

# **The Possession of the Truth**

## ***(Der Besitz der Wahrheit)***

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To the clear and inviting testimony of Jesus regarding His coming in the world Pilate replied with the question: "What is truth?" That was not the quest of a man eager to learn; he did not wait for an answer. He has rather always been understood correctly that as a representative of the decadent Greco-Roman culture he was expressing the general conviction that in the realm of human knowledge there was nothing that could be designated as objective truth, as truth that is valid whether perceived or not, whether denied or accepted. That was in his day a common conclusion based on the controversy between the various schools of philosophy, each of which claimed to have spoken the last word on truth and yet was not able to gain the recognition of its kindred rivals.

Pilate is therefore a witness to the complete breakdown of all worldly wisdom of his age. Though he was not an independent thinker, perhaps not even a well-educated man, he provides evidence that the prevailing view was that the highest and greatest problems of science were impossible of solution, and that what the thinkers of the preceding centuries had produced could not as purely subjective opinion claim any objective validity. In this view he was entirely correct. When Paul (Col. 2:8) calls philosophy "vain deceit," he evidently is not thinking of pagan world-wisdom, but rather of the religious speculation of Judaistic deceivers, yet his description eminently fits all human philosophy: vain deceit, a medley of subjective propositions without any basis on objective truth. The confidence with which the philosophers promulgated their views does not alter the picture. One philosopher judges the other and triumphantly adduces proof that all his predecessors erred egregiously.

The modern age reacts differently to the achievement of its sages than did Pilate to antique philosophy. Moderns permit scientists to fit them with one pair of colored spectacles after another and rejoices naively with childish glee over the new picture conjured up before them, and in their joy are not at all conscious of the fact that modern science has not brought to light even one trace of objective, tangible truth, but on the contrary produces one delusion after another in the form of a whirl of subjectivistic views. On the other hand, the world maliciously charges Christians that the clash of opinions among theologians, which has split them into countless parties, must prove the inadequacy of the Christian religion. "Who can know the truth?" one hears the children of the world say, "when the Christians, who boast of possessing the truth, can reach no agreement among themselves regarding the content of the truth they possess?" It is the same conclusion that Pilate's contemporaries drew. Since such a variety of views obtains among the confessors of Christianity, there is no reliable truth in what is called Christian belief; all is based on purely subjective viewpoints.

One must grant the unbelievers apparently good grounds for their judgment. The nature of the knowledge of the truth and its proof as it is found in the hearts of Christians is hidden from them. They hear only the presumptive voice of so-called theological science and take this talk for the expression of Christian conviction. However, modern theology is completely saturated with the view that every presentation of Christian truth reflects the subjective interpretation of the individual, and therefore can not claim objective validity. Holy Scripture has been abandoned as fountain of the truth. Scripture does not offer objective truth which man is to comprehend and accept, rather its several books express the concept of truth as conceived by the respective writer. For modern theology the acceptance of an objective standard for religious truth belongs to the abandoned misbeliefs of the past. He who still adheres to the inviolable and divine authority of Scripture is a back number. And since modern theology at the same time claims to be the true directive for all Christians, one

cannot seriously fault a non-Christian if he considers Christianity in general as something subjective, an achievement of man's spirit, in its origin and inner value no different from other so-called religions. Since the high lords of philosophy received their religious training in various schools of philosophy, and since, furthermore, all aim to produce something new, it is inevitable that among the spokesmen there is no unanimity, neither in main nor minor matters; that under the banner of this scientism (?) diametrically opposed views may be propounded; and that it is considered fashionable to let everyone think, speak, and maintain his fancy without deservedly putting him in his place with moral indignation. From this collusion only he is excepted who still clings to the objective validity of divine revelation and hence as a matter of principle rejects subjectivism in theology. Should such a one speak up publicly, he is shown no mercy. No man is to be granted a secure possession of the truth based on divine revelation. Since the modern theology claims to seek the truth but not to have it, the man outside the church can come to but one assumption: Also for the Christian it is impossible to know and have the truth.

By the grace of God, we have in our circles thus far not been disturbed by the contemporary subjectivistic theology, and therefore do not feel guilty of the reproach that it is impossible to know how Christians stand on theological questions. On the contrary, we stand ready to help all who doubt and waver, since we are conscious of possessing irrefutable, divine truth. Hence it appears to us unthinkable that in the circles of American Lutheranism, in the present circumstances, Pilate's question could seriously be asked. However, we ought not consider ourselves immune. The *Quartalschrift* has already pointed out in its discussion of the various union efforts that in the course of the agitation for the suspension of synodical differences extremely questionable views and motives have appeared. Not, of course, the view that there is no sure possession of the truth at all. Our Lutheran people have from their youth clung to the tenet that in the confession of the Lutheran Church they have solid ground to stand on. They know that she teaches divine truth. But it could happen that the effort to unite hitherto separated church bodies, despite flagrant doctrinal differences, were motivated by the statement that a layman cannot attain certainty regarding the respective doctrines, seeing the learned theologians cannot persuade one another; the whole controversy is a battle between professors, and does not concern the Lutheran laity. What was thus openly said among the Norwegians may to a great extent, with more or less consciousness, be the view in other circles. For in our own circles, here and there privately, there is indicated as aim of union efforts not only the federation or union of synods agreeing in their confessions, but a union of all who call themselves Lutherans. Such a proposal wants summarily to set aside all doctrinal differences and declares the irrelevant. Such a view reveals the admission that it is a vain effort to establish the truth objectively. It is the mark of all unionism to surrender the thought of arriving at a clear, unified understanding of fundamental questions. It makes doubt a confessional principle.

It must become evident to us at once that such symptoms, here and overseas, indicate a disintegration which eventually, if it cannot be stemmed, must lead to the dissolution of at least Lutheran church life. Such a wedge cannot be applied without wrecking the whole doctrinal structure. If in regard to one important point of doctrine it be admitted that the establishment of the truth is impossible, it becomes questionable whether in any case the correctness of a doctrine can be objectively proved. For no one can guarantee that a dispute over any point of any doctrine could not arise. And if the contending parties stubbornly insist on their views, and none will accept the proofs of the other, the unionist will finally, for the sake of peace, ignore the differences and hold them for insoluble, since, after all, no one can prove what is the truth. But that means that under such presuppositions no one can ever be certain that he has the truth. If what he holds to be the truth can at any time on in any point be made to appear doubtful by clever opponents, with the result that doubt must be acknowledged as legitimate, then he can say of the insight he deems to possess that he calls it truth, but it is a possession over which no rational man can rejoice, least of all when it becomes necessary to oppose the terrors of sin and death with incontrovertible certainty.

It is a peculiar sign of the times that present conditions in the church force us to return to the most common fundamental articles of Christian doctrine. Never has it become more apparent than today that a false conception of doctrine on any point finally touches the very foundation of faith. The church has even raised against heretics the charge of the 11<sup>th</sup> Psalm: "They destroy the foundations" (Luther's translation). This

judgment she has usually supported sufficiently with the proof that false teachers perverted or simply denied clear statements of Scripture. Out of his sure insight into the Gospel, Luther stated that every false doctrine, though it appear ever so insignificant, finally attacks the chief article of Christian faith, the doctrine of Christ the Savior from sin, or the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

By continual reference to Scripture and by energetic denial of all human considerations and proportions with reference to doctrine, Luther confronted his opponents with the conviction that every false doctrine is based on an under-valuation, disregard, or denial of divine revelation in the Scriptures. While he could with some justice assume that most of his opponents agreed in acknowledging Scripture as divine revelation, in our day the denial of this fundamental principle is stated with the greatest shamelessness, in consequence of which discussion of doctrinal matters is futile before both parties agree on the common basis that "the Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel" (SA, Pt. II, Art. III15). Modern subjectivistic theology in Germany denies this principle. It glories in the claim that verbal inspiration has been proved a fairy tale. But every unionist also deviates from this principle, since his attitude toward doctrine is justifiable only if there is no objective norm according to which one can establish beyond a doubt what is divine truth.

Hence we are constrained from two directions to battle for the principle of faith that God has certainly provided a fully sufficient medium to lead men to the possession of the truth. In other words, we must contend more than ever that Holy Scripture is the Word of God in a real sense and therefore also adequate to communicate divine truth. According to ancient usage we speak of inspiration, of the clarity and perspicuity of Scriptural revelation and base thereon the sentence quoted above from the Smalcald Articles. By this we want to say that man can attain the possession of the truth only through the Holy Scriptures, but that the Scriptures do verily offer to every man clear truth. He who has Scripture and yet errs in doctrine can never fault Scripture, but must himself bear the responsibility. The Scriptures cannot err. He who errs has deviated from Scripture in those points in which he errs.

Everything then depends on the possession of this foundation truth. The divine origin, the divine inerrancy, the divine and efficacious completeness of Scripture alone authenticate the possession of the full truth to the extent it is possible for truth to be comprehended by man. Our knowledge of the truth is "in part," as St. Paul testifies (I Cor. 13:9) of his inspired knowledge. But that does not alter the fact that what is known "in part" is truth. If, after all, we want to speak of possessing the truth, it must be an established fact for us that divine truth is presented in Scripture in a comprehensible form insofar as it is at all accessible to man.

But wherein does in this instance the possession of the truth consist? Who HAS the truth that Scripture is the source of all divine truth? We call this statement the formal principle of Lutheran theology and thus claim that the Lutheran Church possesses this truth. If this is not to be vain talk, it must follow that every Lutheran possesses this truth, for the Lutheran Church has nothing that the individual Lutheran does not have. However, the individual does not possess a truth of this nature if he has memorized the statement expressing this truth, or if he has merely appropriated it intellectually. The truth that Scripture alone is the source of all divine truth and presents it to us in objective form can be proved from Scripture itself without difficulty. Not to mention the individual passages that refer to the mystery of inspiration and more or less plainly testify to it, we need only to be reminded of the decisiveness with which all the prophets and apostles insist that the message they wrote is not man's word but truly the Word of God. In their writings there is not the faintest hint that the writers were conscious of presenting their subjective views according to their personal judgment. The divine origin of their whole presentation was so self-evident to them that only in especially emphatic passages they refer to it. No one can read the Holy Scriptures without getting the understanding that they claim for themselves that they originated by divine inspiration and have the purpose to offer to all men divine truth in a wholly trustworthy form. That is known to every proponent of modern theology as well as to us. Yet he does not possess this truth. This character of the Holy Scriptures appears to him to be a piece of pious fraud or simply an instance of the subjectivistic coloring of these writings. None of us would have fared any better who would have accepted this truth in a merely intellectual manner. Rather it is evident that this truth, even as any other truth, must first become truth for a man before he truly possesses it.

One must therefore differentiate between presumed possession and real possession. For a Lutheran, thanks to his training, it is self-evident that he must profess the statement regarding the divinity and reliability of the Holy Scriptures as his confession in order to testify that for him this truth has really become truth. Without passing judgment on any individual it can nevertheless be correctly said that some among us, while making this confession, do not properly consider the fact that they do not possess this truth despite their intention. It is apparent that the impartation of this as well as other divine truths is done by human mediators. The normal way for our children consists in proving this truth in the course of catechism instruction, but in the form of human words - e.g., the definition of the explanation of the catechism - which is then memorized by them. It would be ridiculous to deny that many of our Lutherans think they possess this truth because it is in the text book and is confessed by the whole Lutheran Church, but not because the Scriptural proof has made them conscious of this truth as truth. In the case of those who later, in preparation for service in the church, through the study of theology seek a deeper knowledge of Christian doctrine, a similar process may take place with regard to the ground-laying power of Holy Writ. In our theological study we aim to keep in contact with the theology of past centuries. In discussing divine truths we consider the presentation of the fathers of our Lutheran Church. This may entail that individual students assume that they are convinced of this theological truth and possess it, while their presumed conviction rests on the authority of the fathers, which as given expression to their conviction. In other words, they possess the tradition of the truth and think they possess the truth itself.

In the face of these possibilities it is by no means superfluous to point out that the dogma of the divinity and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures is a statement of faith, which cannot become the spiritual possession of man by way of intellectual appropriation. Whoever has not by the Holy Spirit been brought to accept this truth in faith does not yet actually possess it. But the Holy Spirit works all the knowledge of the truth, and hence also all conviction of the truth, through the medium of the Word itself. That is to say, in general, that he who has through the Gospel come to faith in the Savior has at the same time come to the unshakable conviction that the Gospel is God's graciously powerful Word unto salvation. Specifically this statement means that conviction regarding the divine inspiration of Scripture is not obtained through arguments from the Scriptures - and be they ever so keen - but only through the witness which Scripture itself presents. Thus there is repeated in every case the process which moved the Samaritans to say to the woman: "Now we believe, not because of thy sayings; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). When quoting 2 Pet. 1:20f to a doubter in order to gain not only his intellectual assent but to convince him also spiritually, we will indeed do well to expound the literal understanding of the passage. If one is to be convinced by this passage, he must understand that Peter writes that no prophet gave an interpretation of the future on the basis of his own thinking. "No prophecy of the Scripture is the product of private interpretation (which the prophet produced by his own insight), for no prophecy has ever been produced by the will of man, but moved (carried along) by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from Godward (their speech as to form and content came from God)." But not until the Holy Spirit has quickened His own witness in the heart of the doubter and through its divine power has moved him to accept it does its truth become his faith-possession so that he truly possesses it. It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth (I John 5:6).

Uncertainty inevitably follows the denial of inspiration. But if we confront this uncertainty with the believer's certainty of the possession of all divine truth because in Scripture we have the immutable and dependable Word of God, this certainty theoretically applies to all points of doctrine. Whether or not I know what Scripture says on any given matter, its divine character is a guarantee to my faith that it at all events speaks the truth. Whenever to a Bible-believer through his own searching or through the endeavors of others a Scriptural truth is revealed, he accepts it intellectually while at the same time it becomes his conscious possession by faith. One does not attain a conscious possession of a Christian doctrine of truth except through the revelation which God has, so to speak, presented to us in a tangible manner. Living faith therefore is characterized by the endeavor to increase its incomplete possession of truth by searching the Scriptures. The searching and seeking in the Scriptures, which Jesus (John 5:39) recommends or approves (depending on whether one understands the verb as indicative or imperative), which Peter (First Ep. 1:11) describes as being

done by the prophets, for which the Bereans are commended, is such a natural fruit of faith - which lives by the Word along - that we rightly diagnose promptly as a weakness of faith when we meet gross lack of interest in Bible study in a Christian. With its repeated question: "Where is this written?" the Small Catechism expresses the constant desire of faith to accept truth as divine. The process by which a Christian comes into an ever greater conscious possession of truth is in Scripture called edification. Besides self-edification it also speaks of the endeavor to help others to attain growth in knowledge and to increased possession of the truth. It bids us act according to Eph. 4:16 and Col. 3:16, injunctions which apply to every Christian according to his station.

It is not proper to object at this point that among those who in like manner claim to adhere to the Scriptural principle a great variety of interpretations of single Scripture doctrines may appear. Doctrinal controversies which have so sadly torn apart the Lutheran Church in America do not warrant the conclusion that a unified knowledge of the truth is unattainable from the Scriptures. Such a conclusion would ignore the fact that besides faith there are in a Christian other mental factors which could interfere with and prejudice his ability to acquire knowledge. At times these disturbing factors become so determinative that we suspect that the respective person has abandoned Scriptural principles or at least has in the given case not permitted them to influence him. In other cases it is only too apparent that the opponent, although he as a Lutheran also accepts the Scriptural principle in theory, he does not apply it either because of convenience or prejudice, but lets his opinions be handed to him ready-made by others. In brief, the ignorant blames Scripture for divisive differences of doctrinal viewpoints. But this is not caused by a lack of Scripture's revelation, but rather by the innate evil which is still inherent in every Christian.

But what now? Which of the various Lutheran parties in our country has the right of claiming to possess the truth? For a moment let us set aside the fact that the possession of the truth on the part of a body is never greater than that of the individual members of that body, and that the possession of the truth is nothing else but the conscious divine conviction of the truth, which is never imparted to a group but always to individuals making up the group. Let us assume that two Lutheran bodies separated by doctrinal differences are composed entirely of people who with conviction share the viewpoint of their spokesmen. Which of the two parties then possesses the truth? Which one really has it? Patently, the correctness of a conviction is not tantamount to its existence. One can be convinced that he is serving God when he slays Christians for their faith (John 16:2): The correctness of a conviction depends on its basis and source. Such a scrutiny will soon determine when the possession of truth must be present.

We have repeatedly pointed out in the *Quartalschrift* how deceptive is the feeling of certainty that is evoked by traditionalism. Its crassest form is the collier's faith, according to which a man thinks he possesses the truth because he believes what the church believes without knowing what that is. The leaders of the Roman Church foster and further this outlook wherever they can, if in no other way than by letting their people live in deepest ignorance as long as they are not forced by the contrast of Protestantism to spend time and labor on the education of their people. But also in the Lutheran Church, which from the beginning emphasized the indispensability of personal knowledge and experiential faith, several varieties of the collier's faith appear. Let us cite one instance which fits directly into our line of thought. We are all agreed that the Symbolical Books of our Church contain the confession of the truth. Whoever denies that ceases to be a Lutheran according to our concept. But does one possess the truth if he has a copy of the Book of Concord on his shelf? Certainly not. The pages with their letters are not the Book of Concord, much less are they the truth that the book confesses. Or can one say that he possesses the truth which the Book of Concord confesses when he has dutifully read it once or twice? It is of course possible that while reading one has gotten the definite impression that the book contains no statement which contradicts any view which one at the time holds. But a clear comprehension of the rich contents of the book is gained only by means of a conscious effort to prove the arguments of the Symbols by the Word of God and thus truly appropriate them. One can expect of a Lutheran pastor - who upon entering his ministry is pledged to the Book of Concord - that next to the Bible he knows no other book better than this one. Would it be impossible occasionally to find among us a pastor who as representative of the Lutheran confession would base his possession of the truth on the fact that he owns a copy of the Book of Concord, who believes what the Church believes without knowing what she confesses as her faith?

But even a thorough knowledge of our Symbolical Books does not yet guarantee the possession of the truth. The doctrinal controversy carried on publicly among us is not waged by men unacquainted with the Book of Concord. As Lutherans the spokesmen of each party need to prove most thoroughly that their presentation agrees with that of the Reformers. It would have to be called an intolerable judgment of hearts if one party were to charge the other of consciously casting the mantle of conformity to the confessions over a false doctrine. Since however on the basis of the Confessions diametrically opposed views can with all decisiveness be presented as truth, it is clear that the most accurate knowledge of the words of the Symbols by no means guarantees the possession of the truth. It is a case of human documents, human presentation of Scripture truth. Even if we contend that this presentation in no point deviates from Scripture, such a presentation does not have the inherent power to create in the reader a conviction of faith if it does not lead back to Scripture, which alone can give the certainty of faith. This fact is the basis for the demand that any one who is expected to really regard and defend the Confessions of our Church must compare them with the Scriptures. Only when thus compared with Scripture do the Symbols have any authority whatever, and only thus comes the certainty that they teach the truth. Furthermore, since the presentation of doctrine in the Symbols, despite the carefulness of the authors, is affected with all kinds of imperfections, it gives rise to differences of opinion. We may, for instance, on our part have the impression that Article XI of the Formula of Concord without the possibility of misunderstanding expresses election unto faith, and nothing else. We therefore simply cannot understand how anyone can read into these clear confessional statements the election on the basis of foreseen faith. But if the opponent nevertheless appeals to the Formula of Concord and supports his appeal with apparently strong argumentation, we shall not be able to refute him with the assertion: "You misinterpret the Formula of Concord and teach un-Lutheran doctrine." One cannot flatly and in all cases prove a doctrinal statement to be Lutheran by quoting as proof from the Formula of Concord of the Augsburg Confession! To say that in dealing with a Lutheran, one appeals to the Confessions (but in dealing with others one appeals to the Scriptures) is true only to the extent that both parties agree in the understanding of the Confessions. Experience has amply shown that a long-drawn controversy over the meaning of the words of the Confession leads to no real results, since the opponent usually will refuse to be silenced, not to think of admitting his error. Thus, in all cases, we are finally again and again compelled to prove our possession of the truth from the Scriptures. Here is the infallible Word of God, about which no Christian will purposely quibble. If I can show the opponent that he is changing the meaning of the clear words of Scripture by subtraction or addition, I have given him proof before God and man that he does not possess the truth with regard to the point at issue.. If on the other hand I can prove that my doctrinal presentation is nothing but an unfolding of thoughts already expressed in clear Scripture passages, then my proof is established that I possess Scriptural truth and hence possess the truth of the Lutheran Confession.

If it does not suffice to prove the possession of the truth by appealing to the Symbols, so much less will the appeal to the private writings of Lutheran teachers suffice. No man is in possession of the truth because he knows and can show what a Quenstedt or a Gerhard wrote as his presentation of the truth. The excellent writings of these dogmaticians lack exactly what makes the Confessions in our circles in a certain sense a norm: the fact that they must rate as the voice of the whole church. A quotation from the folio of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or ten almost similar quotations from different contemporary books on doctrine will not even with certainty document the doctrinal conception of the church of that age. And obviously one is still less in possession of the truth just because one knows what these men said. Among the spokesmen of the Lutheran Church a difference of opinion regarding this thesis ought to be impossible. One can perhaps not blame the average Christian when he thinks he possesses the truth because he remembers the definitions of the Catechism, especially since in our instruction of the youth we are still far from overcoming the method of considering the "questions" in the catechism as the doctrine and treat the Scripture passages as proofs of the doctrine, thus inverting the correct sequence. But among those who want to take part in our doctrinal controversies the dogmatical dicta from the doctrinal writings of theologians should in no sense be regarded as proof for the possession of the truth.

Human tradition of doctrine is at best a human presentation of the truth. Therefore traditional statements immediately belong into the category of disputable assertions. The doctrine of the Trinity is not truth because it is found in the Augustana, in fact it is and will remain questionable whether the Augustana's presentation can

be upheld. The same is true of the extensive presentation of this doctrine by the dogmaticians of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Even though they all with one consent agree in their statements is not to say with certainty that they testify to the truth. It is even disputable whether the term "Trinity" or "triplicity," which has been accepted by the entire Church, contains in sufficiently understandable manner the Biblical doctrine of the nature of God. The expression is a product of the human spirit, like countless other dogmatical terms, and cannot insist on divine justification when objection to it is raised. Just because some one simply confesses belief in the trinity of God is of course no proof that he is even acquainted with the Scriptural doctrine of the distinctive characteristics of the three Persons and of their relation to one another. Still less does it prove that he has in faith grasped these truths. We shall therefore never be able to convince our opponent in a doctrinal controversy of our possession of the truth as long as we try to reach an understanding with him regarding whose interpretation agrees with the interpretation of other men. Only he will finally have proved the possession of the truth who with reference to the statements of Scripture on the controverted question can claim with Paul: "I continue witnessing ...none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22). After all, only the Word of God is THE truth (John 17:17).

That means the Word as it is written. Only in the Written Word do we HAVE the truth. The truth finds no more adequate expression than that of Scripture, which not only contains the truth, but IS itself the truth. Paul, who in the Pastoral Epistles so often speaks of sound doctrine (I Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tt. 1:9; 2:1) patently explains this expression further when he writes: "If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tm. 6:3): "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me" (2 Tm. 1:13). And it is certainly not unimportant that in Rm. 10, where he is directly speaking of the effecting of the certainty of faith, he uses instead of the term LOGOS the peculiar expression RHEMA (twice in v. 8 and in vs. 17-and 18). John often uses the same word in reporting Jesus' sayings on faith-life, e.g., 8:47: "He that is of God heareth TA RHEMATA of God." So also 5:47; 6:62; 12:47f; 15:7.) While the expression LOGOS would permit the assumption that any wording of divine thoughts in human speech is still God's Word in the real sense, the expression RHEMA points up that we are dealing with a literal wording of divine thoughts. For RHEMA denotes the spoken word, the utterance, as clearly seen, e.g., in Mt. 26:75; Mk 6:32; Lk 2:19,50. What God has uttered in His doctrine is His doctrine, is the truth, and in the very form of the words He has chosen. Faith grasps this presentation of the truth and consequently possesses the truth precisely in this presentation. Therefore they have the truth who cling to the simple, clear word of Scripture as THE doctrine.

It is therefore at least inexact to say divine truth is that which is clearly expressed in Scripture and results from incontestable logical conclusions. It may be admitted that false views may often be refuted adequately by logical conclusions from Scripture. Since we find, for instance, that Scripture attributes the exercise of will power to the Holy Spirit, we are fully justified in declaring it false doctrine that the Holy Spirit is merely a power of God. Furthermore, the exegete often speaks in the form of logical deduction in expounding the meaning of a Scriptural doctrine. For instance: God loved the world. "World" designates the totality of individual mankind, each of whom belongs to the world. Therefore God's love embraces every individual. But it is clear that by this logical process no truth beyond the word of Scripture has been gained, but rather a mere unfolding of the truth which actually is stated in this brief statement of a word of Scripture. Such a conclusion then expresses exactly the truth which the word of Scripture testified, and leads only into a deeper understanding of it. With such deductions the preacher therefore speaks who from the Word of Scripture presents to his congregation God's plan of salvation, and has consequently preached well when the text has become transparent, clear, and lively to his hearers. Christ legitimized such exposition when he opened the Scriptures to His disciples. Likewise did the apostles when they quoted OT texts and expounded them (Ac 2:25ff; 8:30ff; 18:28; 28:23; 1 Cor 15:1; etc.). Through such opening of the Scriptures their content is made truly graspable for faith, so that the possession of the truth is indeed not made more certain, but clearer and more joyous. But as soon as the attempt is made to go beyond the written Word to establish divine truth with deductions a wrong road has been taken. Such an attempt presumes that man by virtue of his reason is able to construct divine truth, or that God in His thinking is as restricted as man, so that His line of thought must follow

the same course as ours. We need not prove that such presumption is blasphemous, for it dishonors God. Therefore careful scrutiny is indicated when a theologian speaks of the logical consequence of and utterance of Scripture and seeks to promulgate his logical deductions as truth. In the past decades we have seen so many instances of this that we do not need to search for our examples in the past centuries of church history. We have been told that since the damnation of man is due entirely to his disbelief of the Gospel, it must needs follow that in the salvation of man not only the grace of God but also the attitude of man comes into decisive consideration. It has recently been stated that since Scripture says that we are justified by faith, it therefore follows with logical cogency that faith is a condition in justification. Whether these conclusions are logically correct is not the question here. At any event they are theologically false, for they irreconcilably contradict the divine assurance that the salvation of a sinner entirely and in all its parts takes place by grace alone. Our reason cannot go beyond divinely revealed truth. Logical deductions which merely serve to unfold the sense of Scripture bring forth no NEW truth. Who by way of logic seeks to enlarge his possession of truth beyond the content of the Word deceives his heart with errors and forfeits the possession of the truth he had before.

Into this area of drawing conclusions belongs the thought that it is the assignment of the theologian to harmonize the various Loci of dogmatics in order to attain a scientific system of theology which with all its parts will form a logical whole. That is not the same thing as when we say that Scripture must be explained by Scripture. This axiom has very distinct value in exegesis when its application stays within the limits which for the Bible-believing Christian are really self-evident. In disputation with his opponents Luther often found occasion to point out the abuse of expounding clear and plain statements of Scripture with dark or less easily understandable passages and thus attempt to foist on them a meaning not intended by the Holy Spirit. The very opposite is the correct procedure. If a dark passage plainly treats of the same subject as a clear one, then the clear passage serves to clarify the dark one by showing how one attains understanding it. By a discreet application of this rule one will find in most cases that the clear passage only serves to prevent a false understanding of the dark one, but not to determine the doctrinal content. The view referred to above regarding the assignment of scientific theology however does not aim at all to attain a better understanding of Scripture, a knowledge of the truth really imparted. The theologian who feels called to harmonize Scripture truths finds the motive for this procedure in the incontestable fact that the separate morsels of truth that God has revealed to us do not always have logical connections. Even if we had the marvelous insight into divine revelation such as the apostles had by inspiration, we should still have to say with Paul: "We know in part." In not one single doctrine can we pursue the strands of revelation to the point where they all combine. Everywhere we sooner or later arrive at a point where not only our individual knowledge but the possibility of all human knowledge totally stop. The simple faith which God seeks to work in us does not feel this as a limitation, for in the truths which we glean from Scripture we have such an extremely rich treasure that we enjoy the individual jewels with ever new delight. But at the same time the believer may realize nevertheless that the knowledge of the truth does have limits beyond which he will not reach while under the imperfection of this earth. When we, for instance, glean everything that the Scriptures relate about the divine mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, we have indeed gained a collection of irrefragably, divinely certain perceptions of truth, but the mystery itself remains unsolved and unsolvable. Since we experience this in all areas of doctrine, it follows that it is impossible to Systematize the doctrinal content of Scripture in logical manner. And when with our fathers we speak of a system of doctrine we clearly are conscious that a system in the scientific sense is out of the question. The artless faith of the Christian serenely accepts this and with undisturbed satisfaction lets the single truths stand immediately side by side where Scripture does not give the connecting concepts, and nevertheless glories in the great richness of his possession of the truth. But he who yields place to reason, instead of taking it captive under the obedience to Christ, soon feels the incompleteness of his knowledge as a burdensome limitation and seeks to break through the bars. Then he begins to harmonize. He proceeds to chip off, piece by piece, from Scripture truths that do not want to fit together logically, until the corners fit together, until he has a structure that fits together logically. At this harmonization the rationalism of all centuries has labored and has always boasted of the results of its operations as certain truth and possession of the truth. But never has such an operation been performed without giving up certain very definite articles of revelation because they did not fit



into the context. And so the truth was lost. An example will illustrate this. Scripture speaks of the divinity of Jesus Christ and at the same time of the obedience of the Son to the Father. These two doctrines do not mesh logically, and no man can make it plausible to reason that both can be true. Faith calmly accepts both truths and lets them in God's name stand immediately side by side. The Rationalist hacks away at them and finally establishes that the statements about the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ cannot be taken in their full sense. The Son is not equal to the Father in His nature, but is subordinate to Him, and hence not God in the full sense of the word. That view is better suited for an understanding of the passages that speak of obedience. A subordinate can of course yield obedience to a superior. Beautiful harmonization, resulting in the loss of the Divine Savior. Logical deduction thought it had enlarged the possession of truth and has thereby forfeited the whole truth. Harmonization of Scripture according to reason may make possible the construction of a water-tight theological system, but it does not lead to a possession of the truth; it hinders and destroys it.

Let us append a brief consideration of the analogy of faith. This slogan was regarded until recently by some of our opponents as heavy artillery that must be brought into action when necessary to save a lost position. The expression is taken literally from Scripture. It is found in Rm 12:7 (Greek!). The lovers of this phrase interpret faith exactly as did already Gerhard: *Praecipua et fundamentales doctrinae coelestis capita in V.D. proposita* (De Justif., sec. 16), the so-called *fides quae creditur*. Then they make the application: Every Scripture passage must be understood and explained according to the analogy of faith. The exegetical examination of this understanding of the passage in Romans does not belong here. It has been made in former volumes of the *Quartalschrift*, and the investigation has shown without the possibility of contradiction that Paul in this instance no less than in others uses the Word "faith" metonymically for the doctrine regarding faith. He is also here speaking of the heart-faith of the Christian. This proof, which removes the Biblical basis for the afore-mentioned use of the phrase, has up to now not been refuted. Nevertheless men continue to operate with the analogy of faith with the intention of establishing the possession of the truth and making counter-arguments ineffective. Let us now in connection with our line of thought examine the merits of this supposed means of searching out the meaning of Scripture. The analogy of faith is allegedly the sum of the chief articles of Christian doctrine clearly presented in Scripture. The first question that arises is: Where is this summary as such really found? If it is to be an exegetical aid, it must be palpably at hand. The definition itself presumes that it is not given in Scripture as such. Otherwise one could have simply said: Analogy of faith in every case consists of the words of Scripture. Faith does not search out *praecipua capita doctrinae* out of Scripture, but simply believes everything Scripture says. But by the analogy of faith is intended first to show faith what it is to believe according to the words of each passage. Actually the analogy of faith is meant to be a summary (synthesis? Tr.) of Christian doctrines as the Christian has understood them. By a conjurer's trick, likely performed involuntarily, the passage in Romans is made to speak not of the doctrine of faith but of that which the theologian believes who judges according to the analogy of faith. The sum of doctrinal elements is the sum that was formed in his head. We have here with a somewhat different shading the same principle from which modern theology seeks to develop all theology: Christian consciousness! What a Christian at a given time finds in himself as faith-knowledge is to be for him the standard for the truth-content of the single passages. Thus he is to gain possession of the truth that Scripture offers him. It becomes immediately clear that with THIS analogy of faith all certainty of the truth is immediately made impossible. Who is to decide which are the foremost chapters of Christian doctrine that God has revealed in Scripture? Since Scripture itself does not classify articles of faith according to rank or importance, it must be left to man to apply the standard according to which Scripture is to be rated. Who is qualified for this? If the professional theologians arrogate this function to themselves, the rest of the Christians are dependent on the verdict of theologians. But if every Christian has the right to establish the contents of the analogy of faith, the confusion might become exceedingly great. In any case, no man will finally know how he should understand even the clearest passage of Scripture. The Papists will, according to their analogy of faith, spoil for him all texts that speak of the forgiveness of sins by grace for Christ's sake. The Baptist, according to his analogy of faith, will demonstrate that Baptism is not accompanied by the forgiveness of sins, but is an outward ceremony in which water is used in a specified manner. While Paul clearly states that we were elected in Christ before the world began, and in that connection does not mention faith, wise men will arise and

according to their analogy of faith tell the Christian reader that also in this statement of doctrine faith dare not be omitted, and that the passage really would say; We were foreseen as believers and so were elected. Briefly, the analogy of faith which some think to find in a misunderstood word of Paul's becomes, in the hands of those who have fallen on error, a weapon with which they rob other Christians of a correct simple understanding of Scripture. Never yet has a false teacher in the church proclaimed that he interprets Scripture contrary to those articles of faith which he accepts and considers of greatest importance. They all hide their wolf nature under a sheep's clothing which they can just as well call the analogy of faith as an orthodox theologian his correct conception of doctrine.

The falsely conceived, and therefore false famous analogy of faith will therefore confirm or further no one in his possession of truth. If it is correct, as we have presented above, that truth is indeed found and appropriated only in the words of Scripture, it is by the same token clear that the possession of truth extends only so far as a man in faith accepts the Word of God as it is written. If faith then finds that Scripture in two different passages utters thoughts that seem to contradict one another, he does not see therein a demand to alter the content of one passage according to the content of the other, for he would thereby actually give up the content of both passages as divine wisdom since he must subjectively decide which of the two passages must submit to correction by the other. On the contrary, he lets both stand side by side and thus appropriates the truth expressed in both passages. And so he seriously applies the principle of faith that there are no contradictions in Holy Writ. Occasionally he may be tempted to solve an apparent contradiction with the means at his disposal, and if he has a measure of success he makes the joyous experience that Scripture cannot be broken. But for him the truth of both passages does not depend on the possibility of such a solution. If it were therefore try correct that in Rm 12:7 Paul designates the fides quae creditur with "faith," it would HAVE to mean: The Word of Scripture as it is written: The Word is the foundation of faith, and not the sum total of doctrinal statements abstracted and assembled by dogmaticians.

These considerations of the possession of the truth have a direct bearing on the question whether the Lutheran bodies of our country can achieve union. They all desire union, but also only on the basis of truth. Union can therefore be attained by establishing who has the truth. Every Christian immediately sides with the acknowledged truth. But now the Word of Scripture is THE truth, and all human presentations in the confessional writings and in the works of the dogmaticians are truth only to the extent that they reflect unaltered the content of Scripture. The one direct road to union can therefore be this that proof is adduced to show which of the contending parties has simply the clear word of Scripture as its doctrine. Let none say: You point out a well-trodden path which we have long traveled. The fact is that we all know of the existence of that path. But have we all actually always walked in it in such a way that it is well-trodden for us?