CHAPTER III

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MAJOR POINTS OF VIEW REGARDING

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A history of the movement of Scriptural interpretation through the long centuries as it is related to the respective contemporary theories of inspiration, displays an interesting pattern against which to evaluate present-day theological methods. It reveals a consistent relationship between these two aspects of Christian thought and practice. It justifies the term problem as it is used in the title of this study. The problem is not whether or not the Scriptures are inspired, but in regard to almost every other possible question concerning the explanation of inspiration and of its nature, purpose and object and how inspiration may affect interpretation. The historical review gives, also, a perspective against which to view contemporary thinking in respect to ecumenical Christian emphases. It is invaluable to those who desire to avoid the transitory, the novel and the provincial in doctrines of Scripture. It locates doctrinal family relationships, even though the ecclesiastical lines may have been broken or tangled.

It would be impossible to present a fully detailed historical survey in a study of this nature. The key figures in each epoch
must represent their own situation. The Patristic period, the middle and Scholastic period, the Reformation proper and the post-Reformation or Confessional period and relevant modern trends will be briefly surveyed. It is hoped that what has been intended as a characterization of each will not become merely a caricature, a danger which always accompanies the brief "proof-text" biography. The attempt to minimize this danger has been made by means of comparing the interpretations of scholars of widely varying personal points-of-view and staying within the general area of agreement. In some cases, notably with Luther and Calvin, this area has been too limited for value and a personal judgment was required. This judgment is based on an inductive study of the writings of these men, rather than upon a deduction from an a priori approach to them. In this area of research, therefore, there has been great dependence upon studies already done in the field of the history of interpretation. There are several excellent works from which two publications have been selected. Dean Farrar's classic work, The History of Interpretation, will be used for its arrangement and much illustrative material.¹ L. Berkhof² would not, perhaps share Dean Farrar's view on inspiration so it was thought

¹Farrar, History of Interpretation, pp. 48-50.
²Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation.
that these two works would serve to stand together. Their agreement in the analysis of early Christian thinking is significant. This full agreement has not been sought in every case. Other sources have also been consulted and used on occasion.

The Pre-Christian Palestinian Jewish Interpretation

Interpretation of Scripture probably did not begin before the days of Ezra. The prophets took a very free view of the law of Moses. In fact, Moses' name is mentioned but three times in all the Prophets (Isa. 63:12; Jer. 15:1; Mal. 4:4), and only in the last passage is the law of Moses mentioned, and neither Sinai or High Priest is named at all. And there is only a trace of reference to the Levitical system. Actually the prophets register a "magnificent protest" against the spirit of legalism. Ezra instituted an era of legal strictness never known before — the restoration of the Law, which undoubtedly saved the Jews as a nation from extinction. It taught the people how to maintain religion and separation under hostile foreign rule and permanently ended the practice of idolatry. But the scribes, following Ezra, made of the Book, Tradition and Ritual new idols most difficult to identify and uproot. They held every word of the Five Books of Moses to have been supernaturally communicated and every tittle of Levitical formalism as of infinite importance. The Law, became an object of worship, more sacred than any other Scripture.
Outward conformity to it was salvation, "torturing scrupulosity" became a substitute for glad obedience and Messianism was "debased into a materialized fable."¹

Probably the crudest form of Bibliolotxy developed during this period. Every letter was considered holy, and unusual case endings religiously significant. Hidden meanings were sought by every possible device, acrostically, cabbalistically, allegorically, mystically and otherwise. The confused picture came to a semblance of order when Hillel proposed seven rules by which oral tradition could be deduced from the Written Law. These seven rules of interpretation became the hermeneutical foundation of the Talmud, which so completely overshadowed the Hebrew Bible that it may be regarded as the sacred book of the orthodox Jews.²

**Philo and the Alexandrian Jews**

Many Jews were for economic reasons attracted to the splendid city of Alexandria where consequently a fusion of Greek philosophy

²Ibid., pp. 18-19. (1) Rule of "light and heavy" or "from the less to the greater; (2) rule of "equivalence" infers a relationship from identical expression; (3) "extension from the special to the general," permitted special Sabbath rules to apply to any festival; (4) two passages could be explained by a third one; (5) inference from general to special cases; (6) explanation from the analogy of other passages; (7) the application of inferences which were self-evident.
and Jewish religion took place. It was here the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek and the Septuagint version became the "Apostle to the Gentiles," and influenced exegesis for centuries. Fables regarding its origin resulted in attributing to it supernatural inspiration. Strangely enough, New Testament writers quoted from it, though it contains many mistranslations.

The peculiar Alexandrian type of allegorical interpretation arose, we are told by Farrar, by the necessity of harmonizing Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. This need is a universal one and occurs again and again. Whenever men try to apply the Bible to daily life, a like need arises.

Now the only possible method for making ancient documents of felt authority express throughout their whole extent the thoughts of advancing ages is the method of finding in them a mystic sense which lies below the surface — in one word, the method of allegory.¹

The method was already in use. Homer was made contemporarily respectable by the allegorical method. Philo, then, simply accepted it from the Greeks and systematized it. He professed to respect the literal sense, but actually thought it was a concession to weakness. Symbolic exegesis was to him, far richer. He was a good man and so sincere that he thought himself to be inspired, but his allegorizing was completely absurd. Philo held most rigid views of inspiration.

¹Ibid., p. 134.
It is "the holy word," the "sacred oracles," supernaturally significant in its minutest parts. He insisted that Scripture should be only interpreted in the light of that which is worthy of God. Whatever dropped below that had to be allegorised, as was also, any contradiction in Scripture or where Scripture itself allegorises. To him, also, allegory was called for when Scriptural expressions were doubled, when superfluous words were used, when a play of words were possible or when tense or number was unusual.\(^1\) But when this has been said it must be added that with all his erroneous interpretive methods, says Farrar, those who read his works are impressed with

his high morality, his dignity and loftiness of soul, his wide learning, his burning enthusiasm, his obvious sincerity, his innocent gladness, his deep piety. Undoubtedly, like the great philosophers in whose inspiration he believed, he too, had "knocked at the door of truth," and ardently longed for the furtherance of truth.\(^2\)

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**The Patristic Period**

The Patristic period will be classified according to catechetical schools, Alexandrian and Antiochian, the Literal or Realistic "school" and the Western type of interpretation.

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\(^{1}\)Ibid., pp. 22-23. These rules were "still more futile when they are only applied as Philo applied them, to a translation abounding in errors . . . The repetition, "Abraham, Abraham," does not imply that Abraham will also live in the life to come; nor does "Let him die the death" mean "Let him die in the next world as well as in this."

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 152.
The Alexandrian school was strongly influenced by Philo's allegorical principles and will be represented by the two most famous teachers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, his pupil, both of whom "regarded the Bible as inspired, in the strictest sense."\(^1\)

Clement (d. 215) came to the position of head of the Alexandrian school, well qualified by extensive learning and deep Christian convictions. Philosophy, he felt, was a teacher leading men to Christ and his whole work was motivated by this belief. Among his contributions to Christian thought was his interpretation of Scripture, the principles of which, as given in the *Stromata*, suggest the profound respect he had for it.

Clement believed in the divine origin of Greek philosophy and openly taught that Scripture must be allegorically understood. He did not deny the literal sense of Scripture but felt that the hidden senses of Scripture were only for the perfect Christians "who are marked out by election for the true Gnosis" (*Strom. I*, 7, et al). He thought of some New Testament stories as legends. The story of Salome is from "the Gospel to the Egyptians" (*Strom. III*, 63).\(^2\) He often attributed quotations to the wrong authors, and some were not to be found in the Scriptures. To him the Apocrypha was inspired and the


\(^2\)Yarrer, *History of Interpretation*, p. 164.
Septuagint miraculously inspired and he called Plato "all but an evangelical prophet" (Strom. I, 10). Examples of his exegesis include the idea of "clean beasts as implying the orthodox who are steadfast and meditative, since rumination stands for thought and a divided hoof implies stability. He allegorises the Decalogue and treats New Testament miracles as parables. In the feeding of the 5000 the barley loaves indicate the "preparation of the Jews for divine knowledge because barley ripens earlier than wheat, and the fishes the preparation of the Gentiles by Greek philosophy, because philosophy was born amid waves of heathendom, and given to those who lie on the ground."¹

He used the four-fold approach: (1) the superficial instruction to "the plain people"; (2) a higher form of instruction to those who had studied philosophy, "cutting through" Greek dogmas and "opening up" Hebrew Scripture; (3) an overcoming of the heretics who are brought by force to the truth; (4) and the highest, or gnostic teaching which is capable of looking into things themselves.²

As unsatisfactory as this approach may be to a twentieth century student, the fact remains that Clement's method of interpretation was

¹Tbid., p. 186.

to him the only satisfactory way to plumb the depths of the treasures of divine Scriptures.

Origen, Clement's pupil (c. 185-254), who succeeded him as head of the school, is considered the greatest scholar of the ancient church. His chief work was in textual criticism and the interpretation of Scripture. Students were drawn to him for his scholarship and pedagogical ability and he used all his gifts primarily to lead pagan youth to Christ. Jerome and Gregory give remarkable descriptions of him, emphasising his skill in the classroom and his passion to open the Scriptures to young eager minds. His work of fundamental importance was the compilation of the Hexapla, an enormous work in which six Old Testament versions and texts were placed in parallel columns. He labored diligently to produce a pure text and applied his wide learning to the task. In interpretation, he distinguished a three-fold sense corresponding to body, soul and spirit, which suggested the literal, moral and spiritual senses. In the latter he was led into uncontrolled allegory, but it seemed to be prompted by a deep desire to come to the truth of God's Word which human language is unable to convey.¹

It is this motive rather than the errors of his allegory that might well be remembered. He believed "in its strongest form, the theory of verbal inspiration,"² that "every clause of the Bible was

¹Ibid., pp. 87-91.
²Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 190.
infallible, supernatural and divinely dictated, and yet, if taken literally, he thought the Bible could not be so regarded. The anthropomorphisms, the immoral Old Testament scenes, the absurd prohibitions regarding food, and the contradictions in the Synoptics, provided him an argument for the need for an allegorical interpretation. A literal sense was for the weak, the allegorical, for the mature mind. He produced a forceful exegesis and attempted to systematize his own false conclusions, but at the same time his influence did much to "build up the fabric of Biblical interpretation" and "it must not be forgotten that he was the father of grammatical as well as allegoric exegesis," and was the first systematic and thorough textual critic. Bishop Lightfoot says of him, that he was a deep thinker, an accurate grammarian, a most laborious worker, and a most earnest Christian.

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1Ibid., p. 196.
2Ibid., p. 189.
4Origen, while living, was the victim of "episcopal jealousy and party intrigue" and his memory darkened by "ignorant malice" but "there is no man to whom the Church of Christ owes a more awful debt of reparation than to this incomparable saint." By his Tetrapsl and Hexapla he became the founder of textual criticism. Through some strange twist of fate it has been "his errors which were canonized," not his worthy contributions. He shared the views of Scripture prevalent in his day. The Septuagint was inspired. There were mysteries in soliciisms and errors. The Apocryphal books were inspired and authoritative. Not one iota of Scripture (Apocrypha included) is "empty." "God," he says, "gave the command Thou shalt not appear before me empty, and therefore He cannot speak anything which is empty" (Philokal., fragment). Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 157.
"The errors of exegesis which Origan tended to establish for more than a thousand years had their root in the assumption that the Bible is throughout homogeneous and in every particular supernaturally perfect."¹ Many details, of course, by their literal sense were "derogatory to God's greatness" and had to be handled accordingly. What profit could there be, he asks, in reading about Noah's drunkenness or about Judah and Tamar? Some of the precepts were unworthy and unjust, such as, that an uncircumcised child should be cut off from his tribe (Gen. 17:14). Ought not the parents to be punished rather? His allegorical method gave him, from the story of Rebecca coming daily to the wall, the truth that we must come daily to the wells of Scripture to meet Christ.²

The Antiochian school was noted for its repudiation of the Alexandrian allegorical methods, and its anachronous use of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation was never widely nor successfully used again until the Reformation. Two men represent it, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), and John, called Chrysostom (d. 407). Theodore, "held rather liberal views respecting the Bible,"³ and was keenly aware of the human aspects in it. He insisted on an interpre-

¹Ibid., p. 191.
²Ibid., p. 199.
tation that gave full value to the grammatical and linguistic rules, unity of sense, sequence of thought, and related concerns. Although he was a brilliant exegete, Theodore was not a Hebrew scholar, nor did he avail himself of the Peshito version which would have aided him greatly. He relied on the full inspiration of the Septuagint. He treated all Scripture as equal in value with no conception of progressive revelation, though he did refuse to see the Trinity in Gen. 1, or the three spies of Exodus. He could explain away bothersome passages and resorted to arbitrary reading changes. (In Ephesians 3:15 he used ἐγκαταστάσεις for ἐπισκευάσεως). But he paid close attention to particles, moods and prepositions and carefully addressed himself to hermeneutics.

Both he and Chrysostom roundly rejected the allegorical interpretations of their day and Theodore, at least "paid a terrible penalty for having been born in an age too soon. His aberrations from traditional dogma brought him into suspicion."\(^3\)

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\(^2\) One of the greatest contributions was his grasp of the difference which separated Jewish and Alexandrian theories of inspiration. The unique Jewish concept of inspiration was in its ethical character, or the enlargement and enablement of the individual consciousness. The Alexandrian pathological inspiration came by way of trance or a depression of individual consciousness. The former, purified in Christianity, takes the Old Dispensation literally but sees in it a shadow of the future, suggesting the use of typology (which Theodore rejected), and the latter became a pretext for the unbridled use of allegory in which writers could be made to mean something other than they said. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

John of Chrysostom, who, though less learned and original than Theodore, had more definiteness, clearer insight, and more practical and spiritual wisdom, and "stands unsurpassed among the ancient exegetes." There are fewer errors and vagaries in his writings than in any other one of the Fathers. Though he, too, held to a high view of inspiration, he also frankly acknowledged the human element in Scripture. He adopted a sober mystic sense but is known best by his usage of and appreciation for the special words and contextual meanings. He held Scripture to be perfectly perspicuous, the only aid needed, being a willing heart, wise guidance of men and the help of the Holy Spirit of God.  

It is interesting to note, in this regard, that this school in spite of its more correct exegetical principles was not able to influence the doctrinal decisions of the Councils. Orthodoxy stemmed from the more spiritual interpretation of the Greek theology of the Alexandrian school.  

The Literal or Realistic school, which from this time on became formative for the Western Church, is best represented by Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome and St. Augustine. Its unique contribution was its elevation of Tradition to an authority equal to Scripture. In practice

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1Ibid., pp. 221, 223.

Tradition always overshadows Scripture, when it is admitted to an equal status, under the guise of being its protector and interpreter.

Tertullian always spoke of Scripture as being uttered by God and dictated by the Holy Ghost (Apol. 18) and saw no degrees of inspiration but placed all Scripture on the same level (DePudic. 17). He supposed they contained the total body of all truth and that they contained no contradictory elements. He held as infallibly inspired their cosmology, chronology, anthropology, and history (De Anima. 1, 2). He claimed equal authority also for the Book of Enoch, and "the Sibyl who lies not" (De Idol. 15). He mixed up quotations, quoted them inaccurately and used some not found in Scripture, as proof texts. He knew no Hebrew and relied on the "inspiration" of the Seventy (Apol. 18). He held that Ezra reproduced the whole Scriptures by immediate inspiration. He protested against literalism yet took literally "the hand of God," and other anthropomorphisms. He blames the gnostics for their abuse of allegory yet employed it when it suited him. He finds a symbol of the Twelve Apostles in the twelve walls of Elim, in the twelve gems on the high priest's breast and in the twelve stones taken from Jordan (c. Marc IV, 13). In arguing with heretics, he said contemptuously, it is useless to use Scripture. The appeal must always be made to tradition. Ironically, the "father of Latin Orthodoxy," in maintaining the right of private judgment and freedom of faith and conscience, became a champion of schism and died
a heretic.\footnote{Farrar, \textit{History of Interpretation}, pp. 117-180.}

Cyprian followed closely in Tertullian's steps. Though he, too, held to a very high theory of inspiration his "exegesis is vitiated by the fatal fault of unreality." He proved the unity of the Church from (1) the Passover commandment, "In one house shall it be eaten." from (2) "My dove, my undefiled one," and from (3) the command of the spies to Rahab to collect all her family into her house. Noah's drunkenness was a sign of the Passion. He insisted that everything he done as Christ did it, yet demanded that Holy Communion be celebrated in the morning. He said everything in the Old Testament about priests applied to Christian presbyters. Tradition, to him, was subservient to Scripture until he needed it to defend some \textit{a priori} opinion.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 180-181.}

Jerome was one of the intellectual giants of Christian history. Farrar tells us that his personal character was less lofty than most of the Church Fathers. "... he was an excessively faulty saint..." but his exceptional scholarship rendered to the study of Scripture, services equal only to Origen. He learned Hebrew from an unpointed text, by his own efforts mainly, but with the infrequent and surreptitious midnight visits of a friendly Jew. It was risky for both Semite and Aryan to be found together for the Jew was held in deepest contempt. Such diligence underlay every area of Jerome's learning and his translation of the Scriptures into the Latin (Vulgate), as faulty as it may be, represents a new high mark in the rising tide of Biblical and critical scholarship. It was another...
major step in the spread of the sacred Scriptures in the vernacular. Jerome distinguished sharply between canonical and all other writings, and was alert to the superior value of the literal and historical sense of the Bible, but as with the other exeges of his age, he too fell into the allegorical method when some passage baffled him.\(^1\)

It is impossible to say what his view of inspiration may have been. Sometimes he speaks as if every word in Scripture was "so mysterious and supernatural that even their contradictory statements were equally true"\(^2\) and again criticises them with perfect freedom. He says that the Galatians being foolish, Paul accommodates himself to their infirmities, and made himself foolish. In another place he

\(^{1}\)Jerome's valuable contribution, including a well-developed literal and historic sense was somewhat offset by his overhaste, second handedness, vehement prejudice, and changeableness (p. 225). He spent only three days in translating Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (p. 226). He hastily read the Fathers and then dictated as fast as he could, hoping the reader would attribute his hasty quotations to humility (p. 227). In his controversial literature he throws all exegetical caution to the winds, particularly in regard to his prejudices against marriage. As an example, he said of married Peter, he "washed off the filth of marriage in the blood of martyrdom," and sometimes "by the impudent fable that Peter left his wife with his nets and his fishing boat." (p. 228). But, most serious was his lack of exegetical decision. He is as unsure about how to characterize other writers as he is about his own Vulgate renderings (p. 229), and his commentaries are full of contradictory statements. "He was himself, so conscious of these inconsistencies that he quotes the verse "When they persecute you in one city, that is in one book of Scripture, let us fly to other cities, i.e., to other volumes." (Comm. in Matt. I, 23), Ibid., p. 229.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 230.
speaks of Paul as unable to express profound thoughts in an alien
tongue (in Gal. 5:12).\(^1\) In many places he disparages allegory, but
then, "treats every detail, almost every syllable, of the Levitic
law as full of mystic meanings.\(^2\) Scripture narratives are too shocking
to be matters of sacred history.\(^3\) Jerome, then becomes another link
in the long chain of Christian scholars who stood baffled before the
mighty Word of God.

St. Augustine, said to be the most influential single man in
all Christian history subsequent to Apostolic days, followed in the
tradition of Jerome. Unfortunately, Augustine was not the scholar
that Jerome was, but he excelled in systematising the truths of
Scripture. He was extravagant in his claim for a verbally inspired
and inerrant Bible, as is indicated by such statements as the following
in which his writings abound: Scriptures "were written by the Holy
Ghost" (De Doctr. Christ. III, 37), and sacred writers were "pens
of the Holy Ghost" (Confessions, VII, 21).

His interpretive ideals were high. Allegory, he thought, ought
always to be based, if used at all, on the strictly historic sense.
He recognised the fact of progressive revelation. A literal sense was
the best sense. But in practice, Augustine indulged in some of the

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 231.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 232.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 233.
most extreme allegorical interpretation. It is interesting to note that in spite of his ideal he accepted as a norm the rules of Ticho-
nious which were less justifiable than Philo's or Hillel's and refers to them with marked praise since they enable us, he said, to under-
stand the hidden meanings of Scripture.¹

He also agreed with Philo in his attempt to defend the character of God by allegorising passages which seem un-
worthy of Him should they be taken literally. And, of particular interest is the fact that as an exegete he was a true servant of the Church. He laid down the rule that "the Bible must be interpreted with reference to Church Orthodoxy."²

Since Augustine is identified in Christian thinking as the Father of Orthodoxy it comes as somewhat of a surprise to note the details of Augustine's allegorical interpretation and remember that it was the Septuagint which he regarded as inspired Scriptures.

Hab. 3:2 ("Thou shalt revive thy work in the midst of the years"), is in the Septuagint, translated, "And thou shalt be recognised in

¹The rules of Tichonious: (1) "about the Lord and his mystic body," namely the Church. Some Old Testament passages refer to Christ, the next clause may be the Church, etc., (2) "about the Lord's bi-part body," or about true and false Christians. Thus in Cant. I, 5, "I am black but comely," the first epithet refers to false Christians: the second to true Christians. (3) "About the Promises and the Law," is theological. (4) "About Genus and Species," or whole and part. All nations mentioned in Scripture are types of Churches, either good or bad, part or whole, depending on the weight of the exegete. (5) This rule permits a sort of cabalism of numbers. (6) "About the devil and his body," teaches us how to apply some passages of Scripture to the devil and some to evil men. Ibid., p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 236.
the midst of two animals." Origen sees in this passage, the Son and Spirit; Tertullian saw Moses and Elias and Augustine holds it to be the ox and ass in the manger, and his view has exercised a deep influence over the pictures of the Nativity in Christian Art.

St. Augustine, being ignorant of Hebrew, and finding in the Septuagint his nearest approach to the original, had an exaggerated opinion of the sacredness of the Greek version (De Doct. Christ. II, 15). He seems to have doubted whether even the errors were not of divine origin."1

He said sacred writers were "pens of the Holy Ghost" (Conf. 7, 21), yet recognized the human element in Scripture and explained the Synoptic variations on purely human principles (Inspiratus a Deo sed tamen homo, in Joann, tract. 1, 1). 'Leaven' might be 'truth' or 'wickedness,' and a 'lion' could stand either for 'the Devil' or for 'Christ.' In the Fall story, the fig leaves were hypocrisy, the coats of skins, morality, and the four rivers of Eden, the four cardinal virtues. Surprisingly, the drunkenness of Noah is "a figure of the death and passion of Christ" (Hom. in Gen. 13:3), and

"The sun which knoweth his going down" (Ps. 103), is Christ aware of his own death, and, could anyone be as senseless (ita desinit), he says, to imagine "the prophet" (Psalms) would have meant actual sleep in "I laid me down, and slept, and rose up again," and not the death and Resurrection of Christ (Enarr. in Ps. 103)2

So deep has been, and is the hold of Augustine on Christian thought, not only in Protestantism but in the Catholic faith as well,

1Ibid., p. 12h.
2Ibid., p. 238.
that no other single man could be called so truly ecumenical. His opinions have become almost identified with divine revelation, and much of his thought anticipated modern psychology and philosophy. But for the subject at hand it is an incredible thing to note that his Biblicism and his emphasis on the authority of the Church, mutually contradictory emphases, as well as all the doctrines which he taught, were born and nourished in the perspective of Scripture which this review presents.

The whole epoch is the allegorical period of Biblical interpretation. The few traces of a more sound method of exegesis, were either ignored by the Church as in the case of Theodore of Mopsuestia, or ignored in practice by the person proposing it. Nearly every scholar knew to do better than he practiced. We are compelled to reckon with the fact that out of this period came the Council decisions regarding the nature of Christ upon which the Christian Church stands today. Out of it, too, came the orthodox view of anthropology which was formative for Protestantism, and the realistic doctrine of the church which is Catholicism. In spite of their questionable handling of Scripture, they had insights which were permanent for the Church. Their view of the inspiration of Scripture equals that of present-day Fundamentalists, yet it was the Septuagint which was so regarded (even as some Fundamentalists regard the authorized version). They believed in what would now be called verbal inspiration, yet they
treated the divine words with bewildering freedom. They altered them, misquoted them, combined widely different passages to prove a point and allegorised to the point of absurdity. We are left with the question: Why did allegorising satisfy highly intelligent and deeply religious men? What consistency may be found in their interpretive methods and their expressed views of Scripture? This is a question which must be kept in mind and answered when more evidence has been gathered.

Medieval and Scholastic Periods

The middle ages have not been called Dark without some reason. Particularly in the realm of Scriptural interpretation do we become aware of the eclipse of Biblical scholarship. Whatever may be the full reason for this, at least we may safely assume that the ascendancy of the authority of the Church did not aid in encouraging thought in this direction. The elevation of Church authority to equal Scriptural authority resulted in the servile status of Scripture to Church doctrine. Papal authority assumed the place of God over the Book, state, reason and private conscience. There were, in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of this, very definite rules of interpretation prevailing. These rules were rigid, in that they were set by the church but they were also flexible enough to prove any number of things. The point is that, by them, all truth was or could be known. Hugo of
St. Victor simply expressed the frank belief of the church when he said: first learn what you are to believe, and then go to Scripture to find it there. "Dogmatics were made the key to interpretation."¹

The flexibility of Scripture was in its "multiple sense." Hugo of St. Victor said:

The word involves the sound, the form the meaning.
The sound is addressed to the enemy, the form of the word to the afflicted people; and the meaning of the word to the . . . choir of the elect.²

The religious, or semi-religious literature of the Middle-English period demonstrates indirectly the usage of Scripture. In a study of Piers Plowman, the systematic exegetical procedure was discovered by the authors, inductively.³ They say that medieval students were taught to read on three levels. The first was in terms of grammar, structure, syntax. The second step was to determine the meaning of what had been read, and the third, the theme, or doctrinal content. The last is the important thing, for in it lay the higher meaning, or sentence. This sentence was not so much the moral, as the "dominant unifying principle." "The relative importance of matter and sentence is indicated by Chaucer's Nun's Priest, who compares the matter of his tale to the chaff, its sentence to the fruit."⁴ Biblical

¹Ibid., p. 258.
²Ibid., p. 252.
⁴Ibid., p. 1.
exegesis was carried through on these same three levels, with a very sharp distinction made between sense and sentence. The sentence was elaborated by means of the three levels, tropological, allegorical and anagogical. The tropological meaning applied to the individual, the allegorical applied the Old Testament to the Church, the anagogical is concerned with heavenly mysteries, or is the sentence of Scripture. The commentaries of the Fathers always had this mystical meaning in mind and to find this is the goal of Peter Lombard's work called by the name Sentences.¹ The medieval student did not confine himself to any single interpretation but acquainted himself with any number, so that it was not, to Peter Lombard, a contradiction to find different sentences in the Fathers regarding any one passage of Scripture, but the evidence of richness or multiplicity of meaning in this the highest realm of spiritual exercise. The Glosses gave multiple meanings to individual words. "For example ... dormitio (sleep) is given seven meanings: the quietness of contemplation, spiritual torpor, death, sickness, blindness, falling into sin, sexual embrace."²

The ultimate Sentence of the Bible was perfect caritas, the love of God and of one's neighbor, and this was said to be the end of all Biblical study.³ Since this is so, passages in the Bible not

¹Ibid., p. 4.
²Ibid., p. 5.
³Ibid., p. 11.
literally active in this pursuit must be figuratively interpreted.¹

In this way, the sentences were the symbolic message of Scripture, the real meaning of it in distinction from the literal words in the book. Christ himself, in a mystical way, as well as Peter, the head of the Church, are involved in this sentence and accounts for the name of the poem Piers Plowman, or the mystical impression on the human will toward the City of God. It is no mystery, in view of this understanding, that Abelard's Sic et Non, was not well received. He was, by the spirit of his work, not only attacking Tradition, and poor exegesis, but the mystical meaning or the sentence philosophy. In this his rationalism is most clearly defined. He could only have compiled it in the spirit of mockery and the Church accepted it as the mockery he had intended; but it became another wedge to separate the hold that Tradition had on Scripture.

Scholasticism was born of the efforts of free inquiry to penetrate the dogmatism of the Church. The new era began with Anselm (1033-1109) who tried to lift the truths of faith to scientific certainty, "I believe in order to know." Peter Abelard, did a great deal to break down the authority of tradition. But as is so often the case when Scripture has become intertwined with tradition or some other concern, when the support is taken away there is a loss of faith in the

¹Ibid., p. 12.
Bible as well. Abelard began to criticize Scripture as well as Tradition. His own restless speculative spirit drove him beyond the bounds of good judgment. But his maxim, "By doubting we arrive at truth," did more than any other one thing to challenge the whole structure of tradition. Peter Lombard retreated into the dogmatic method as we have shown, but his Sentences with Thomas' Summa, became the textbook of scholasticism.

In exegesis we see the Schoolmen at their worst. Scholasticism treats the letter of Scripture, even in its plainest histories, as an enigma which veils the latest afterthoughts of theology.

Thomas Aquinas, the most important figure in the Scholastic era, in that he synchronized the major forces of the age into one impressive whole, uniting Aristotelian philosophy, Augustinian theology and Latin ecclesiology, did not add anything to the doctrine of Scripture. He held a high view of Scripture, says Seeberg, believing that God imparted definite items of knowledge to the sacred writers, by way of transient impressions. But Thomas used the four-fold sense of interpretation essentially as described above, historical, tropological, allegorical and analogical. Bonaventure (d. 1274) accepted the super-

1Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 261.
2Ibid., pp. 266-267.
natural infallibility of every word of Scripture but made his commentaries profoundly unscriptural. From

> God saw the light . . . (he said) If truth is not, it is true that truth is not; something therefore is true, it is true that there is truth; therefore if truth is not, there is truth. For truth prevails above all things.¹

Nicholas Lyra (d. 1340) disturbed the slumber of Scholastic interpretation by a rediscovery of the Hebrew grammar and a study of other languages. He distinguished five methods of Biblical commentary, the last of which he accepted; the Verbal, which centers on individual words, the Subjective, the Allegoric, the Kabbalistic, and the Literal, which confined itself to the actual meaning of the writers. Farrar thinks that Nicholas did more than any other writer to break down the tyranny of tradition and overcame the centuries-old bad methods of interpretation.² "After the death of Nicholas of Lyra there was no important addition to the study of Scripture till the dawn of the Reformation."³

As the allegorical period produced principles of interpretation, so the Scholastic period produced principles in keeping with its general attitude toward Scripture and the purpose of it as they understood it. The purpose, if we may judge from the use made of Scripture,

¹Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 272.
²Ibid., p. 277.
³Ibid., p. 278.
was largely to justify Church doctrine and practice. In order to make the application, rules of interpretation which would produce the needed support were devised. The multiple meaning device was admirably suited to this demand. Though this is undoubtedly true to fact, it is the conviction of the author that a more subtle and spiritual motive was also behind it. There is every evidence that the centuries-old impulse to relate sacred Scriptures to common daily need was at work at least in the early stages of this approach to Scripture. The reason for this hypothesis is very simple. Institutions and patterns of human activity and thinking never descend ready made into life. Always they spring out of the "grass roots," out of some need or impulse or reaction. When it is time to defend that pattern of behavior or the institution which develops from it, the tendency is to codify the original impulse into a controlling method of preserving the status quo. Originally, Scripture served the spiritual needs of men, and the "three" and four fold senses of interpretation were attempts to give system to that usage.

It must be observed, also, that in spite of the defective principles of interpretation of this period, the doctrine of the Atonement was in the process of examination and formulation, and in the hands of Anselm and Abelard, took forms so permanent as to compel the Church today to reckon with them.
The Reformation View of Scripture

The Reformation was in the truest sense a rediscovery of the Bible. Its initial spiritual and intellectual "shock," in the person and preaching of Luther was the effect of the Living Word of God, stripped of its enervating and choking traditional interpretations, shining out in its unique power over the consciences of men. The work of Luther was preceded by a growing interest in the Bible as literature. Actually, the preamble to the Reformation, in the form of such scholarship, was the hidden but vital roots of the spectacular afterglow. The curious thing is that this scholarship was born in the spirit of the Renaissance which was not in itself a religious awakening but rather the awakening of the human spirit from its long sleep under the spell of a materially strong but spiritually decadent Church.

Lorenzo Valla (d. 1465), is said to have been the chief link between the Renaissance and the Reformation. He was not a deeply religious man but in the course of his studies came upon the wonder of the Bible and was convinced that it should be read and interpreted literally, grammatically and with a full understanding of the original languages just as the newly recovered classics were being read. This impressed Erasmus profoundly. Jacques Le Ferre, a few years later, with Valla in mind, translated, for the first time, the entire Bible into the French language (published in 1523). Reuchlin (b. 1455), a
layman, dominated by the same spirit, "devoted himself to the study of language with the express object in view of elucidating the Scriptures."\(^1\) He spent all he earned by teaching, in acquiring greater knowledge of Hebrew, and once paid ten gold pieces to a Jew for the explanation of a single phrase. He was so eager to find the literal sense of Scripture that the cost to him in time and money was not considered. Hebrew was a "lost tongue" to the Church at the time. Priests had denounced it as an accursed language so that when Reuchlin lectured on Hebrew at Heidelberg University, he had to do so secretly to escape their fury. The controversies between him and the Church theologians were exceedingly bitter and serve to point up the fact that the struggle with the Papacy was a struggle of "knowledge against ignorance, of light against darkness."\(^2\)

Erasmus of Rotterdam, though not considered a hero of the Reformation, gave invaluable tools to the Reformers. His *edites princeps* of the New Testament (1516) was the cause of the conversion of Bilney the English martyr. It was used by Tyndale and Coverdale as well as by Luther. He desired "to see Christ honored in all languages, to hear the Psalms sung by the labourer at the plough, and the Gospel read to poor women as they sat spinning at the wheel."\(^3\) It pained

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\(^1\) Farrar, F. W., *History of Interpretation*, p. 315.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 315-316.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 317.
him to listen to ignorant worshippers rattling off the memorised Latin prayers and Scripture passages, without the slightest idea of what the words meant. Of all the things that may be said about Erasmus, pro and con, his devotion to the great ideal of recovering the Bible from the corrupt Vulgate and publishing it in the original languages, and the personal cost of achieving it, deserves to be remembered in his favor. It is significant to the final work of the Reformation and is an important point in this study.

Martin Luther was in large measure the fruit of previous Biblical scholarship. In the Bible he found Christ. He was amazed to know that the word "penance" in Jerome's "holy" Latin version, with all the corrupt theological system implicated with it, was rather "repentance," and men could by-pass the Church hierarchy and come directly to forgiveness from Christ's hand. Luther's contribution to the Church is very great but we will restrict the discussion to an answer to the question "What was Luther's view of Scripture?" There are two approaches to this question and they are mutually exclusive. One depends upon Luther's actual writings — an inductive approach. The other looks back on Luther through later Creedal formulations to find in him a view of Scripture consistent with that formulation. In the opinion of the writer, the former approach is the only consistent one. We must rely upon the opinion of dependable Luther students and historians for most of the analysis.
Luther was well trained in Scholasticism and the Sentences. He knew Peter Lombard's Sentences almost by heart and interpreted Scripture in the "four-fold sense." His interest in Hebrew and Greek opened to him the richness of the unadorned Bible and was the key to the principles of interpretation, which became formative to him and to the Reformation. They are, (1) the supreme and final authority of Scripture itself, apart from ecclesiastical authority. He would not even argue this point since it was theoretically admitted by the Catholic Church. In this relation, he was led to reject even the authority of councils which, he discovered gave contradictory decisions. He scorned the popular glosses, or word analyses, multiplying meaning on meaning. Scripture (2) is sufficient, needing no Father to supplement contradictory meanings.

The literal sense (3), was to him the only proper sense. He finally rejected the four-fold interpretations. Even Erasmus had not forsaken this method, in the interest of the "fecundity" of Scripture. Errors, said Luther, arise from neglecting the simple meaning, for each passage has but one simple, true sense of its own. (4) Of course, it follows that Luther rejected allegory. In his commentary on Genesis III, such remarks are made, "Origen's allegories are not worth so much dirt," and, "Allegories are . . . the scum of Holy Scripture," and "Allegory is a sort of beautiful harlot, who proves herself especially seductive to idle men." Luther maintained (5) the
perspicuity of Scripture, saying that "the Holy Ghost is the all-
simplest writer that is in heaven or earth." The difference of
opinion among exegetes he attributed to "malice or pravity." This
and (6) the strong assertion of the right of private judgment, and
the conviction that every right-minded man would come to a uniform
understanding of Scripture was the profoundest conviction of the
Reformers. When unity of Christians failed to materialise it gave
great distress of mind and eventually led, doubtlessly, to the New
Confessional dogmatism. But, to Luther, the Holy Spirit given to
all Christians, gave them a higher function than merely to register
the decrees of a sacerdotal class.  

The excesses of private opinion and the fact that all the
Reformation controversialists appealed to Scripture and claimed the
right to interpret it in their own way, prompted Luther to lay out
rules for interpretation. The first three raise no question:
(1) the need for grammatical knowledge, the (2) need for knowledge
of the historical occasion and conditions, and (3) contextual acquain-
tance. The last three gave rise to subsequent errors. (4) The need
for faith and spiritual illumination did not take into consideration
the inability of piety alone to give infallible interpretation. No
individual can, unaided, know the conditions of centuries of history
through which the Bible was written. If the first three rules are

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1Ibid., pp. 327-329.
valid this one is not independently valid. The fifth rule is found throughout Reformation literature, "the analogy of faith" which simply indicates that Scripture interprets Scripture. In the first place it misapplies Paul's use of this term (Rom. 12:6), and in the second place it is exegetically meaningless outside of the rule that Scripture must not be distorted out of its general or particular context. The last rule, so meaningful to Luther, (5) that Christ is to be everywhere found in Scripture, can be and was by others made to mean that Christ could be found revealed clearly everywhere from Genesis to Revelation.¹

This last criterion, Luther used radically. By means of it, he concluded that some books were not and could not be made to be, canonical. On this basis, some books were above others in value. St. Paul's epistles were more gospel than the Gospels and Romans and I Peter were the "right kernel and marrow of all books." His critical insight decided that the Books of Chronicles were inferior to the Books of Kings (which he regarded as only "a Jewish Calendar"), and he noted the improper chronology of Jeremiah. One of Paul's proofs in Galatians was, to him, too weak; and Jude's epistle was unnecessary. The Epistle of James was "a right strawy epistle and one which flatly (stracks) contradicted St. Paul." And of the book of Revelation he

¹Ibid., pp. 332-334.
said that "his spirit could not accommodate itself to the book, and that it was sufficient reason for the small esteem in which he held it, that Christ was neither taught in it nor recognized." He put it in the same class as Esdras as uninspired. To him, it did not matter whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch or not, for Moses was for the Jews, not the Christians. In his Commentary on Genesis 38, Luther apologizes for the Holy Spirit for recording sexual immoralities.

It is needless to say, that in the face of this kind of criticism of Scripture at the hand of Luther, regardless of what he may have said relative to the value of the Bible he did not mean what later came to be called verbal inspiration. Even statements like the following must be understood against a wider context of meaning than is often afforded by Luther.

The Bible is God's Word, written and, as it were, spelled and presented in letters, just as Christ, as the eternal Word, is presented in human nature, (and) one letter, even a single tittle of Scripture means more to us than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot permit even the most minute change.3

1Ibid., p. 336.
2Ibid., p. 337.
William Young quotes from Luther’s letter to Carlstadt, to illustrate his regard for an objective, authoritative and verbally inerrant Bible.

Therefore this is our basis, where the Holy Scriptures establish something that must be believed, there we must not evade the natural meaning of the words nor wrest them from the conviction in which they stand unless an express and clear article of faith compels us to arrange or interpret the statement otherwise. If we acted differently, what would become of the Bible?

No statement could better illustrate Luther’s view of Scripture than this. He believed in an objective Scripture but he also held Scripture to an a priori test, the "article of faith," which we know from other passages to be Christ, the Living Word.

Luther's insistence upon the grammatical and historical sense, and his own recognition of and freedom in criticizing the human elements in Scripture, makes it impossible to hold that he held the modern theory of verbal inspiration. Luther’s theory of inspiration did not end in the words of the text but in the Living Lord who stood as the criterion of the validity of the written record. Interpretation was not a mechanical and arbitrary thing, but was very personal and very much dependent upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. From this position he never wavered in spite of the excesses perpetrated

in the name of Scriptural interpretation. If it be said that such a view of hermeneutics and such a view of inspiration is indefinite and lacking in the finished characteristics which the later Protestantism gave it, Luther, we believe, would not object. His Lord could not be confined in human principles of interpretation. There was always an open door toward the spiritual life. So far as inspiration is concerned we may say, Luther believed in an inspired book but inspiration, in his mind, was not equated with inerrancy.

"Christ, and Christ alone, was to him without error — was alone the essential Word of God." (Werke, XXIII, 654).¹ This gives to the Bible a living dynamic quality, a fresh and vital communication to every age and to every individual. He said in his introduction to the book of James,

All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with him. That is the true test by which to judge all books when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ.²

The most consistent and undoubtedly the greatest exegete and theologian of the Reformation was John Calvin. Some say he was the greatest that ever lived. Certainly, he was more logical and systematic, deliberate and consistent than any interpreter before him.

¹Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 339.
²Quoted by Lehmann, Theology Today, p. 337.
Calvin's great systematic work, "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," provides a more sure basis of analysis of his doctrines than anything Luther left. In the Institutes, Calvin's mind lies exposed and his method of interpretation clearly demonstrated. In fact it is precisely this point that Calvin would have us note.

The design of the Institutes was

... to prepare and qualify students of theology for the reading of the divine word, ... for I think I have given such a comprehensive summary and orderly arrangement of all branches of religion that, with proper attention, no person will find any difficulty in determining what ought to be the principle objects of research in the Scriptures and to what end he ought to refer to anything it contains, ... If I should publish any exposition of the Scripture, I shall therefore have no need to introduce long discussions respecting doctrines ... This will relieve the pins reader from great trouble and tediousness, provided he came previously furnished with the necessary information.1

Calvin's principles of Interpretation are suggested in the Dedication to King Francis. In defending his doctrine against those who charged him with "nefariously corrupting" the Word of God, he pleaded Paul's "fixed and invariable standard by which all interpretation of Scripture ought to be tried," namely, the "analogy of faith" (Romans 12:6). The rule known by this name, and first proposed as a principle of interpretation in the Reformation, is otherwise worded, Scripture interprets Scripture, and is a misapplication of

Paul’s meaning in the passage. In the same dedication he explains his opposition to the Fathers — ”I mean the writers of the earlier or purer ages” — . They contradict each other, were inconsistent with themselves and "ignorant of many things." He uses them, however, far more than Luther did. In this explanation Calvin parts company with the multiple sense interpretation in favor of the one, clear meaning of Scripture.1

In the Institutes we find further principles of interpretation. He said that the writer’s intention is to be held inviolate. This principle is often reiterated. In a dedicatory letter to one of Calvin’s Commentaries, quoted by Bernard Ramm but unidentified, Calvin said that the test of the validity of an interpretation was the faithfulness of the commentator to the writer’s mind. "It is an audacity akin to sacrilege to use the Scriptures at our own pleasure and to play with them as with a tennis ball."2

The rule of piety" requires that an indulgence in an unprofitable degree of speculation" leads the reader away from the simplicity of faith3. We should not speak of or desire to know anything "beyond the information given us in the Divine word . . .

1Ibid., pp. 28-29.


3Calvin, Institutes, (I, 14, iii, iv).
as soon as the Lord closes his sacred mouth. ... we should give up our desire of learning.

Inference, however, is proper and important. Calvin demonstrates David's use of inference, and makes some inferences of his own from the Psalm 107, in Book I, 5, viii.

One of the most widely used principles in Calvin's works is the synecdoche, that figure of speech which suggests the whole by a part. By it interpretation may exceed the expression. But the application must be held in check by the "end for which it was given" or the writer's intention. By way of example of this type of figure, Calvin, in Book II, 8, viii, demonstrates its proper use. He says that commands and prohibitions always imply more than the words express. The rule is (1) to examine the subject under discussion; (2) to determine to what ultimate end the command was given and (3) to draw an argument from the command to its opposite. A positive command implies a prohibition and a prohibition implies a positive performance relative to it. This rule Calvin applies to the Decalogue and to the Sermon on the Mount and makes of these two passages highly practical rules of life.

Figurative interpretation is proper, also, when the text permits. This type of interpretation is crucial to Calvin's Old Testa-

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1Ibid., III, 21 iii.
ment exegesis.

Whenever the prophets mention the blessedness of the faithful, scarcely any vestiges of which are discernible in the present life, he should recur to this distinction; that in order to the better elucidation of the Divine goodness, the prophets represented it to the people in a figurative manner; but that they gave such a representation of it as would withdraw the mind from the earth and time, and the elements of this world, all which must ere long perish, and would necessarily exit to a contemplation of the felicity of the future spiritual world.1

The Old Testament was not limited to earthly things but to spiritual things (note elaboration in II, 10, xxi-xxii). In other words, Old Testament figures pointed to and culminated in the spiritual blessings of the New Testament. They were not material but spiritual. The children of the promise, from the beginning of the world . . . belong to the New Testament, and that, in hope, not of carnal, terrestrial and temporal things, but of spiritual, celestial and eternal blessings.2

New Testament interpretation centers around the word "meaning" and shows Calvin’s feeling for Scripture at its best. In the Sacramental controversy3 he answers his opponents who accuse him of not being enough of a literalist. They said he did not give due credit

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1Ibid., II, 10, xx.
2Ibid., II, 11, x.
3Ibid., IV.
to the words of Christ. His answer is that, though they have held the words inviolate, he has been more reverential to the meaning.

... Our diligence in inquiring into Christ's true meaning is a sufficient proof of our high regard to his authority ... Nothing prevents us from believing Christ when he speaks, and immediately acquiescing in every word he utters. The only question is, whether it be criminal to inquire into his genuine meaning.

Calvin said that these "good doctors" prohibit "even the least departure from the literal signification." They have the word, he admits, and quote the letter of Scripture, but they would "banish from the Church the gift of interpretation which elucidates the word."

In the light of Calvin's key principles of interpretation, and the Protestant principle, Scripture sola, the Institutes, which were the Reformation text-book, are of unusual interest to this study.

Calvin, in the General Syllabus, lays out the plan of the whole work. It follows the development of the Apostles' Creed, since everyone is familiar with that. As the Creed consists of four parts, that concerning (1) the Father, (2) the Son, (3) the Holy Spirit, and (4) the Church, so his books will follow this order and conform to the subject matter suggested by it.

It became obvious, as the Institutes are opened, that the

1Ibid., IV, 17, xxii.
2Ibid., IV, 17, xxv.
doctrines taught have not been Biblically but philosophically grounded. Even the structure and arrangement of material demonstrate this fact. The entire first book is a treatise on natural theology and is as rational an approach as that of the Schoolmen to theology.

Catholics still call Calvin a Scholastic. Not only does the plan of the Institutes as a whole follow this method, but each argument for the doctrines he develops, is first rationally developed before it is Scripturally grounded. He appeals to common sense and logic and every device of philosophy. Only then does he appeal to Scripture to defend the doctrine he has built. The Scriptural defense is in the typical Scholastic style — that of the appeal to the proof-text. Calvin did not, as a rule, come to his doctrines by way of true exegesis, nor does he support his contentions in the Institutes by way of exposition, in the modern sense. Rather, he first lays out the doctrine as an uncontestable truth, which it would be unthinkable to question. After this rational presentation, he denounces all opposers of it. Then he builds his Scriptural defense, seldom, if ever, using passages of greater length than three or four verses, and the context is not always carefully consulted.

The philosophical presentation is supported by scores of quotations from the classics, some of them pagan works and writers such as Cicero, Valerius Maximus, the Aenoid, Plutarch, Plato, Seneca, Xenophon, Socrates, and many more. Calvin was an exceedingly well-
read scholar and saw in non-Christian literature truths which contributed to a natural knowledge of God.

Calvin had no doctrine of inspiration, as such. He is not discriminating in the use of the term, confusing it with revelation and illumination, and others. In other words, fine definitions in this field were a subsequent development in theology. They would have been inconsistent in Calvin's system. He does, however, give every evidence in the spirit of his writings and by word that he held Scriptures to be God's Word, which he also recognized to be mediated to us by human hands, "Being illuminated by Him (the Spirit) we now believe the divine original of the Scripture . . . that we have received it from God's mouth by the ministry of men . . . ."¹ He calls Scripture "the pure word of God,"² and suggests a verbal dictation by contrasting the "neat, elegant and even splendid" diction of the prophets, with the "rude and homely style" of others by saying that "by such examples the Holy Spirit hath been pleased to show, that he was not deficient in eloquence."³ In defending the written Scriptures against those who "deride the dead and killing letter," he says, "He is the author of the Scriptures; he cannot be

¹Calvin, Institutes, I, 7, v.
²Ibid., IV. 17, xxvi.
³Ibid., I, 8, ii.
mutable and inconsistent with himself. He must therefore perpetually remain such as he has there discovered himself to be."\(^1\) In his Commentary on I Peter 1:19, he says that holy men of God "were moved — not that they were bereft of mind . . . but because they cared not to announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide . . . " Men of humble position and crude speech were taught by the Spirit, who, though before despised as some of the meanest of the people, suddenly began to discourse in such a magnificent way on the mysteries of heaven.\(^2\)

Note the emphasis on the incomprehensibility of the revelation as a test of its divine nature. We may be aware that many things in the Bible were "blind" to him, as the interesting quote below suggests. The very "low and mean" style of the three Evangelists proves the fact that they wrote of "heavenly mysteries which are above human capacities."\(^3\)

Similar is the method of Paul and Peter, in whose writings, though the greater part be blind (italics mine), yet their heavenly majesty attracts universal attention. . . . One circumstance raises their doctrine sufficiently above the world . . . Matthew . . . Peter . . . John . . . all unlettered men, — had learned nothing in any human school which they could communicate to others, . . . Let [anyone] deny that the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles,

\(^1\)Ibid., I, 9, ii.
\(^2\)Ibid., I, 8, xi.
\(^3\)Loc. cit.
or let them dispute the credibility of the history: yet the fact itself loudly proclaims that they were taught by the Spirit.¹

The efficient cause of the inspiration was the Holy Spirit, but Calvin is not clear as to which of the two persons involved in the revelatory act, the Spirit or the human agent, leaves his personality characteristics on the record. After having shown that the crude style of the unlearned evangelists was stamped on the Gospel record, he says of the "splendid and elegant Scriptures"

The Holy Spirit hath been pleased to show, that he was not deficient in eloquence, though elsewhere he hath used a rude and homely style.²

The divinely inspired message and record is not the word of God until the confirmatory experience is paired with it. That the Scriptures have a divine origin, Calvin is certain. "God is the author of the Scriptures"³ but only those illuminated by the Spirit have this persuasion.

Being illuminated by him, we now believe the divine original of the Scriptures, not from our own judgment or that of others, but . . . that we have received it from God's own mouth by the ministry of men.⁴

¹Ibid., I, 8, xi.
²Ibid., I, 8, 1.
³Ibid., I, 9, 11.
⁴Ibid., I, 8, 4v.
It is necessary, therefore that the same Spirit

who spoke by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate
into our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully de­
livered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them.1

In another place this dual assurance is taught.

Whether God revealed himself to the patriarchs by or­
acles and visions, or suggested, by the means of the
ministry of men, what should be handed down by tradition
to their posterity, it is beyond a doubt that their minds
were impressed with a firm assurance of the doctrine, so
they were persuaded and convinced that the information
they received came from God. For God always secured to
his word an undoubted credit, superior to all human
opinion.2

This study should prepare our minds for the further fact that
Calvin, as well as the other reformers, made no claim for inerrancy
or infallibility of Scripture. The nearest he comes to it is to
say that the people were "certain that God had spoken without the
least fallacy or ambiguity,"3 that this certainty "required no
reasons" and was produced by an assurance from heaven. "I speak of
nothing" he says, "but what every believer experiences in his heart."

Though "the apostles were certain and authentic emanences of
the Holy Spirit and therefore their writings are to be received as

1Ibid., I, 7, iv.
2Ibid., I, 6, ii.
3Ibid., I, 7, v.
the oracles of God," yet Old Testament writers did not have any great measure of personal illumination even in their inspired writings. We could assume a blind, mechanical recording on their part, did not Calvin become explicit in the matter. Granting that the prophets were "distinguished by such energy of the Spirit" as to be sufficient to illuminate the whole world, yet

they were under the necessity of submitting to the same tuition as the rest of the people, they are considered as sustaining the character of children as well as others, ... None of them possessed knowledge so clear as not to partake more or less of the obscurity of the age.2

This is but one of the passages, of which there are many, that tell us that the Old Testament sheds but a feeble light, not perfectly delineated, and not capable of maintaining its glow in the presence of the full light of New Testament revelation.

In following Calvin through his arguments one soon discovers that he is not a slave of grammar or words. He freely rejects as superfluous and misleading, the Greek particle οὖν (therefore), in Matthew 7:12, with the consequent change in meaning. One often finds superfluous particles, he explains. He calls the Romanists "syllable-hunters" in their unbending literalism.3 The following is

1Ibid., IV, 8, ix.
2Ibid., II, 11, vi.
3Ibid., IV, 17.
Calvin's reaction to the literalist who misses, according to him, the obvious meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, and the teaching about recovering personal belongings, in particular:

"We ought not to quibble about words, as if a good man were not permitted to recover what is his own when God gives him the lawful means (Matt. Comm)."

His defense of litigation and swearing in the face of Jesus' teaching is a masterpiece of casuistry.

Calvin believed that the Biblical writers adjusted their writings to the level of the ordinary man's understanding (a point of view somewhat out of keeping with what we have already noted regarding the incomprehensibility of the revelation). He attributes this manipulation to the human writer, not to the Holy Spirit. Moses, he says, "accommodated himself to the ignorance of the common people," and "Moses, speaking in the popular manner," adjusted his message to them.¹ This accommodation of Scripture to the capacity of human credulity is made more explicit in a passage in which he speaks of the angels.

'It is certain that spirits have no form; and yet Scripture, on account of the slender capacity of our minds, . . . represents angels to us as having wings, to prevent our doubting that they will always attend . . . us.'²

¹Ibid., I, 14, iii.
²Ibid., I, 14, viii.
The authority then of Scripture will have to fall into the general pattern already discovered. There will be found the same qualification of its absolute authority as we have found in the other passages.

It is proper to introduce some remarks on the authority of Scripture... For when it is admitted to be a declaration of the word of God, no man can be so deplorable presumptuous... as to dare to derogate from the credit due the speaker... It obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself.\(^1\)

The names Calvin uses for Scripture indicate somewhat of his view of them. Simply Scripture is conspicuously one of his most frequent terms. Sometimes it is the Doctrine of Heaven, the Doctrine of God, or a few times, the Bible. The most striking synonym is the Word of God or God's Word. It is striking because of the use he makes of it, a usage which seems to point to Calvin's philosophy of the Word.

There are two discussions in which the use of this term makes for ambiguity if we assume it to refer simply to the written word. The first occasion is in relation to the written word, and gives rise to the observation that Calvin clearly subordinated the objective written word to the objective, metaphysical Word of God or Christ. In his Christological argument we find these words —

\(^1\)Ibid., I, 7, 1.
When the Scriptures speak of the Word of God, it certainly were very absurd to imagine it to be only a transient and momentary sound, emitted into the air, and coming forth from God himself; of which nature were the oracles, given to the Fathers, and all the prophecies. It is rather to be understood of the Eternal Wisdom residing in God, whence the oracles, and all the prophecies, proceeded.

The ancient prophets, no less than the Apostles spoke by the Spirit of Christ. If the Spirit that inspired the Prophets was the Spirit of the Word, he concludes that the Word was God. He adds;

Captious and loquacious men would readily evade this argument, by saying, that the Word imparts an order or command; but the Apostles are better interpreters, who declare, that the worlds were created by the Son, and that he "upholds all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:2,3).

To Calvin, then, the Word of God is, apparently a broader term than Scripture, and when used in certain connections indicates a more authoritative and absolute Word than the mere written Word. When used this way the Word is not a command, or an order, or a preposition, but the Logos back of all revelation.

Another variant in usage occurs in connection with Calvin's discussion of the Church, which is, to him, distinguished by this criterion, "the pure preaching of God's word, and the legitimate administration of the sacraments." It is difficult, in the treatises

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1Ibid., I, 13, vii.
2Ibid., Dedication, p. 34.
on Christology, and Ecclesiology and the Sacraments, to clearly distinguish between the (1) Preached word, the (2) "Visible word" (Augustine's phrase for the Sacraments which Calvin borrows), and the (3) Living Word or Christ. In a Sacrament, he says, "God manifests himself to us . . . more expressly than he does by his words." This would put the sacraments at least on a par with the Bible. He goes on, "I affirm that Christ is the matter, or substance of all the Sacraments." "The office of the Sacraments is precisely the same as that of the Word of God: which is to offer and present Christ to us . . . but they confer no advantage or profit without being received by faith." In this instance, the Sacraments, the Bible and the Person of Christ are strangely equated. There is no wide difference between the sacraments of the Old and the New Law, as though one prefigured and the other communicated the grace of God. Paul speaks of "the fathers in the time of Moses who did "all eat the same spiritual meat" (I Cor. 10:3) with us, and explains that meat to be Christ. Who will dare call that an empty sign, which exhibited to the Jews the real communion of Christ.\(^1\)

\(^1\) *Ibid.*, IV, 1b, vii.
\(^2\) *Ibid.*, IV, 1b, xvi.
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, IV, 1b, xvii.
\(^4\) *Ibid.*, IV, 1b, xxiii.
In this passage we not only see a typical Calvin interpretation of Scripture, but to the point under discussion, we detect Calvin's philosophy of the Word of God. He had a "low" view of the written word, in comparison to the modern view in some conservative circles. The active Living Word subordinates the written word. The "visible" word is more effective than the written word to illuminate the believer. It is the Living Word which is the end of revelation. It is questionable whether Calvin would have described his doctrine of Scripture in the terms that the Calvinists later came to accept as orthodox. This judgment is made in spite of the estimate of some who call Calvin a literalist and a grammarian.

The purpose of Scripture, to Calvin, was not to focus attention on itself, but was to reveal Christ. It was not an end in itself, but a vehicle through which the Spirit worked.

"If it exhibit Christ," and the "office of the Word of God . . . is to present Christ to us," are statements that cannot be disregarded in our understanding of Calvin. The promise of blessing is not

\[\text{Ibid., I, 9, iii.}\]
"carnal," but "spiritual," not "temporal," but eternal." If Calvin was a Biblicist, he most surely was not a Worshipper of the word but only of the Word.

We conclude that Calvin with Luther held a view of Scripture which not only affirmed the sacredness of the Book and its authority but which based these qualities in the divine Author and Interpreter, rather than in the book itself. His very free handling of Scripture and his emphasis upon the humanity of the individual authors as well as their participation in the errors and ignorance of their times, justifies this conclusion. His exegetical principles which refused to conform to a strictly literal sense, and his emphasis upon attention to the historical conditioning of a passage, cannot be harmonised with the unimaginative literalism with which he is often charged. His major concern, that Christ be exhibited in Scripture, and that the Holy Spirit alone could make the Word of God meaningful to an individual, was not a concern with the words as words but with a spiritual message beyond the laws of exegesis. It seems safe to conclude by the study of the foregoing section on the Sacraments, that Calvin's view of the Word of God did not absolutely equate it with written Scripture; but whether this conclusion is correct or not, it is the author's opinion that his attestations of infallibility and authority referred to the Divine Source of written Scripture, not simply to the concreted object called the Bible. Christ, the
Word of God, is the perfect subject. From Him came the word, to Him the word points. He, alone is perfect and infallible.

The observation which was made in relation to the basic Christian doctrines having been formulated in ages when allegorical and "four-fold" methods of interpretation were the vogue, applies again with Luther and Calvin, and particularly the latter, who are "Fathers" of Protestant doctrine. Calvin, especially, is the model for contemporary exegesis. Yet, under scrutiny, both he and Luther prove to have held a view of Scripture uncongenial to the more Biblicistic followers of both. Neither Luther, nor Calvin held to verbal inerrancy, yet their doctrines became the basis for Protestant orthodoxy. We do not conclude that either Luther or Calvin was inconsistent, necessarily, or seriously, as Farrar, and others today, claim. The only way to throw them into inconsistency is to force a modern view of verbal inspiration into their words. To do so takes the strength out of their usage of Scripture. To Luther and Calvin, the authority of Scripture was not secured by inerrancy and infallibility, two qualities only belonging to Persons, nor was it imposed from without.

It is the authority of the Spirit of God by whose activity the record both came into being and is freely accepted by all who read and heed what it says. This is the unique contribution of Luther and Calvin . . . It never happened before. It has been largely neglected or repudiated since. The time has come for its rediscovery.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Lehmann, _Theology Today_, p. 331.
Confessional Period

After the mental and spiritual liberation of the Reformation, the freedom from Scholastic bondage, the liberation of truth, the unlocking of Scripture to the commonest man, the elevation of the common man to a spiritual priesthood and unrestricted entrance into the presence of God, there came a strange surrender of all these freedoms and a return to a bondage equal to the old, except in name. The old Scholasticism was replaced by a new Scholasticism, as rigid as the old; and liberty was imprisoned behind great doctrinal systems. The most unpleasant note of all was the bitterness with which each man defended his own orthodoxy and denounced those whose views differed. ¹ It was the age of the authority of Creeds, Symbols and Confessions, a new authority to the world of religion. Here-to-fore the ancient decisions of the ecumenical councils were felt to be sufficient in that they faithfully expressed Scriptural teaching. Scripture stood in judgment over the Creeds. Now, for the first time in 1500 years, the Creeds defined Scripture. It is this aspect of the Confessional period which will call for examination and analysis. Only that part of each major creed which expresses a definite view of Scripture will be noted. Philip Schaff's volume on Creeds is

The Reformation impulse was registered in both the religious factions created by it. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant groups experienced reformation. Each group sharpened its doctrinal demarcations by council decree and Confessional standards. The decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), by rigidly defining Catholicism for all time, ended any hope for ecumenical Christianity on any other basis than it provided. We are interested in the Catholic view of Scripture as defined by that document and as interpreted by later popes. The statement is as follows:

The Holy, Ecumenical, and General Synod of Trent ... having ever before its eyes the removal of error and the preservation of the truth of the Gospel in the Church — that Gospel which, promised beforehand through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth and then ordered to be preached to every creature by His Apostles, as being the fountain of all saving truth and moral instruction; seeing, moreover, that this truth and instruction is contained in written Books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the Apostles from the very mouth of Christ, or were delivered — as it were by hand — by the Apostles themselves at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; this same Synod, following the example of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with equal devotion and reverence all the books of both the Old and the New Testaments, since the one God is the Author of both, as also the aforesaid traditions, whether pertaining to faith or to morals, as delivered by the very mouth of Christ or dictated by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Catholic Church by the unfailing succession.

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Regarding the translation to be used and the rules of interpretation to be followed, the Council is extremely explicit.

Moreover, the same sacred and holy Synod, — considering that no small utility may accrue to the Church of God, if it be made known which out of all the Latin editions, now in circulation, of the sacred books, is to be held as authentic, — ordains and declares, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall, — in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, — wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, — whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures, — hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published. Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established.

It would be difficult to conceive of a theory of inspiration more in harmony with what is called verbal. The following quotation from papal writings makes this clear.

All the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican.

$Ibid.$, pp. 19-20.

$But Can It Be Found in the Bible? (Quotation from Pope Pius XII)$, pp. 17-18.
Lutheranism is defined by means of Catechisms and Creeds, and significantly none of them undertake to make a definitive statement regarding the inspiration of Scripture. The Book of Concord (1580) including the three ecumenical creeds (Apostle’s, Nicene and Anthanasian), the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Schmalkald Articles, Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord, constitute the authoritative statement of the majority of Lutherans. The Augsburg Confession, however, (written by Melanchthon) is generally accepted as the doctrinal standard.

Luther, in his writings, emphasised the objective, authoritative Word against those who rejected all authority outside of the subjective leading of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, so far as the written symbols are concerned, there is no specific definition of a view of inspiration. The Creeds appeal to Scripture for the defense of doctrine but do not specify a formulated doctrine of Scripture.

Reformed theology begins to elaborate a doctrine of Scripture. The Reformed branch of the Reformation, in distinction from the Lutheran branch, arose at Marburg (1529) when Luther refused to accept the Zwinglian view of the Sacraments. This isolated South and Swiss Protestants, who found leadership under Zwingli and Calvin.

The particular emphases were predestination and the authority of the Bible as a norm of faith and practice. There are over thirty Reformed confessions from Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles to the Westminster Confession (and a few subsequent confessions of lesser importance). Of this great number, two are selected for a brief analysis: the Belgic Confession because it is authoritative for the Christian Reformed Church, and others today, and the Westminster Confession, because it is the "culmination and end of creative reformed Protestant thought,"¹ and because it is authoritative for many Presbyterians, some Congregationalists and a few smaller groups.

The Belgic Confession (1561) composed by Guido de Bres who soon after died a martyr, was received in the Netherlands. It is now the Confession of Faith of the Christian Reformed Church. There is obvious reference in it to Calvin's French Confession. It became the basis for the confession passed by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. The purpose of Scripture, it states, is that men should be without excuse before God and that in it God makes Himself known to us, "as far as is necessary for us to know," to His glory and our salvation. Article III says this Word of God came not by the will of men but men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and were afterwards commanded to commit His revealed word to writing and "He Himself wrote

with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures." Article IV adds to former lists of canonical books, the statement that against these books "nothing can be alleged." Paul is named as author of the book of Hebrews. The authority of Scripture comes, "not so much because the Church approves them" but because of the inward witness in our hearts, and the fact that they carry the evidence in themselves. "For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being justified."

Since it is forbidden to add or subtract we are to conclude that "the doctrine" is most perfect and complete in all respects. It becomes the "infallible rule."

This Creed elaborates on the method of inspiration and the extent of authority. Although inspiration has not yet appeared as a term, that which later will be identified as inspiration in later creeds, is now said to include (1) being "moved by the Holy Spirit," (2) speaking, and (3) later commanded to write the revealed word. There is an apparent discrepancy in the 3rd article in that, these humanly written records and the two tables written by God's own finger, are not distinguished from each other in the, "Therefore we call these writings holy and divine Scriptures," and the assumption is that either we have such supernatural objects now as God's writings or that both God's writings and men's writings are equally supernatural. This lack of
clarity results from the attempt to equate God's part and the human element in Scripture. The authority of Scripture extends to the limit of men's need of salvation. In this creed we find the first reference to infallibility, but this infallibility is limited to that which proves right doctrine. Perfection of Scripture is also mentioned, but not a verbal perfection. The evidence upon which Scripture is based, is, curiously, not only the "inward witness" and Scriptures "self-evidence" but the cause of being able to see both of these, namely, their prophecies are being fulfilled. The lack of elaboration leaves much to be desired in the understanding of this section of the statement.

The English Thirty Nine Articles, Schaff tells us, show evidence of a Calvinistic heritage. But their theology, a later writer says, is that of the Augsburg Confession. Certainly the English Presbyterians, later, found no fault with the doctrinal soundness of the Articles. But, of interest to us, is the utterly simple statement regarding Scripture

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be approved there-by, is not to be required of any man . . .

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Standing between the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession and the chief source of the latter are the Irish Articles of Faith (1615) thought to have been written by Archbishop James Ussher and representing Reformed doctrine in Ireland. Relating to the Scriptures it is less specific than the Belgic Confession but a little more so than the English Confession. The "ground of our religion" and "the rule of faith and all saving truth," it says "is the Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures." This limits the claims made for Scripture to the area of "saving truth." Article II says that since the Scriptures have been "given by inspiration of God" they are in that regard to be "of most certain credit and highest authority." No more is said here, than that Scripture is dependably adequate for the purpose of its existence. There is no thought, apparently, of equating the Word of God with every word of Scripture or what is later called verbal inspiration.

The Westminster Confession (1647) was formulated by a body of English non-conformists who, though they had no quarrel with the Church of England on the basis of doctrine, did desire to break with the English Church government and ritual. The "Presbyteries" were organised in defiance of the "Episcopies," and gradually the Puritans (Pure Protestants) came to a definite self-consciousness. They

1 Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, p. 526.
desired union with sympathetic sister groups in Scotland and Ireland, not on the basis of a national creed, but so far as a Catechism and church government was concerned. Warfield gives us the spirit of the Westminster Assembly.

All the topics . . . are treated with notable fulness with the avowed object, not merely of setting forth the doctrine of the churches with such clearness and in such detail as to make it plain to all that they hold to the Reformed faith in its entirety, but also to meet and exclude the whole mob of errors which vexed the time. ¹

The form and order of the Irish Articles were used as a basis and the content revised and expanded. Scriptural proof texts were added by April, 1647. After the three bodies individually had ratified the whole it became the Confession of faith of the Presbyterian Churches in the British dependencies and America and later some Baptists. ² Dr. Schaff thinks that the chapter, "Of the Holy Scriptures," is "the best counterpart of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the rule of faith,"³ and Warfield agrees, that "such a statement of a fundamental doctrine is a precious heritage, worthy not only to be cherished but to be understood."⁴

² Ibid., p. 61.
³ Schaff, Creeds, p. 767.
⁴ Warfield, Westminster Assembly, p. 155.
Because of the length of the chapter, we shall accept War­field's analysis of it, in brief. "Holy Scripture or the Word of God written . . . is given by inspiration of God." Inspiration is the defining term, not itself defined and is contrasted with human writings." All books in all their parts are asserted to be inspired. This "makes these books divine and not human writings." God is their author; they are "immediately inspired by God," so they are the "very Word of God," of "infallible truth and divine authority . . . the very word of God" in all their parts and elements alike.¹

Because it is God's book it is "authoritative in and of itself."² Against "the Socinians and Arminians who desired to confine the authority of Scripture to its literal asseverations," the West­minster Confession adds also what "by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture."³

The original autographs, only, are the inspired Bible, and alone are authoritative as a final appeal in defense of doctrine, though providential care assures their full authority for the trans­mission of saving doctrine.⁴ But the sharp distinction drawn between

¹Ibid., p. 204.
³Ibid., p. 226.
⁴Ibid., p. 237.
"inspired originals and the uninspired translations" must not blind men to the possibility and reality of the conveyance in translation... of that Word of God which lies in the sense of Scripture, and not in the letter, same as in a vessel for its safe conduct.

Scripture has but one sense. It is its own interpreter, parallel passages alone will give infallible guidance. The basis for this statement is in the assumption that God is the sole author, who as Truth itself, needs no other one to interpret him.

The Holy Spirit, who speaks in every part of Scripture, is the Supreme Judge in all controversies of religion. This does not distinguish between Scripture and the Holy Spirit, but says "whenever and wherever Scripture speaks that is the Holy Ghost speaking." The words of Scripture are not dead words but are instinct with life.

The Westminster Confession contains the most explicit statement regarding Scripture, in particular, of any creed, with the exception of the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), which defined verbal inspiration in its most extreme form. We note that the

1 Ibid., pp. 240-241
2 Ibid., p. 255.
3 Textual literalism in the sense of the infallibility of the Biblical words was never held in the Church before the seventeenth century. It achieved extreme and solitary formulation in the Formula Consensus Helvatica (1675), the last doctrinal confession of the
Westminster Confession itself extended its authority over a limited segment of the Christian church. Its purpose was not to be ecumenical, or to express opinion held universally, in time or area. It was, rather, highly definitive of Reformation theology and excluded all that which was considered as error in the light of its own insights. It sought to codify the truth of the Reformation, as Calvinists saw it. Regarding Scripture, it is more explicit than any previous written expression. The Bible is not a human book, but a divine book. Consequently, it is the very Word of God, equally in all and every part of the specified books. It carries its authority in itself. So extreme is this expression that a fissure is forced upon between what is described and what men possess. No previous view of Scripture had forced this unnatural division between the human and divine in the Bible. It may well be the source of all the conflict between science and the Bible, since. The solution was to affirm inspiration only of the autographs, and to say that doctrinal authority lies only in these autographs and that translations are not so inspired or authoritative. But problems immediately arise. We

Reformed Church of Switzerland, which declared even the vowel points of the Hebrew alphabet to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. This confession never extended its authority beyond Switzerland and was as remote as could be from the mind of the Reformers. Lehmann, *Theology Today*, Vol. III, Oct., 1946, p. 342.
do not possess these autographs; therefore decisions regarding doctrine cannot be made. Since only the autographs can be equated with the Word of God, then it is only proper to say that the Word of God is not to be equated with what we now possess as our Scriptures, and we would be forced to say that Scriptures contain the Word of God and to maintain a distinction between them, which is precisely what the Confession does not want to say. But this position is inevitable on the basis of what the Confession admits when it says that since we have only the "uninspired translations," the Word of God lies, now, "in the sense of Scripture, not in the letter." And to say this, is to make affirmations of verbal inspiration illogical, and erroneous. The Confession is quite inconsistent in calling the guidance which our Scriptures give, in our "regular language," infallible, in view of the above analysis, and to equate Scripture with the Holy Spirit, is unfortunate, in that it either imprisons Him within an uninspired document or robs us of any contact with Him in the absence of the autographs. In any case, it is questionable whether it is proper to either regard even the autographs as so supernatural as to be the actual person and voice of the Holy Spirit, or to fail to discriminate between the natural and supernatural in Scripture. It is dangerous to materialize God or to deify objects. Lack of this discrimination does one or the other.

There are a few observations to be made regarding the Creeds
as a whole. In every case, they originated as local statements, even personal in nature. Some achieved national authority over specific groups within the nation. The Westminster received the approval in two nations of the Presbyterian and later Baptist and Congregational groups. In no case do the Creeds represent an ecumenical status. They do not look backward to historical tradition, or outward toward unity of the Church, or forward to wider agreement or understanding.

The Reformed Confessions tend to regard Scripture as "perspicuous," and to be interpreted in terms of its own statements. If a passage is obscure, another passage somewhere will give a sure light upon it. In this way Scripture interprets itself. It does not need an "outside" source of interpretation. This point is important to an understanding of the Fundamentalist Controversy in America as well as the wider conflict with Modernism everywhere. As the Confession stands, it means that there is no place for textual criticism, and more important, for historical criticism. At this point, the real issue emerges. The curious thing is that this view of Scripture should be coupled with a method of interpretation called grammatico-historical. By historical is meant, simply that, the text is to be understood in its contemporary situation. (There is another meaning to historical which will be considered later). The intention of the author is to be studiously sought. Now, a moments consideration will reveal a fundamental discrepancy between this and what is meant
by verbal inspiration. If the precise word which God intended is
in the text, and the word is strictly unambiguous, if the meaning
is in the word and not in the thought back of the word, then the
historical connotation and conditioning is not only superfluous but
distracting. This weakness in the Creedal statement will account for
its subsequent history. In reading the Creeds of this period, one
misses the Reformers' note, emphasising the Living Word. The person
of Christ, as a living Reality, could not be confined in human words,
we would conclude, but this failure adds up to a spiritual barrenness
which becomes somewhat oppressive. Inspiration ends in the word,
according to Warfield, and we do not even have that inspired word.

There is a sense in which the Creeds isolate the individual
from the Word of God. This is made obvious by the fact that (1)
they are external pressures brought to bear upon the conscience regard­
ing Scripture; they are what "one must believe" to salvation.
(2) They are statements about the Word of God, not statements out of
the Word of God; and (3) they were first compiled and then later
defended with proof texts from Scripture, rather than being expo­
sitions of the Word of God. Is not this a new Scholasticism, another
seal on the Word of God, an elevation of a new authority over the
Word of God? Can it be said that by means of these creeds, man can
put his ear to the Word and hear it speak directly to him as the
Reformation faith declared?
Perhaps the most serious result was the imprisonment of the Living Word under bonds of human manipulation. History has shown us that when Scripture was least regarded as a human book, it was most imprisoned by human reason. When it is regarded too much as a supernatural thing, it is least available to human need. This has been demonstrated by the Palestinian Jewish attitude toward Scripture which required the Talmud to interpret it and by the Catholic view which requires a pope to explain it.

Non-Confessional Statements of Faith

Throughout history, there have always been and continue now to be the smaller groups that challenge the majority and contest the points of orthodoxy which do not truly express the best in universal Christian thought. Since Orthodoxy seldom engages in self-criticism, it must submit to the scrutiny of these brave souls, of which in earlier times, martyrs were made. By means of such thinking a better balance is maintained in the whole Church or to use another figure, the growing edge is kept alive by means of which fresh life is generated and released into the whole structure. In some respects the independent groups which will be reviewed in this section, came to independency in respect of the open Bible in contrast to the Book closed by the Creeds.

James Arminius (1560-1609) became the source of a type of
theological emphasis somewhat at variance with Reformation views. His position on free will, contrasted that of the more extreme Calvinistic symbols, though it was completely evangelical in comparison with Pelagius, with whom he has been erroneously compared. His views were developed, however, in various directions, from the most liberal moderism to a mellowing of extreme Calvinistic positions so that Kuiper could say, "Almost all of American Fundamentalism is Arminian, and Arminianism is a compromise with autosoterism."¹

Because of his wide influence and the importance of his views on Scripture which relate to this influence we will include him in this analysis. His writings are largely in the form of correspondence and tracts, admirably systematised theologically, now, by Dr. Bern Warren into a Compendium.² Under the title, "The rule of religion, the Word of God, and Scriptures in particular," he says,

By the "ingrafted word," God has prescribed religion to man, by an inward persuasion, a universal disclosure to the mind and by writing or sealing a remuneration of his heart. This inward manifestation is the foundation of all external revelation.³


³Ibid., p. 75.
God communicates this external word to man, "first orally, then in writing, so that we now have the infallible Word of God, in no other place than in the Scripture."\(^1\) The cause of the books is God, he says, in His Son, through the Holy Spirit. The instrumental causes are holy men "actuated and inspired" by the Holy Spirit. Inspiration may be the "words inspired into them, dictated to them, or administered by them under the divine direction.\(^2\)

There is a tacit rebuke to the spirit of Creedalism if we understand Arminius correctly. To him the Book does not have "authority in itself," nor can a Creed give it authority but only the "veracity and power of the Author," alone, gives authority to the writing.

But whosoever they be that receive it as if delivered by God, that approve of it, publish, preach, interpret and explain it . . . add not a tittle of authority to the sayings or writings . . . and things Divine neither need confirmation, nor indeed can receive it from those which are human. The whole employment of approving . . . is only an attestation by which the church declares . . . these writings . . . as divine.\(^3\)

It is the witness of the Spirit which imparts assurance regarding Scripture, but it is, nevertheless, subject to objective examination.

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 76.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 76.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 78.
"Try the spirits," cautions Arminius. Perfection of Scripture, was to him, a relative perfection. It is not the perfection of the next life, not an "absolute quality, equally dispensed through the whole body of Scripture and each of its parts," but a perfection in relation to the particular purpose of God in bringing salvation to the church. Divine revelation is internal, Inspiration is the external record. There can be no new revelation, because Christ is the fulness of revelation and no revelation can exceed Christ. Interpretation is to be in accord with the grammatical sense and a re-discovery of the intention of the author in "either a proper or figurative signification."

The important emphasis of Arminius' theory of Scripture is in his recognition of the human aspect of Scripture. The cause is God, but men are instruments. The book is subject to examination. Its perfection is not that which sets it apart from human life but is relative to its purpose, that of bringing salvation to the church. He recognizes an accuracy of word in Scripture but inspiration does not culminate in that word, else he would not have stressed "a re-discovery of the intention" of the witness. Interpretation that seeks to recover the thought of the human writer is not speaking of an inspiration which terminates in words.

1 Ibid., p. 87.
Methodism is in the Reformation tradition so far as its Articles of Religion are concerned. John Wesley was himself an Anglican whose Thirty-Nine Articles were born in a Calvinistic atmosphere. Wesley revised and abridged them in the spirit of Arminianism, but in regard to Scripture he was a son of Luther. Wesley shared with Luther ideas as to the inspiration of the Bible. He believed with Luther that "the Word is applied pro me, to make us wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15). No other guide will open the Word but He Himself who gave it.1 Reading is primarily listening, because the word is a "tale" rather than a script and "experience" in an echo, not the rival, of the Word, confirming, not replacing the one supreme authority.2

Wesley felt the same freedom as the Reformers to correct and clarify what was considered faulty in Scripture. In interpreting Matthew 1:1, he explains the genealogies as themselves defective public records, the correction of which would have caused serious question in the minds of those who know of them.3

Yet he was a man "of one book," a Biblicist, but one who constantly asked questions of human experience in order, better to


2 Ibid., p. 30.

understand the "one book." Did sin remain in believers? he asked himself, and kept carefully the case histories of hundreds of converts before he gave an answer. This was one challenge to the stereotyped dogma of the Creeds.

The Baptist Confession of 1689 is the most generally accepted by the Regular or Calvinistic Baptists of England and the American Baptists in the South. It respects the Westminster statement on Scripture.1

But the Northern and Western Baptists find the New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) congenial to them. It is simple and worthy of quoting in full for its point particular of interest to this study.

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.2

In the New Hampshire Confession there is a reversal from the spirit of Creedalism back to the spirit of the Reformers. It expresses a faith in the Word more in keeping with that of the whole Christian Church. We note, particularly, (1) that men were the

1Schaff, Creeds, p. 738.
2Ibid., p. 742.
recipients of divine inspiration, not their writings as the Westminster Confession states; (2) that there is a human element recognised, men wrote; (3) that God was the cause of what was written. Absolutely unique among Confessions is (4) the reference to the Bible as the true center of Christian union, and (5) the fact that the Bible stands as the judge over us and all our creeds and opinions. There is no emphasis on the individual words but on the message of the Bible which is unmixed with error.

The survey would not be complete were it not at least to mention the Society of Friends and Barclay's Apology which is still regarded by orthodox Friends. They hold Scripture to be a secondary rule of faith, subordinate to the Spirit who gives it its authority. Experience looms very large as a source of divine knowledge but experience must conform to and confirm Scripture. In this system the ministry of the Spirit assumes a very important place.

In this chapter the historic Christian faith in Scripture and the corresponding methods of interpretation have been traced and stated. An analysis of the material will be held over and included in the next chapter which brings the theories up to date. It is sufficient to note that throughout Christian history, the Church has believed that the Bible was given to speak to the hearts of men. Whatever the theory of inspiration may have been, methods of interpretation have invariably attempted to relate the inspired word to the contemporary situation.