

Orthodoxy versus Neo-Orthodoxy as It Concerns the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures

[Presented to the Pastoral Circuit Conference, Numbers Two and Three, Northwest District, (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), Christ Lutheran, Church, Coos Bay, Oregon, No20:1961.]

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FOREWORD

To the Bible Student: Greetings!

Our Lord Jesus, the only Lord of the church, wants His children to study prayerfully all of His Word in order that they may be drawn ever closer to Him. For means it fails him never. Many have been brought to a deeper study of God's Word in recent days because of the age-old repetition of a rationalistic approach to God's Word and an apparent deviation from the paths our fathers trod!

This is one of the studies presented to the Pastoral Circuit Conference Numbers Two and Three, of the Northwest District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, November 20th, 1961. Given in the beautiful new Christ Lutheran Church of Coos Bay, Oregon, dedicated the day before to the Triune God, this presentation was well received, and I know you will likewise be blessed by its prayerful perusal.

May this scholarly approach to the problem created by those who would again set their reason above God's revelation, arouse all of us to a renewed research within the Word of God itself, so that the Holy Spirit might once more mightily marshal us and all of His to a dynamic defense of God's Truth.

—The Rev. Martin Lankow

PREFACE

First edition: We ask you to please note that in this essay the term "neoorthodoxy" is used in the sense of "modern contemporary theology" and this in the sense in which this "New Theology" has been accepted and is advocated by certain professors and pastors in the Lutheran Church at the present time.

The Second Edition: We have used the same mimeograph stencils as were used for the first edition except that we made a few minor changes as suggested by a number of brethren.

Third Edition: When the second edition supply did not last even a week, the author decided to present the problem of the publication of this essay to his Church Council members who resolved unanimously to stand behind having the third edition printed under the auspice. of the local congregation as a mission project.

—Reinhold H. Goetjen

For some time a controversy has been raging in the Christian Church concerning the doctrine of the Word. Recently this controversy has arisen in the Missouri Synod also. We shall therefore, according to the ability God has given, in as brief a manner as possible, seek to set forth the contrast between the orthodox view and the view of modern contemporary theology.

THE ORTHODOX VIEW OF THE WORD

The Bible teaches that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Pet. 1,21). That the holy writer is not referring just to what these men spoke but also to their

writings is evident from the context: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Pet. 1, 20-21). From this it is evident that the apostle had the written Scripture primarily in mind when he quoted these words. Likewise, the Bible tells us, “All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God.” (2 Tim. 3, 16). This implies that every word of Scripture (Old Testament is here referred to) is “God-breathed.” As the trumpet player determines the very notes which come forth from the trumpet into which he breathes, so God by His in-breathing determined the very words which were written by His instruments, the prophets. God, Who cannot lie (Tit. 1,2), moved and inspired also the apostles and evangelists not only to speak and record His thoughts but also His very words: “Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” (1 Cor. 2,13). Therefore every word of the Bible is inspired by God.

INSPIRATION IS REVELATION

In orthodox Bible language inspiration is revelation. Not all revelation is inspiration, but all inspiration, as this word is used in a Biblical sense, is revelation. God revealing Himself to Abraham and talking to him about the destruction of Sodom would be classified as revelation but not as inspiration. However, whenever the Holy Spirit inspired one of the prophets to speak or write God’s Word that is not just inspiration but also revelation, e.g. Gen. 1 and 2. Thus the canonical books of the Bible are the revealed Word of God. The Bible is revelation. The holy writers did not always understand the meaning of the truths that the Holy Spirit moved them by inspiration to write as is evident from 1 Peter 1, 10-12: “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister these things, which are now reported unto you by them that they preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.”

THE BIBLE, THE INERRANT WORD OF GOD

Since the Bible is the revealed Word of God which was given by divine inspiration it follows that it is the Truth and is without error or contradiction. This is true not only of the message of the Scripture in general but of each and every statement of the Bible. Jesus speaks of the writings of Moses as the Word of God (Mark 7, 10-13). St. Paul speaks of the word of the apostles as the Word of God. (1 Thess. 2,13). Jesus, therefore, not only consistently showed that he took the Old Testament writings as being perfectly authoritative and without mistake but even made such a statement regarding one word from the Psalms which might be considered hard to accept: “... and the Scripture cannot be broken.” (John 10, 35).

THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS THROUGH THE WORD

Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer: “Sanctify them through Thy Truth, Thy Word is Truth.” (John 17 17). Three verses later He adds “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their (the apostles’) word.” St. Paul writes: “He called you by our Gospel.” (2 Thess. 2, 14), and again: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Rom. 10, 17. Also, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power

of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” (Rom. 1, 16); and also: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Cor. 12, 3).

From the foregoing passages it is evident that the Holy Spirit calls people to faith through the Gospel, the word of the apostles and prophets, the Word of God. From Acts 8, 30: “Understandest thou what thou readest? “ it is evident that this working of the Holy Ghost through the word of the apostles and prophets isn’t in some mechanical or magical manner (ex opere operate) but the Spirit of God works through the intellect and understanding of the hearer or reader of God’s Word.

COPYISTS AND TRANSLATORS NOT INSPIRED

Orthodox Christians believe, according to the clear teachings of the Scriptures, that the holy writers of the Bible wrote by inspiration so that they only wrote down what is God’s Word and God’s Truth when they wrote the original manuscripts. Orthodox Christians, however, do not hold that the copyists and translators were inspired to make no mistake. Because of some errors of copyists the original text of a few passages cannot be definitely established. For this reason such passages are not used to establish doctrine. For this reason, e.g. 1 John 5, 7 is not commonly used to set forth the doctrine of the Trinity even though the passage may appear to be the most apropos. This doctrine, however, is clearly taught in other clear passages of Scripture where the text has been definitely established from the many copies of the early manuscripts that are available. (cf. Matt. 28, 19; Deut. 6, 4; 1 Cor. 8, 4; Matt. 3, 16-17)

Likewise, orthodox Christians recognize that there are mistranslations of isolated words and even passages in various translations. Even such a good translation as the King James version has a few words that have been mistranslated or have become obsolete. However, orthodox Christians rightly believe that an accurate translation is as good as the original. The mistranslation of isolated words does not throw doubt on those words and passages that have been correctly translated. In the case of a good translation like the King James version we are not aware that the mistranslation of any word affects a doctrine of Scripture. We realize that this cannot be said of some other versions. It is for this reason that our church has always stressed the need for our pastors to become acquainted with the Greek and Hebrew languages so that they can study the Bible as it was originally written by inspiration of God.

In this connection we should not forget the Lord Jesus’ promise: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Words shall not pass away.” (Matt. 24, 35; cf. Mk. 13, 31, Luke 21, 33, Is. 40, 8; 1 Peter 1, 25) . We know that Jesus does not lie (Titus 1, 2). Therefore, we have complete confidence in the established text as God’s Word.

THE NEO-ORTHODOX VIEW OF THE WORD

In contrast to the orthodox view which holds that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, the neo-orthodox view is that the Bible is not a revelation (1). On the contrary, they maintain that the Bible is merely a human record or witness to revelation. They say that God has revealed Himself in His mighty acts and then the writers of the Bible gave their interpretation of this revelation. This they claim the writers did by inspiration. However, by inspiration the neo-orthodox do not mean that the Holy Spirit moved the Biblical writers to write the very Words of God but rather that they wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the extent that they were able to witness to Christ and call Him Lord. (2) (cf. 1 Cor. 12, 3). We would have to say that if we should use the term inspiration in such a sense, then every present-day Christian is just as inspired by God whenever he testifies to Christ as were the writers of the Holy Bible. This makes

the Bible a human, fallible witness to God's revelation. This leaves it up to each individual to try to sort out from the Bible what he thinks is God's Word and revelation.

ACCORDING TO THE NEO ORTHODOX THE BIBLE CONTAINS ERRORS, MISTAKES AND DISCREPANCIES

With their view of the meaning of the word inspiration the neo-orthodox manage to claim that the Bible contains mistakes, inaccuracies and contradictions. This they do in spite of the fact that some maintain that they believe that every last syllable of the Bible is inspired.

These men also hold that the writers of the Bible used the stories that were current in "the community of God" at the time and wrote them down to present some certain divine truth. e.g. The writer of Genesis 1 and 2 was, in their view, concerned with giving his interpretation of how things came into existence and he therefore put into writing the stories which were current at that time which explained these things and he, therefore, set forth the divine truth that God is the Creator and Preserver. Period (3). The rest, according to their view, is merely a report of the current alleged myths of how this creation took place. One of their proponents in describing the writings of Gen. 1 to 3 states: "He wrote it as a tale, as a poetic piece, to set forth the truth of that which he believed to have happened, using materials available to him from the storytellers or from written documents. This is to say, these accounts propose to speak of real events describing man's creation and fall as well as the making of His world, but in language that is largely symbolical, or mythical, and is to be so understood." (4) Likewise this same author wrote, "For that reason Bultmann can quite rightly say that the only historical statement in the Apostle's Creed is the sentence, 'He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.' The rest of the Creed uses a different kind of language from the third dimension of life, from the level of revelation and not necessarily of factuality." (Emphasis added) (5) He wishes to imply that the facts as recorded in the Gospels did not happen as these facts are recorded there as is also evident from his claim that he finds a discrepancy between the ascension accounts as they are recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke. He maintains that St. Matthew "unmistakably suggests that Christ ascended from a mountain in Galilee" (cf. Mt. 28) but that Luke places the ascension as taking place from the Mount of Olives (cf. Acts 1, 12). It does not seem to bother this author that Matthew never mentions a word about the ascension. (6)

TRUTH IS NOT IDENTIFIABLE WITH FACT IN NEO-ORTHODOX LANGUAGE

Whereas in orthodox language, as Dr. C. F. W. Walther puts it: "Everything which is presented as factual is factual." (7). Conversely, the neoorthodox do not want to identify truth with fact. On the contrary, according to them much that is presented in Scripture as fact is not supposed to be factually correct and yet it is supposed to be the truth. For example, the statement of fact that over 600,000 Israelite men left Egypt at the time of the Exodus is regarded by one of their proponents as being a "beefed up" account, an exaggeration which is supposed to magnify God for His great power. (8).

The same writer states on the previous page of the same essay: "We need to keep in mind that it is a modern heresy to identify truth with fact." Just ponder for a moment this man's definition of heresy. This same writer claims to find much evidence of contradictions, historical errors, and other mistakes in the Scriptures (9). He also regards the clinging to the factual side of the creation account "as an exceedingly subtle stratagem sometimes employed by the Evil One" (10). This professor appears to call us victims of Satan's lies when we cling to the belief that God has by inspiration revealed to us in Gen. 1 to 3 the facts as they actually occurred at the

beginning of time. It appears that he would also call us heretics for doing so. What happens if we apply this principle to all the facts recorded in the Bible?

ACCORDING TO THE NEO-ORTHODOX THE BIBLE IS NOT REVELATION BUT A RECORD, WITNESS AND MEDIUM OF REVELATION

Rather than regard the Bible as revelation the proponents of the new theology call it a “medium” of revelation. They hold that as man studies this Bible of myths, legends, and inaccuracies, God “confronts” or “breaks through to” the individual with His claim upon him and they thus experience an “encounter” with God. The neo-orthodox theologians appear to believe that God (Holy Spirit?) may reveal Himself in His person to the person who studies or hears the Bible, and the individual may be led by God to understand what is the Truth and can sift it from the error that is allegedly in the Bible. The Bible is supposed to reveal all that is necessary for salvation inerrantly.

Just how much of the Scripture this is supposed to be we are not told. Apparently the facts of the stories of the Creation and the Fall are not included. This naturally is a puzzle to the orthodox Christian who cannot understand how there can be, or even needs to be, any salvation if the story of the Creation and the Fall are not to be regarded as factually correct. How these things are not supposed to be factually correct and yet are supposed to teach the positive truth that God is the Creator and to teach the positive truth of the Fall is truly a mystery which is difficult to comprehend. One might wonder if these aren't the “good words and fair speeches” which deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting, concerning which the Apostle Paul wrote in Rom. 16, 18. The issue that faces us is that if the account of the Creation and Fall in Gen. 1 to 3 is not supposed to be factually correct why should we believe that God is the Creator and that man fell into sin?

DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK THROUGH THE WORD?

It appears that here we have an unexpected danger point in the neoorthodox theology. The adherents of neo-orthodoxy appear to propose that the Holy Spirit works without means (or God reveals Himself immediately today as He did in Bible times to the prophets and apostles) and this in a mechanical or magical manner in connection with the Word of the Scriptures rather than through the Word as it is comprehended and understood. It appears that a bit of Reformed and Roman theology concerning the means of grace is here being advocated and is being accepted by some Lutherans. This brings about a softening up process. Once a Lutheran has been led to believe that the Holy Spirit works without means and mechanically merely in connection with the Word, then he is soon ready to accept the attitude that the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture is, after all not such a serious matter. Then he is soon ready to make the next step of denying the inerrancy itself. Another softening-up process is accomplished by the continual emphasis on the teaching that as long as a person holds to the material principle (Justification by faith) he is a Christian even if he does not hold to the doctrine of the Verbal Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture. This argument ignores the fact that we cannot have a building without a foundation. Destroy the foundation (the formal principle) and you cannot erect a proper building and if you have one it is doomed to certain collapse.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

The neo-orthodox have undermined the very foundation of the Christian faith. “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Eph. 2, 20. The Bible is the (Word) writings of the apostles and prophets upon which the church is built.

Dr. C. F. W. Walther wrote: “Whoever thinks he can find one error in Holy Scripture does not believe in Holy Scripture but in himself; for even if he accepted everything else as true, he would believe it not because Scripture says so, but because it agrees with his reason or with his sentiments.” (11) (Emphasis added)

Man makes himself his own authority in religion. He tries to build his faith on the baseless foundation of his own reason and sentiments.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ITSELF IS SHAKEN

One young minister recently stated to the writer that his faith in Jesus was stronger now that he had accepted the tenets of neo-orthodoxy. We naturally ask, “What Jesus?” The Jesus who put His stamp of approval on all of the Old Testament and referred to it as the Word of God (Mk. 7, 10-13) and never spoke a word against its absolute inerrancy? The Jesus who when in a dispute quoted from the Psalms and when referring to one word that might be difficult to accept, stated: “The Scripture cannot be broken”? If that is the Jesus he believes in, he is believing in a Jesus that is either an outright liar and deceiver if he didn’t mean what he said or he is an ignoramus who was himself deceived into believing that he was the Son of God, when in reality he was nothing of the kind. The scribes and the Pharisees in the days of Jesus also believed in a Messiah, a Christ, of their own imagining. However, when the true Messiah did come and reveal Himself, these men would have nothing to do with Him because He did not fit the preconceived notions which they had of such a Messiah. Is this perhaps also true of these modern neo-orthodox theologians? Are they manufacturing for themselves in their imaginations a Jesus Christ which does not exist except in their own preconceptions?

WITH THE ACCEPTANCE OF NEO-ORTHODOX PRINCIPLES ALL DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE BECOME UNCERTAIN

When a person follows the principles laid down by the neo-orthodox, then the Bible, in the final analysis, is man’s word and it is up to the interpreter to find in the Bible the truth of God. Each theologian can sift out what he wants to take and reject what is not pleasing to him. In doing this he may also change the doctrines which he teaches from time to time even as the notorious Dr. Karl Barth has also done. In that case doctrinal discipline becomes a thing of the past. No one can be accused of teaching contrary to Scripture because the theologian can always hide behind the claim that he does not regard a certain statement of Scripture as correct because it is, after all, merely man’s record and response to revelation and may well be mistaken since all humans are subject to error.

WHAT IS THE GREAT APPEAL OF NEO-ORTHODOXY?

Our sinful flesh does not want to be bound to God’s Word and is by nature rebellious. It wants to be free to believe and do as it pleases. One professor reveals to us his personal feelings about accepting the tenets of neo-orthodoxy: “Basically a question of adequate elbow room to proceed with the task of presenting the multi-varied grace of God to our particular generation.” This is often referred to as “academic freedom” which means freedom from the restrictions of God’s Word.

The appeal is the same as that which Satan used in the Garden of Eden. “Yea, bath God said?” (Gen. 3, 1) Our sinful flesh would love to see God discredited. Thus our flesh hopes to elevate itself. It is the same appeal to pride: “Ye shall be as gods.” (Gen. 3 5). The neo-orthodox makes himself his own authority and thus, in reality, his own god. He becomes guilty of “self-deification” or “Egotheology”. (12) “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16, 18).

LET HIM THAT THINKETH THAT HE STANDETH TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL

This same proud flesh that has led many to accept the false tenets of neo-orthodoxy resides in all of us. Let us not self-righteously think or say, “That could never happen to me.” Let us heed the warning of Paul, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2, 12-13). Let us look to God and His Word and grace alone for help and protection against this temptation to apostasy. Let us beware of letting self-trust stand between us and God’s gracious help and guidance from His Word. Let us not think that we can just quietly sit back and think that it is not necessary for us to enter into this controversy and that all is well so long as we ourselves are not deceived. If we take such an attitude, we should not be too surprised if in a short time we find ourselves among the errorists or at least “defending” them by our silence.

NOTES

1. *The Bible as Record, Witness and Medium* by Dr. M. Scharlemann, page 21.
2. *Revelation and Inspiration* by Dr. M. Scharlemann. dare 17.
The Bible as Record, Witness and Medium by Dr. M. Scharlemann, page 21.
3. A follower of the “New theology” maintained that the Genesis record tells us only “what” God did and nothing about “how” God did it.
4. *The Inerrancy of Scripture* by Dr. M. Scharlemann
5. *Ibidem*
6. *Revelation and Inspiration*, page 16.
7. *Concordia Theological Monthly* of November, 1961, page 686.
8. *The Inerrancy of Scripture* by Dr. M. Scharlemann, page 5.
9. cf. *Revelation and Inspiration* by Dr. M. Scharlemann.
10. *The Inerrancy of Scripture* by Dr. M. Scharlemann.
11. *Concordia Theological Monthly* of November, 1961, page 689.
12. *Scripture Cannot Be Broken* by Dr. Th. Engelder, page 49. *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, by Franz Pieper: “Furthermore, the Ego theology is a form the worst form, of idolatry—self-deification. The authority which the I theologian denies to Holy Scripture he claims for himself.” Page 127.

WE HAVE A SURE PROPHETIC WORD

We have a sure prophetic Word By inspiration of the Lord; And tho’ assailed on ev’ry hand,
Jehovah’s Word shall ever stand.

Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure

The teachings of the Word endure.

Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word, His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord.
Rise, my soul, to watch and pray, From thy sleep awaken; Be not by the evil day Unawares
o’ertaken. For the Foe Well we know Oft his harvest reapeth. While the Christian sleepeth.

Watch against the devil's snares Lest asleep he find thee For indeed no pains he spares To deceive and blind thee. Satan's prey Oft are they Who secure are sleeping And no watch are keeping.

Some would have us believe that we are being uncharitable if we question the teachings of a minister or professor. St. Luke. However, seems to have been of a different opinion: "These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17. 11.)

TO OUR READERS

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Sequel essays are in the offing. "*Orthodoxy Versus Neo-Orthodoxy as It Concerns Doctrinal Discipline*" will be ready to go to the press as soon as the money can be obtained to publish it. "*Orthodoxy Versus Neo-Orthodoxy as It Concerns the Doctrine of the Church*" is being prepared by a competent essayist from the Texas District.

Some fine comments have been received. A few are quoted:

"My hearty thanks for the kindness of sending me a copy of your essay on Orthodoxy. This is an excellent piece of work, unusually concise and to the point. Its brevity invites reading—much more so than a long dissertation. I hope it will be widely distributed."

—A Professor from one of the Colleges of
the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

"Was nice hearing from you pastor and many thanks for the clear-cut paper which I feel any simple minded layman can understand! I read your Orthodoxy Versus Neo-Orthodoxy through with great interest and will pass it on to others in my circle of friends. You are to be commended for a job well done."

—A layman from Michigan

"An excellent essay. Thank you very much for making it available. Please send me 100 copies ... Keep up the excellent work! Keep me informed regarding any new publications of this kind on other doctrines."

—Pastor from Michigan

I was a recipient of your paper '*ORTHODOXY VERSUS NEO-ORTHODOXY*' ... What a fine work written in a manner understandable by even the layman!"

—A layman from Illinois

“Your treatise ‘*Orthodoxy Versus Neo-Orthodoxy as It Concerns the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures*’ was received the days before Christmas ... You may imagine that I sat down at once and read it. My heart swelled, as I continued reading, and I thanked God that there are still men courageous and bold enough to stick their heads out for the defense of the pure doctrine and also able to present in plain language what the Bible, what God, says to stuff the mouth of the gainsayer ... I am old and handicapped and cannot well jump into the ring to fight, but I hope and pray that more men like you will arise and rush to the defense of what is precious to our hearts, the pure Word of God, by which alone men can be sanctified and the church of God be truly built.”

—A pastor from Wisconsin

“I also heartily thank you for your manuscript ‘Orthodoxy Versus Neo-Orthodoxy etc.’ In my opinion it is excellent. God bless you.”

—A pastor from British Columbia

“Just finished reading your pamphlet on inspiration. Agree heartily. Like its simple precision. Keep it up.”

—A Pastor from St. Louis, Mo.