. The Word is spiritual and I also become spiritual: for He inscribes it in my heart, and then, in brief, all is spirit.¹⁸

When Luther was writing about the interpretation of John 1, he said:

It is foreign and strange to reason, and particularly to the worldly-wise. No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit. It is as impossible of comprehension by reason as it is inaccessible to the touch of the hand.¹⁹

Calvin, too, stressed this point. He writes:

Religion appearing, to profane men, to consist wholly in opinion, in order that they may

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 136

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 160, 161.

not believe any thing on foolish or slight grounds, they wish and expect it to be proved by rational arguments, that Moses and the Prophets spake by divine inspiration. But I reply, that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason. For as God alone is a sufficient witness of Himself in His own word, so also the word will never gain credit in the hearts of men, till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit. It is necessary, therefore, that the same Spirit, who spake by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate into our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely intrusted to them.²⁰

And again:

Let it be considered, then, as an undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit, feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason; but it obtains the credit which it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit. For though it conciliate our reverence by its internal majesty, it never seriously affects us till it is confirmed by the Spirit in our hearts. Therefore, being illuminated by Him, we now believe the divine original of the Scripture, not from our own judgment or that of others, but we esteem the certainty, that we have received it from God's own mouth by the ministry of men, to be superior to that of any human judgment, and equal to that of an intuitive perception of God Himself in it.²¹

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Institutes of the Christian Religion, I, VII, 4; Allen translation; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949.

²¹

Ibid., I, VII, 5.

Thus the principle which was emphatically set forth was that the man devoid of the Spirit could not possibly understand God's Word. If he offered his explanation, it would be clear that it was incorrect by the testimony of the Scriptures themselves. Only the believer, enlightened by the Spirit, was able to be a true and correct interpreter.

This principle, in turn, has two aspects to it.

The first is that the believer himself is the only one who can function as an interpreter of Scripture because he has been given the Spirit Who is the Author of faith whereby he bows in humility before the Word of God and receives its good instruction. He does not come to the Word of God with preconceived notions. He does not talk to the Word. He does not impose his own ideas upon that Word and make the Scriptures agree with him. He listens to what the Spirit says to the Churches--objectively through the Word and subjectively in his heart; for only then is God the Divine Interpreter of His own speech. The believer bows in humble adoration, as a little child, and listens to God.

Secondly, the believer can and does do this only in connection with the whole Church. If a believer isolates himself from the Church he forfeits his right to function as an interpreter of Scripture. The Scriptures are known only in communion with the people of God. Within the fellowship of the saints alone is it possible for the child of God to hear Scripture speak. He must, first of all, stand in communion with the Church of his own time, with the saints who live with him upon the earth. And he must do this in connection with and in submission to the preaching of the Word as it comes to the gathering of believers and their seed on the Lord's Day. But he must also stand in communion with all the saints who have searched the Scriptures before him and have now gone to join the company of just men made perfect. For one Spirit, enlightening the saints of every time, has dwelt in the Church from the day of Pentecost onward. And that one Spirit guides the saints mutually into the truth. The believer does not despise the work of the Spirit in the Church gone by. This is why the Confessions of the Church can surely lead him to Scripture. Nor does he turn his back upon the saints with whom he shares the blessings of the

revelation of God in Christ. In living communion with them all, he comes to Scripture in humility and reverence. But he never places anything from the Church of the past above the Scriptures as an authority in its own right. Before the Scriptures alone he bows.

When this is done, there will be agreement among believers. It cannot be different. And, in all the ages of time, it has not been different. The Word of God speaks one language; and one Spirit leads and guides into all truth. When believers together bow in faith before the Word of God, they hear the one speech of God as it comes to the Church throughout all time.

There will always be heretics who deny the truth and seek to cloak their heresies with erroneous appeals to Scripture. There will always be differences on minute points of exegesis between saints. Here too freedom must be permitted. But in the truths of the revelation of God the Church will agree and heresies will be clearly shown for what they are. The Church will hear what the Spirit has to say to her.

It is all aptly summed up in the Belgic Confession:

We receive all these books, and these alone, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling. (Article IV).

And:

. . . Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than

vanity itself. Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house. (Article VII).

Always the temptation is to interject between the believer and God's Word another authority, other than the authority of God's Word itself. It has happened before. It is happening again. The gravest threat is now to interject the authority of science between the believer and Scripture. This is but another form of rationalism. But it is very real. Repeatedly we are taught that we must reinterpret the Scriptures because the findings of science demand this. The findings of science not only show that the earth is much older than formerly supposed, but the findings of science give clear indication of how creation came about; i.e., in some sort of evolutionary fashion. And the abundance of scientific materials make such alterations imperative. But the findings of science are, after all, the conclusions of men's minds. Do they have authority in their own right? This is surely the assumption. Science must, it is said, tell us not only the "when" of creation; but also the "how". And Scripture must be interpreted in this light.

But if the Church permits this to happen, it will have fallen into the same old error of Rome, in a modified form, and it will have forsaken the very precious principle for which the Reformers fought. The believer must be on guard against all this. If the word of scientists is to be believed, then the Scriptures are no more clear; they are obscure; and the uninformed laymen must leave the interpretation of Scripture at key points to the experts. Then the office of believers is once again denied, for the simple and uneducated child of God cannot hear any longer the Word of God. He must let others interpret for him. But if the believer permits this to happen, then the child of God is robbed of God and of His Word. He has let others snatch this Word out of his hands. He has permitted others to take that Word from him.

Has he not then lost it in a very real sense? It is not his; not his to read, to study, to use to instruct his children, to take with him down the difficult way of life. It belongs to those who have special abilities to understand it. And it is surrendered to authorities other than the authority of God.

The Scriptures must have free course. There is a spiritual issue involved here. It is the spiritual issue of faith and unbelief. It is the spiritual issue of bowing in humility before God in Christ or exalting one's self in proud unbelief above the Scriptures. It is an issue that relates to the salvation of our souls. The child of God who clings to Scripture, clings to God in Christ--and finds eternal peace.

AS TO THE DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

(4)

--Prof. H. C. Hoeksema--

The main burden of this series of essays has been to emphasize the truth that Holy Scripture is wholly divine.

In our discussion of this doctrine we are now ready to discuss the truth of what has come to be called organic inspiration. The latter is the term which has been devised in dogmatics to express dogmatically the fact of the wonder of Holy Scripture and the fact of the wonder-work of God whereby He produced Holy Scripture.

What is meant by organic inspiration? To this question we shall devote our attention both negatively and positively. And in connection with this question, therefore, we shall discuss the alleged human factor and human element in Scripture.

Only too often when the subject of organic inspiration is discussed, it is simply interpreted to mean that inspiration is non-mechanical. It is explained that the Holy Spirit did not use the human writers as mere machines, as we use our typewriters or pens or recorders; neither did He use these human writers as mere amanuenses, as an office may employ a staff of stenographers or secretaries. But, thus it is explained, the Holy Spirit used the writers of Holy Scripture as living and thinking and willing men, with their mind and will, and without suppressing their individuality. It is pointed out frequently that the individuality of each human writer becomes clearly manifest in his writings. There is individuality as to choice of words, style, manner of argumentation. There is a marked difference between the style of Amos and of Isaiah, or between the manner in which the apostle John presents the truth and Paul's method of argumentation.

Now all this is perfectly true. But it is not all the truth. And because it is not all the truth, but in fact really fails to give expression to the heart of the truth concerning organic inspiration, this presentation becomes dangerously erroneous. It leads to the distinction which is commonly made, even in Reformed

circles, between a human factor and a divine factor in the production of Holy Scripture. And this, in turn, leads to another commonly made distinction between a human element and a divine element in the contents of Holy Scripture.

This question as to the Human and the divine factor in the Bible was one of the chief points of controversy in the famous Dr. R. Janssen Case in the Christian Reformed Church, dealt with by the synods of 1920 and 1922. Dr. Janssen taught that there was a human factor as well as a divine involved in Holy Scripture, and that, therefore, with a view to the human factor, mere human, i.e., historical and literary, critical methods could be followed to account for the origin of Holy Scripture. Dr. Janssen's fellow professors disagreed with and debated his conclusion, that is, that there is also a divine and a human element in the contents of Holy Scripture, and that therefore the methods of historical and literary criticism may be applied to Holy Scripture. However, they conceded the fact, namely, that there is a divine and a human factor involved in the production of Holy Scripture. According to this view, for example, Isaiah was there with all his individual traits, with his mode of thinking and education; and the Holy Spirit in organic inspiration did not suppress Isaiah's individuality, but in inspiration simply employed it as it was. And so the human Isaiah and the divine Spirit united and collaborated to write the Word of God. Thus understood, the result is necessarily that there is not only a divine-human factor in the production of Scripture but also a divine and a human element in the contents of the Bible. One may attempt to avoid this conclusion, but he cannot do so logically if he clings to the idea of a divine and a human factor in the composition of the Bible. The theory of a divine and a human factor leads inevitably to the conception held by Dr. R. Janssen at the time of the Janssen Case --the very same conception, essentially, that is held today by the adherents of the so-called "new theology" and "new hermeneutics" who are so free in their criticism of Holy Scripture. But it is evident that if Scripture is the product of a human and a

divine factor, it is not absolutely the Word of God. In the instance of the Janssen Case matters took the peculiar turn which led ultimately to the common grace controversy. In connection with his theory of Scripture, Dr. Janssen explained this human and divine factor as the happy cooperation of so-called common grace and special grace; and it was no wonder that he began to accuse his opponents of a denial of common grace, something which ultimately led to a division among those who were at first united in their opposition to Dr. Janssen's teachings.

This same concession with respect to a human factor and even a human element in Holy Scripture--although sharp distinction is not always made between "factor" and "element"--is very commonly found among what would be classed as conservative theologians today. It is to be expected, of course, that various adherents of the new theology and the new hermeneutics in the Reformed community must somehow find and even emphasize such a human factor and human element in Holy Scripture. But in our opinion this concession on the part of those who otherwise stand opposed to the new theology is as fatal today as it was in the Janssen Case. We will gladly admit that some of these theologians today do not see, or at least do not want, the consequences which may be inferred from their concession of some kind of human factor or human element in Scripture. We also gladly admit that some want to limit severely the extent of such a human factor or element, to limit it, for example, to matters of form and style. But our point is that those who concede such a human factor have in effect conceded a fundamental principle and have made themselves weak in defending the truth of the infallibility of the Word of God. Ultimately, on that basis such a defense becomes impossible because it is inconsistent. Moreover, we believe, too, that history confirms our contention. It may be possible, by force of tradition, to maintain for a time the truth of the infallibility of Holy Scripture. Eventually, however, concessions are made; and finally the entire structure of inspiration and infallibility comes under attack and collapses.

From a positive point of view, as we have already suggested, what is at stake is the right understanding of what has come to be known as organic inspiration. To this positive aspect we shall give our attention in due time. At present we wish to consider this matter of a so-called human factor and its implications.

We will begin with a few quotations.

First of all, we call attention to the following from the pen of M. Eugene Osterhaven.¹ In this quotation he does not address himself to the specific problem which we are considering; in fact, he attributes the denial of a human factor to a rather surprisingly different motive. Nevertheless, he concedes too much when he writes as follows:

The divine-human character of Scripture means that it was composed by men in human language as they were motivated and guided by the Spirit of God. Because God has used the medium of human language to make His will known and has employed men to put His message into writing, there is variety in the literary form of the Bible. Individual styles and the culture and background of human authors can often be detected, as well as the historical setting out of which the particular writing comes. These are not new discoveries but are as old as the writings themselves, although for a time they were lost to the church. Calvin was very much aware of them, as his commentaries on the books of the Bible show. Moreover, modern biblical scholarship has contributed greatly to our appreciation of the Bible as a human and historical document.

There are those who object to the characterization of the Bible as a human book. In the interests of its sacred character the only adjective they will ascribe to it is divine. The humble manner in which most of it

1) The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition (pp. 75, 76), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1971.

came into being would be an offence to them, if they were to reflect on it, just as the manger in Bethlehem and the cross on the hill have been an offence to others. The communication of God's will in the midst of thunder and lightning, as at Sinai, is understandable, but that it should come through an obscure prophet or in the drafting of an apparently ordinary letter is hardly worthy of the nature of revelation.

The reply to such reasoning is that this is the nature of revelation. In most instances God has not made His will known in a spectacular manner but in a quiet, unostentatious way. In the time of crisis in his life the prophet Elijah stood on Mount Horeb as Moses had done earlier to receive a message from God. First a powerful wind tore rocks loose from the mountain, but God's Word did not come in the wind. After that there was an earthquake, but the Word did not come through the earthquake either. Then there was a fire, but neither was it the bearer of the message. After the fire there was "a still small voice" and this was the voice of God. (I Kings 19: 12).

Paul who was aware of the divine manner of action, and was himself a chosen vessel, writes that among those who were called there were not many who were

wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (I Cor.1: 26-29).

Revelation has come in this manner likewise. It was not given to the priest Amaziah, or to King Jeroboam of Israel, but to Amos who was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. The Lord took him from following the flock and said, "Go, prophecy to my people Israel" (Amos 7: 14 f.).

Amos' message was cast in human speech so that both he and Israel could understand it. It is as clearly and fully human as a message can be. It passed through Amos' mind and his vocal organs framed it. Moreover, it must have been present with all the power of his person. It was indeed Amos' message. But it was more than that. It was divine. It had originated with God, and what Amos spoke was precisely what God had commanded. As it was fully human, it was also fully divine. That is the character of the inscripturated Word of God likewise. It is the Word of God in and through the words of men, God lisping to us, His children, as Calvin puts it, as a nurse lisps to a little child to make him understand. The appearance of the sacred record is like that of any other book but its content is a message from God. The message is found in the Bible and the Bible is the Word of God.

The divine-human character of the Bible is the offence of particularity. It was a stumbling block to the great German thinker Lessing and a host of others. That God's revelation should have occurred in certain times and at certain places and that the record of those once-for-all experiences has been deposited in a book was too much for Lessing and many of his eighteenth-century contemporaries. If there is any revelation of God, these men reasoned, it must be in the laws of nature and the general principles existing in the minds of all men, or at least of the philosophers. The most amazing assumption and express teaching of the literature of that period is man's innate ability to know whatever needs to be known about God. Belief in the Bible as a necessary, special revelation from God was folly to these men and they weakened it by argument when they were able or treated it with outright contempt. Next, we call attention to the following by Dr. M. Arntzen,

a Dutch theologian who is known for his opposition to the liberal trends in the Netherlands today. In his essay in the book Interpreting God's Word Today, p. 183, he writes as follows:¹

Although the emphasis on the human factor in the composition of Scripture is improper and abusive, we should assess accurately the human element of the Bible. We know that the Apostle John is the apostle of love, as is evident from his letters. Paul's letters differ from those of Peter, and the sublime language of Isaiah varies greatly from that of Malachi. Certainly Herman Hoeksema goes too far when he speaks on the divine and human factor in the Bible. Says he,

It is not even safe to speak of a divine and human factor in Holy Scripture. It is true, of course, that the revelation of God came to us through men and in the course of a human history. But we may never forget that also the cloth on which this divine work of revelation was embroidered by the Holy Spirit is not from man, but from God.

Of course, in all fairness we must admit that every comparison has its defect. Yet when the work of the sacred writers of the Bible is presented by means of this comparison, has the writer not become too passive in his work? The introduction to the Gospel according to Luke is often used to show that the writers did their own work, granted that the Holy Spirit guided them and kept them from error. We may not speak of a difference in degree but must posit a basic difference between the guidance of the Holy Spirit for all believers and the driving force of the Holy Spirit employed when the sacred writers composed Scripture.

With respect to this quotation we make the following comments:

- 1) Here is a typical instance of one who clings to the idea of a human factor and a human element, but complains about an improper and abusive emphasis thereof.

1) Simon Kistemaker, Editor; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1970

2) Neither here, however, nor elsewhere in his essay does the writer furnish an adequate definition and positive description of the proper and useful emphasis on the human factor and element of the Bible.

3) The facts mentioned concerning John and Paul and Isaiah and Malachi will have to be conceded by any right-minded student of Holy Scripture. Moreover, they were certainly recognized also by Herman Hoeksema, whose position is criticized by Dr. Arntzen. The issue, however, is not whether these facts are correct; it is rather whether these facts may be said to constitute evidences of a human factor and element in Scripture. In other words, will an adequate statement of organic inspiration, which takes into account the data cited by Dr. Arntzen, include the idea of a human factor and a human element? Or will such an adequately stated doctrine of organic inspiration precisely exclude the idea of a human factor while it nevertheless explains in as far as this is possible the data mentioned above?

4) With respect to the questioning criticism that the writer becomes "too passive" in Herman Hoeksema's presentation, we may note: a) That the expression "too passive" seems to imply degrees of passivity and the possibility of an unacceptable extreme of passivity. Is this possible? And if so, where are the limits? b) With all due regard for Dr. Arntzen's concession that every comparison has its defect, did it not occur to the writer that the "cloth" of which Hoeksema speaks in this connection is a rational, moral fabric? Surely, Dr. Arntzen does not imagine that Herman Hoeksema conceived of the sacred writers as mere cloth, or as stocks and blocks? That, after all, is the false accusation which has always been stuffed in the boots of Reformed men by their opponents. Besides, quotations which show that Herman Hoeksema had no such conception of the writers of Holy Scripture could be multiplied. c) Would not the same criticism of "too passive" have to be brought against Scripture itself? Does not the Bible frequently employ language concerning men and nations which would make an Arminian bring the stock-and-block charge? Is

not Assyria pictured in Scripture as the axe wherewith God heweth and the saw which He draweth? Are not God's people admonished to remember the rock whence they were hewn? In fact, does not Scripture teach that prophecy came not by the will of man, but that holy men were borne by the Holy Ghost? Do such statements also make men "too passive?"

5) Meanwhile, we can appreciate Dr. Arntzen's positing of a basic difference between the Spirit's guidance of all believers and the work of the Spirit in inspiration, though we do not particularly appreciate the expression "driying force." We would be inclined to say concerning such an expression that it makes the writers "too passive!"

Even the renowned B.B. Warfield, in our opinion, does not offer complete clarity on this issue, much as we respect his fidelity to the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. He also concedes the presence of a human factor, though he recognizes and warns against its pitfalls.¹ Writes he:

It has been customary among a certain school of writers to speak of the Scriptures, because thus "inspired," as a Divine-human book, and to appeal to the analogy of Our Lord's Divine-human personality to explain their peculiar qualities as such. The expression calls attention to an important fact, and the analogy holds good a certain distance. There are human and Divine sides to Scripture, and, as we cursorily examine it, we may perceive in it, alternately, traits which suggest now the one, now the other factor in its origin. But the analogy with Our Lord's Divine-human personality may easily be pressed beyond reason. There is no hypostatic union between the Divine and the human in Scripture; we cannot parallel the "inscripturation" of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God. The Scriptures are merely the product of Divine and human forces working together to produce a product in the production of

1) B.B. Warfield, The Inspiration And Authority of the Bible, pp. 162-163; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia, Pa., 1948

which the human forces work under the initiation and prevalent direction of the Divine: the person of Our Lord unites in itself Divine and human natures, each of which retains its distinctness while operating only in relation to the other. Between such diverse things there can exist only a remote analogy; and, in point of fact, the analogy in the present instance amounts to no more than that in both cases Divine and human factors are involved, though very differently. In the one they unite to constitute a Divine-human person, in the other they cooperate to perform a Divine-human work. Even so distant an analogy may enable us, however, to recognize that as, in the case of Our Lord's person, the human nature remains truly human while yet it can never fall into sin or error because it can never act out of relation with the Divine nature into conjunction with which it has been brought; so in the case of the production of Scripture by the conjoint action of human and Divine factors, the human factors have acted as human factors, and have left their mark on the product as such, and yet cannot have fallen into that error which we say it is human to fall into, because they have not acted apart from the Divine factors, by themselves, but only under their unerring guidance.

It is true that Dr. Warfield makes the human factor of which he speaks completely subject to the divine; and in so doing he preserves the inerrancy of the Scripture in his view. But the fact remains that he speaks of such a human factor and even of the conjoint action of human and Divine factors. One would also almost be inclined to ask whether Warfield's human factor can indeed be said to function as a factor. Yet the language is there for someone to employ as a wedge to break open Warfield's view of Holy Scripture.

In our opinion, the late Dr. Edward J. Young in his rather well-known work, Thy Word Is Truth, writes much about this subject

with which we find ourselves in agreement.¹ He expresses himself clearly and carefully and avoids some of the undefined expressions which others employ. We shall conclude the present installment of this series by making several lengthy quotations from this work. On pages 65 and 66 he writes:

There is one very important factor in the doctrine of inspiration which hitherto has been mentioned only in cursory fashion. That is the human side of the Scriptures. Peter stated expressly that "holy men who were borne along of the Holy Ghost spake." We have said little about these holy men whom God used in the composition of the Bible. We have simply sought to make it clear, since they themselves also emphasize this fact, that the Scriptures are from God. It is, we have contended, necessary to recognize the Divine origin of the Bible, and the implications of such recognition.

It is likewise necessary and important to do full justice to what the Bible has to say about its human side. This is today the more important because of the constant misrepresentations of this aspect of the doctrine. We are told, for example, that the human writers were mere pen holders whose hands moved under the direction of the Spirit. The historic doctrine is quite frequently parodied as being "static." The writers wrote as mere automata, so the parody runs, having received what was dictated to them and then placed it in writing. When modern authors proclaim, "We want no mechanical theory of inspiration," they give one the impression that they believe they are refuting an actual error. As a matter of fact, however, the idea of mechanical dictation is nothing more than a straw man. Recent conservative writers on the subject of inspiration have sought to do justice to the human side of Scripture; they have been far from advocating a mechanical dictation theory.

1) Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1957

What shall we say about this word dictation in regard to the doctrine of inspiration? It was a word that Calvin, to take one example, did not hesitate to employ. "Whoever, then," he says, "wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit." In speaking in such a vein Calvin is simply following the thought of the Bible itself. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, did not hesitate to say, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Corinthians 2: 13). If we were to attempt to bring out more clearly the precise force of the Apostle's language, we might render, "in words taught of the Spirit." Paul is saying as patently as he can that the words which he is employing are those which the Spirit has taught him, and this is precisely what Calvin also maintains.

At the same time, although the term dictation in itself is not objectionable and expresses forcefully the Divine origin of the words of the Bible, it is perhaps unwise to use the word today without some qualification. A new connotation has come upon the term which it obviously did not have in the day of Calvin. When we speak of dictation, there immediately comes to mind the thought of the businessman dictating a letter to his stenographer, or the teacher dictating an exercise to her pupils. In both these instances it does not make too great a difference who takes down the dictation. One stenographer can probably do it as well as another, and if one is not available, another can easily be obtained. Likewise, when the teacher dictates a passage to her class, the important thing is that the pupils take down precisely what has been dictated, and do not add to it

or subtract from it. The person of the stenographer or of the pupil is in reality a comparatively negligible factor. Such, however, is not the situation with respect to the human writers of the Bible. True enough, the words which they employed were taught them by the Holy Spirit, but it is not the case that it makes no difference who wrote those words. It is not true that Peter might just as well have written the Pauline epistles as the great Apostle himself. It would serve the interest of clarity, therefore, if, in the discussion of this doctrine, we lay stress upon the fact that although the Bible teaches that its very words are from God, it most emphatically does not teach a mechanical dictation view of inspiration.

On pages 70 and 71 of the same book Dr. Young calls attention to an aspect of this entirely subject which is well worth remembering:

The question may very well be raised how the Spirit actually controlled the writers of Scripture so that they wrote expressly what He desired and yet at the same time were responsible individuals whose personalities were not stifled. How, for example, could the prophet write, "The words of Amos...which he saw?" Does not this verse contain a glaring contradiction? If the words are truly those of Amos, how could they at the same time be those which had found their origin in God? If God was the Author, how could Amos also be regarded as an author?

Legitimate as such questions are, however, they cannot be fully answered. God has not seen fit to reveal to us the mode by which He communicated His Word to His servants, placing that word in their mouths and "carrying" them until the Word was accurately committed to writing. We have come, in other words, into an area of mystery. There is much about this precious Scriptural doctrine which God has not revealed. The Scripture is silent as to the mode which God employed to preserve His

Word from error. In this as in so many doctrines of the Bible there is mystery. It is, of course, to be expected that such would be the case. We are but men and our understanding is at best limited and finite. We can only know as a created being knows. God, on the other hand, is the One who in His understanding is infinite. We cannot probe into His dealings in such a way as to obtain full and comprehensive knowledge thereof. He is not such a One as can be brought down and placed under the scrutiny of the microscope of the human mind.

On pages 72 and 73 Dr. Young calls attention to some alleged implications of the fact that the Word of God came through human agents and instrumentality, in order then to deny them. He writes:

At this point, however, it is necessary to consider in some detail and with some care an objection to the above teaching which is frequently being voice in our day. When the Word of God came through human personality, it is very often maintained, the Word was obscured to some extent. God was limited in His choice of available instruments through whom His Word might come to us, and therefore He did the best that He could with the personalities and means which were at His disposal. Consequently, the character of the revelation which we have depends not only upon God but also upon the human media through which it came.

Since the Word did come through human agents and instrumentality, it is claimed, there must adhere to it some of the error and imperfection which is found in everything human. It is just like plunging one's arm into muddy water: in withdrawing the arm some of the mud will adhere to it; or it is like rays of sunlight which are less bright when shining through a dirty window than a clear one.

The character of the Divine revelation, therefore, according to this view, depends not only on God, but also on those media through which that revelation came. If those media were fallible, then the revelation itself

partook of that fallibility. God Himself was limited by the means at hand. He could communicate Himself and His truth to men only in so far as men themselves were spiritually mature to receive His revelation. Men with spiritual failings could mar and prevent that revelation from coming to mankind.

Those who insist that the Word of God in coming through human instruments has itself been affected and has acquired imperfections, for the most part believe that they can themselves detect these imperfections. Generally they wish to limit the errors and flaws which have supposedly crept into the Word of God to minor matters of fact or history. Sometimes a comparison is made with the incarnation of the Lord. The Word which became incarnate was subject to all the limitations and hardships of human life, it is sometimes maintained, and likewise the embodiment of the spoken Word of God in the history of a people such as the Hebrews involved all the crudities and the errors that such a people would probably make.

One need not look far today for a statement of this position. It is to be found in much that is written on the subject. Whenever someone writes on the Bible, he seems to feel the necessity of pointing out that it contains errors, and that these errors are a result of the human agents who were employed in the writing down of Scripture. It seems to be taken for granted that error must in the nature of the case be found in whatever is written by human hands.

The above was written before current developments in the Reformed community. In the light of Dr. Young's entire position with respect to Scripture, it would seem to this writer that he would not express himself as mildly today as he does in this excerpt.

Our final quotation contains a clear denial that the Bible is a joint product. Besides, he makes some keen observations

with respect to the subject of the alleged "time-bound" character of Holy Writ. He writes as follows on pages 79-81:

It should be clear from the discussion so far that the Bible is not to be regarded as a "joint" product, the combined effort of God and man. Surely the Bible itself does not make such a claim. There were indeed human writers of the Scripture, but they are not to be considered as co-authors with God. It is not that God contributed certain parts of the Scriptures, and men supplemented these, and it most certainly is not the case that men contributed the greater portion of Scripture to have it supplemented by God. Nor did God and man take counsel together as to what should be included in the Scripture. God did not consult man as to what should be written. The Bible is truly the Word of God. He is the final and the ultimate Author; the Bible comes from God. Without Him there could have been no Bible. Without men, however, there could have been a Bible. God could have given us His Word in some other manner than that which He actually did choose. As a matter of fact, He did choose to speak through inspired men but He was not compelled to do so. In no sense was He limited. That He employed human writers was an act of grace, and the heart of faith will ever adore and revere Him that He so honored the human race as to employ lost sinners as writers of His pure and holy Word. While the human authors were true authors, nevertheless they were not the originators of the words and the thoughts that are found in the Bible. They were holy men indeed, but they were holy men who were borne by the Spirit.

Were these human writers infallible, even when they were not borne by the Spirit? Obviously the Bible does not teach that this was so. They were men of their own day. No doubt their own views of astronomy, for example, were not one whit more advanced than those of their contemporaries. On the other hand, when they were the pen-

men of the Spirit of God, they were expressing the words of God. The thoughts which they were penning had been revealed to them by God; they were placed in their minds by the Spirit Himself. It therefore will not do to assert that they did not have a knowledge of modern astronomy and hence could not have written an account of the creation that was scientifically accurate. If Moses had depended only upon the wisdom of the Egyptians, he would have produced a rather clumsy account of Creation. If he had relied alone upon the thoughts and opinions of his own heart, he would have composed a first chapter of Genesis that for crudity and error might have equaled the writings of Babylonia. Moses, however, in writing the first chapter of Genesis was not drawing upon his own ideas and thoughts. He was giving expression to thoughts which he had learned by revelation of God. He was an inspired penman. What went on in his own mind as he wrote we can never tell, but he acted as a conscious, responsible human being. Without doubt he must have realized that he was writing far more deeply than he himself could fathom. However he composed, however he gathered his material and set it down in writing, whether he wrote and crossed out and polished, we do not know. Nevertheless he worked, and what was finally set down as the completed product was just what the God of Truth desired to have written down; it was the Word of God.

At other times, however, to continue our use of Moses as an illustration, what Moses may have said and done, and what he may have written down, was no more free from error, no more infallible, than any other purely human word or composition. Not at all times was he kept from error, but only when he served as the penman to write down the Divine oracles. The same is true of the other writers of the Bible. Hence, the folly of Reimarus' objection that the moral character of some of

the human writers would preclude them from being the recipients of Divine revelation. In giving the Bible to mankind God did not make use of men who were free from sin. David was a sinful man, and yet through him God gave many of the Psalms. Moses was a murderer. Paul persecuted the Church of God. Yet God selected them to be His instruments of inspiration. That they were thus chosen in no sense condones their guilt. What they wrote, however, and what they said when they were not borne by the Spirit was not inspired; it was as subject to error as the utterances of anyone else. Only when borne of the Spirit were the authors infallible in what they wrote.

While we are not necessarily in agreement with every formulation of Dr. Young in the above quotations, nevertheless we find ourselves in fundamental agreement with his position and believe that his presentation of organic inspiration is correct and much to be preferred to those who easily concede a human factor and element in Holy Scripture.

There is more to be said on this subject. But this will have to wait until our next installment, D.V.
