

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 86:3–4

July/Oct 2022

Table of Contents

The Imprecatory Psalms as Means of Mercy and Wellness Geoffrey R. Boyle	193
The Liturgy of the Old Testament: Its Festivals, Order, Purpose, and Typology Robert D. Macina	215
The Women’s “Speaking” at Corinth (1 Cor 14:34): Does Paul Limit Disruptive Speech or Wrongful Teaching of the Word of God? John G. Nordling.....	241
Suing Your Brother: 1 Corinthians 6:1–9 in the Lutheran Exegetical Tradition Christian Preus	257
Pneumatology in Luke-Acts and Baptism: An Explanation of the Samaritan Believers Who Had Not “Received the Spirit” (Acts 8:4–17) Mark P. Surburg	279
Translations, Traditions, and Transformations: Catherine Winkworth and the Lutheran Chorale in English Benjamin Kolodziej	303
Boasting in the Rags of Scripture Rather Than the Robes of Reason: Johann Georg Hamann as an Enlightened Advocate of Classical Lutheran Theology in his <i>London Writings</i> John W. Kleinig	339

Theological Observer	351
A Warning and Strategy about the Dangers of Digital Media	
Reach the Lost, Who?	
Thanksgiving Day Church Services: Are They Really Necessary?	
“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”: What Happened to Stanza 4?	
One of the Holy Trinity Suffered for Us	
Christian Identity: Colossians 2:6–15	
Research Notes	371
Online Resources from CTSFW Available to Pastors	
Book Reviews	373
Books Received	379
Indices to Volume 86	381

Boasting in the Rags of Scripture Rather Than the Robes of Reason: Johann Georg Hamann as an Enlightened Advocate of Classical Lutheran Theology in His *London Writings*

John W. Kleinig

“God an Author!”¹ That is Hamann’s bold assertion at the beginning of his *London Writings*. The triune God is an author! He is, in fact, the only true author. The Father is the author of the world that he has created. The Son is the author of the church that he has redeemed. The Spirit is the author of the Scriptures that he has inspired. Yet the word authored by the Spirit is by far the greatest of all these wonders, for it discloses the mysteries of creation and redemption.² The word of the Spirit is where I will start in this introduction to Hamann and his *London Writings*.

Yet I must admit that I am sorely tempted to start elsewhere, as most scholars do. I could join John Betz, his best English interpreter, by commending him to you as “probably the most interesting and radical thinker the ranks of Lutheran orthodoxy has produced,” “arguably one of the greatest, most prophetic, and, ironically, most forgotten Christian authors of modernity, the Irenaeus of his time.”³ I could also present him to you, quite justifiably, as he himself did, an author who wanted to recognize “no other orthodoxy than our Lutheran Small Catechism.”⁴ Then, in this context, I could even introduce him to you quite aptly, as C.F.W. Walther did in 1862 before an excerpt from Hamann’s “Thoughts on the Course of

¹ See also the repetition of this in Johann Georg Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, ed. Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weissenborn (München: C. H. Beck, 1993), 59, 67, hereafter BW, and the repetition of this phrase in BW 67.

² BW 59/LW 1. Hamann has this to say about God’s authorship: “The inspiration of this book is as great an act of self-effacement and condescension as the creation of the world by the Father and the incarnation of the Son. . . . The Word of the Spirit is just as great a work as the creation of the world, and just as great a mystery as the redemption of mankind. Yes, this Word is the key to the works of the former and the mysteries of the latter.”

³ John Betz, “Hamann’s *London Writings*: The Hermeneutics of Trinitarian Condescension,” *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 2 (2005): 191–192, 194.

⁴ See his letter to Kraus from 1784 (Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, edited by Arthur Henkel, Weisbaden: Frankfurt am Main, 1959, vol 5, 291, 24–26), and Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 15.

John W. Kleinig is professor emeritus at Luther College, Adelaide, SA, Australia. He can be reached at john.kleinig@gmail.com.

My Life” as “one of the few highly gifted writers of the German nation of recent times who had a sincere faith in the Scriptures.”⁵

Yet no matter how much I am tempted to start with praise for him as a spiritually enlightened author, that would not do justice to him and his unique contribution as a lay theologian. It would misrepresent him to you for two reasons. On the one hand, he never published his *London Writings*, nor did he intend them to be published. Apart from the account of his so-called conversion in his “Thoughts on the Course of My Life” which he shared with his father, brother, and two best friends,⁶ the *London Writings* were written for himself as a kind of spiritual journal.

On the other hand, in the *London Writings* he writes as an astonished reader of a story written by God’s Spirit, or, rather, the reader of God’s stories—the story of Israel and Jesus in the Bible, the story of the world, and the story of his own life as a reader of the Bible.⁷ These are, in fact, not three stories but a single story with one divine author. Since that story tells of God’s threefold condescension in creation, redemption, and inspiration, it requires a reader with the right mentality, the right receptive disposition. So, says Hamann, “a humble heart is the only proper frame of mind for reading the Bible and the essential preparation for doing that.” We, then, have God the author and Hamann the reader. By becoming a reader of this one book, this bookworm, this critical reader of many books, discovers that in reading the Bible he himself is read and understood by its author—he is both critiqued and affirmed.⁸

I must confess that I have a special interest in his *London Writings* and in him as a Lutheran thinker. He has been a theological mentor for me since I first encountered him when I was a student of German literature in university and a student of theology in seminary. I have also just completed an English translation of his *London Writings*, which has been published by Ballast Press.⁹ These writings have, in fact, been published as a whole in a single critical volume by Bayer and Weissenborn only recently in 1993. Up to now, only parts of it have been translated into English, even though they lay the intellectual and theological foundations for all his other published works, which make good sense only in their light. While this English translation may be of some interest to academic scholars, it should be even

⁵ See *Lehre und Wehre* 8, no. 5 (1862): 152–157, and John Henry III, “God an Author: J. G. Hamann, the Bible and Lutheran Tradition” (STM Thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 2019).

⁶ See BW 345/ LW 291.

⁷ For a discussion of Hamann as a listener and reader, see Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent*, 3. This was so, too, for Hamann as an avid reader of what was written by human authors.

⁸ Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent*, 6.

⁹ Johann Georg Hamann, *London Writings: The Spiritual and Theological Journal of Johann Georg Hamann*, trans. John W. Kleinig (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 2021), cited as LW.

more useful to us his largely unacknowledged heirs. We can, I hold, learn much from his Lutheran vision of God's enlightening glory and our present ignorance, hidden as they both are *sub contrario*, under their opposite.

So here I want to introduce Hamann and his *London Writings* to you by examining their origin, contents, and nature. Even though it will be all too brief, I hope to arouse your interest in them, so that you may perhaps even read my translation of them.

The Origin of the *London Writings*

Hamann lived from 1730 to 1788 and spent most of his life in the city of Königsberg, the German-speaking, administrative and academic center of East Prussia. Born to parents of modest means, he had a rather conventional Lutheran upbringing with a father who was still largely orthodox in orientation and a mother who was much more influenced by Lutheran pietism. He studied theology and the law in local university, where he became a fashionable advocate of the Enlightenment with his two best friends. He admits that his own interest lay elsewhere than in the study of theology and law: "What took away my taste for theology and all serious subjects was a new inclination that awoke in me for antiquities, for criticism—for the fine, decorative arts as well; for poetry, novels, philology; for French authors and their talent for writing, painting, portraying, pleasing the imagination, and so on."¹⁰ Due to his haphazard attendance of classes, his pursuit of extracurricular activities, and a speech impediment that precluded a career as a pastor or a lawyer, he failed to graduate. Yet all the time he kept on reading widely and voraciously.

After employment as a tutor for two German noble families from 1752 to 1756 in what is now Latvia, he was employed in Riga as a secretary of a merchant firm owned by the family of his best friend Christoph Berens and sent on a trade mission to London to negotiate a secret trade deal for the firm between Russia and England. When that failed, he lived rather dissolutely, fell into the bad company of fashionable homosexual men, and got deep into debt. Lost and lonely, he suffered from ill health from overindulgence and deep depression from his social isolation. Then, befriended by a devout, Christian couple who provided cheap accommodation for him early in 1758, he went into seclusion. He first began to read some of the many books that he had bought and found no consolation in them. On impulse, he bought an English Bible and began reading it on March 13.

¹⁰ BW 323/LW 269.

It had little impact on him for six days. Yet, as he read it from cover to cover, he became aware of the veil over his reason and his heart that had closed this book to him.¹¹ Then, on Palm Sunday, it struck him that God was speaking to him personally as he was reading it. He no longer analyzed it critically, but meditated on it as it critiqued him and his rationalism. On that day, he began to read it for a second time in a new way and wrote down the results of his meditations in a kind of spiritual journal that he called “The Biblical Meditations of a Christian.” On a Friday evening, March 31 in the week of Easter, he fell into deep reverie as he was reading Deuteronomy chapter 5 with its report that the Israelites heard God speaking the Decalogue face to face with them at Mount Sinai. Here is how he describes what happened to him then:

I recognized my own offenses in the history of the Jewish people. I read the story of my own life and thanked God for His forbearance with this His people, because nothing but such an example could justify a similar hope for me . . . In the midst of these reflections which seemed rather mysterious to me, I read the fifth chapter of Fifth Book of Moses on the evening of 31 March and fell into deep meditation. I thought about Abel and God’s word about him: “the earth had opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood.” — I felt my heart thump, I heard a voice groaning and wailing in its depths like the voice of blood, like the voice of a murdered brother who wanted to avenge his blood, even though I, at times, did not hear it and would continue to shut my ears to it — — It said that this was what made Cain restless and unable to escape. At once I felt my heart flowing, it poured itself out in tears, and I could no longer — — I could no longer hide from God that I was the killer of my brother, the murderer of His only begotten Son. Despite my great weakness, despite the long resistance which I had, until now, put up against His witness and His tender touch, the Spirit of God kept on revealing to me, still more and more, the mystery of divine love and the benefit of faith in our gracious, only Savior.¹²

In that momentous upheaval, that dramatic awakening, Hamann was convicted of two things: his own sin of fratricide and God’s grace for him as the murderer of his Son. Then in his broken heart, he heard how the blood of Jesus which called out to God for vengeance was also proclaiming God’s grace and love to him. That broke his blind, hard, rocky, misguided, stubborn heart, and he surrendered it to God for re-creation by his Spirit. God poured him out, he says, “from one vessel into another.”¹³

¹¹ BW 342/LW 288.

¹² BW 343-344/LW 288-289.

¹³ BW 345/LW 290.

In another place, he gives us this summary of what he had experienced that momentous evening:

When we get to know ourselves, when we come to see ourselves almost as we really are, how we then wish, plead, fear for ourselves. How we then feel the need for all that God, without us knowing it, being interested in it, and asking for any of it, has never grown tired of presenting to us, offering to us, and encouraging us, yet frightening us to receive. Then we hear the blood of the Redeemer crying out in our heart. We feel that the bottom of it has been sprinkled with the blood that was shed for the reconciliation of the whole world. We feel that the blood of vengeance cries out for grace on our behalf.¹⁴

After that event, he continued to read the Bible and record the fruit of his meditations. As he did so, the tone of those meditations gradually changed. The comments became less intellectual and more devotional. Then, when he completed the composition of the “Biblical Meditations,” he recorded his “Thoughts on the Course of My Life” from April 21 to 25, followed by “Thoughts on Church Hymns” from April 29 to May 6, as well as five other pieces before he set out for Riga and returned home on June 27. It was there that he added some further thoughts on his life and a personal prayer of supplication and intercession for his own devotional use.

Thus the *London Writings* were written over the period of six months in what was the turning point of his life. They mark his transformation from an ardent advocate of the Enlightenment to a rather unlikely champion of classical Lutheranism. They document his transition from unenlightened rationalism to enlightened faith in Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the be-all and end-all of his life.

The Contents of the *London Writings*

The *London Writings* are a series of separate texts that differ greatly in character and length. They are all personal in their origin and are all, in some way, the product of deep reflection on the Bible. Since they were never meant for publication, they are polished in some places and rough elsewhere. There are in all nine compositions, most of which are clearly dated.

¹⁴ BW 138–139/LW 80.

On the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture (Undated)¹⁵

Here Hamann does not set out his principles for the cognitive appropriation of the Scriptures, but graphically explains why a humble heart is the only proper frame of mind for reading the Bible, which is even more misinterpreted by its philosophical critics than Aesop's fables about animals would be if they were able to read them. A humble heart alone does justice to its miraculous inspiration by the condescending Holy Spirit and the Spirit's paradoxical revelation of God's wisdom and power through what seems to be foolish and weak. The Word of the Spirit is an unlikely means of grace, like the rags that were used to rescue Jeremiah from his muddy prison, like the pool of water with spittle and dust that Jesus used to give sight to a blind man. What the Scriptures have to say for our salvation and enlightenment appears to be just as stupid to unbelievers as the feigned madness and scribbles of David, the fugitive from Saul in the court of the Achish, the Philistine king.

Biblical Meditations of a Christian (March 19 to April 21)¹⁶

Here we have the heart and soul of the *London Writings*. They come first because God's word came first for Hamann. His meditation on it brought on his spiritual awakening and transformation from a rational intellectual to a faithful confessor of the triune God. Its original title was the "Journal of a Christian." By this change, he shifted attention away from himself to the Bible. His choice of the German term *Betrachtungen* emphasizes his visionary engagement with it, or rather its visionary impact with him and his imagination as he meditated on it. He did not meditate on the Bible analytically and cognitively to further his knowledge of its content, but devotionally and contemplatively, to *see* what God was saying to him as he read it. He read it in order to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit and gain insight into God's dealings with him and all people. Once it is understood that he does not seek to interpret the text exegetically, we can make sense of its unsystematic, haphazard character, with his attention to what appear to be insignificant texts and apparent neglect of other more significant passages. As he reads, he meditates on those parts that strike him, that address him personally or challenge him intellectually as a child of the Enlightenment. They identify his blind spots, in order to grant him deeper and more accurate insight into the spiritual realities that they portray.

¹⁵ BW 59-61/LW 1-2.

¹⁶ BW 65-311/LW 3-258

Thoughts on the Course of My Life (April 21 to 25)¹⁷

Like the *Confessions* of Augustine, this best-known work of Hamann relates the circumstances of his so-called conversion; it is a personal confession addressed to God and himself that begins and ends with prayer to God the Father. In it, he engages in three kinds of confession: confession of his sins, confession of thanksgiving for God's saving word, and confession of faith in the triune God. His confession of faith in the Trinity is in God the Father for the revelation of himself to humanity, in Jesus for his incarnation as a needy man, and in the Holy Spirit for foolishly providing a book for us proud people as his word in which seemingly trivial, contemptible events tell us the story of heaven and earth. The most significant and overlooked feature of this confession is its concentration on God's word rather than his own spiritual awakening.

Thoughts on Church Hymns (April 29 to May 6)¹⁸

Here Hamann meditates devotionally on six hymns which all reflect on the hidden glory of Christians, who are not only made in God's image but also participate in the communion of the Son with the Father by the Holy Spirit. The centerpiece of these meditations is a reflection on Christ's exaltation on Ascension Day 1758. There he notes that "God became a son of man and an heir of its curse and death and fate, so that the man would become a son of God, an only heir of heaven, as closely united with God as the fullness of divinity dwelt bodily in Christ."¹⁹ By his *kenosis*, his self-emptying, we have *theosis*, since we by faith share in his divine nature. Hamann therefore exclaims in amazement at this great exchange:

How human, how weak and lowly God makes Himself on our account!²⁰ How small He makes Himself, and how proud He makes a human being! He Himself became a man to make us gods — — He gives us all that He has — — What could be dearer than His Son and His Holy Spirit — — *All that God has is mine* — — and what was the purpose of that? He says, "My son, give me your heart."²¹

He concludes with this description of that sacramental union:

This true union with God is a foretaste of heaven, it is heaven itself. It is the last rung on the ladder who unites earth as a footstool with God's throne. This

¹⁷ BW 313-349/LW 259-294.

¹⁸ BW 353-395/LW 295-337.

¹⁹ BW 375/319.

²⁰ Philippians 2:7-8.

²¹ BW 356/LW 299.

participation in the divine nature is the final goal of God's incarnation. They are both equally great mysteries which are nevertheless prefigured by human nature and its parts.²²

Deuteronomy 20:4–10 Together with Romans 10:4–10 (Undated)²³

While these undated reflections on the correlation between God's creative word and receptive faith may be regarded as a separate document, they are best regarded as an appendix to previous meditations on church hymns by their conclusion with a verse from a hymn.

Fragments (May 16, 1758)²⁴

In this, the most philosophical of all the *London Writings*, Hamann reflects on our human dependence on the five senses, which are compared to the five loaves that Jesus transformed into twelve baskets full of leftover scraps after the feeding of the five thousand in John 6. Apart from the senses and their illumination by the Holy Spirit, both reason and faith are blind. Our knowledge is therefore limited and partial. So, for example, we cannot even know ourselves apart from God and our neighbor; only through Jesus our neighbor do we truly get to know ourselves and God. But that only partially as we are known by God. He concludes: "*Here we live on scraps. Our thoughts are nothing but fragments.* Yes, our knowledge is patchwork."²⁵

Meditations on Newton's Study on Prophecies (Undated)²⁶

In these observations, Hamann notes that the Old Testament does not just record some messianic prophecies, but claims: "Every biblical story is a prophecy — that would be fulfilled through all centuries — — and in every human soul."²⁷ He shows how the Holy Spirit revealed himself in his word in the form of a servant and became enfleshed in the Old Testament in anticipation of his incarnation in Jesus, just as our spirits are enfleshed in our bodies.

²² BW 370/LW 314.

²³ BW 397-403/LW 338-344.

²⁴ BW 405-420/LW 345-356.

²⁵ BW 407/LW 347. Italics mine.

²⁶ BW 421-425/LW 357-361.

²⁷ BW 421/LW 357.

(*Further Thoughts on the Course of My Life*) (May 29, 1758 to January 1, 1759)²⁸

This untitled section consists of three units: a report from May 29 on his decision to leave London for Riga, entries after his return to Riga from June 25 to the last day of 1758, and a prayer for New Year's Day 1759.

Prayer (Undated)²⁹

No date is given for this comprehensive series of fifteen prayers. While they seem to originate from his time in London, these prayers were reworked subsequently and used by him in his daily devotions. It is a fitting conclusion to his *London Writings*, which come from the time when he himself learned to pray.

The Nature of the *London Writings*

On a cursory reading, it is hard to discover any external coherence in these nine disparate confessional documents that make up Hamann's *London Writings*. Yet there are two markers which show how they are interrelated.

The first and most obvious of these are the chronological notes which relate—most of them sequentially—to three months in Hamann's life. Thus after his intense engagement in a new way of reading the Bible on March 13, 1758, he writes the "Biblical Meditations of a Christian" from March 19 to April 21. After that he pens "Thoughts on the Course of My Life" from April 21 to 25 and composes his "Thoughts on Church Hymns" from April 29 to May 6. Then he starts work on "Fragments" on May 16 and continues his autobiographical journal on May 29. So they are all related to his personal reorientation over that period in his life.

There is also another deeper chronology for him with this, a parallel, more hidden dimension to his life that is shown by Hamann's correlation of his reading and writing with certain significant times in the liturgical calendar. Thus he begins his meditative reading of the Bible on Monday after *Judica*, the Fifth Sunday in Lent, and starts writing his "Biblical Meditations" on Palm Sunday. He interrupts their sequence with an extended meditation on the Sermon on the Mount on Maundy Thursday, passes over Exodus entirely and considers Leviticus on Good Friday. Then on Friday in the week of Easter, he comes to Deuteronomy and experiences his spiritual awakening on the evening of that day. On Saturday the Eve of the Fifth Sunday after Easter, he begins his "Thoughts on Church Hymns" and interrupts them on Ascension Day to pen a moving meditation on our involvement in Christ's

²⁸ BW 429-437/LW 362-270.

²⁹ BW 440-446/LW 371-376.

condescension and exaltation. Then come the composition of “Fragments” on Tuesday in the week of Pentecost and the continuation of his journal on the Monday after Trinity Sunday. In this way, Hamann reconnects his life once again with the life of the church and the life of Christ. His spiritual reorientations result in the renewal of liturgical piety. That is most evident in his report of his association with the German Lutheran congregation in London and its Pastor Pitius³⁰ and his repeated reflections on a wide range of Lutheran hymns.³¹

Taken as a whole, the *London Writings* are devotional texts, the product of intense meditation on God’s word and appropriation of it in ardent prayer. Since a rationalist does not meditate on God’s holy word and does not pray to God the Father through his Son, Jesus, they clearly show Hamann’s transformation from rationalism to orthodox Lutheranism. The inspired word of God and prayer by the power of the Holy Spirit belong together; they are the two main drivers in the composition of these texts. Their arrangement and sequence reflect the truth of this—they begin with biblical meditation and end with intercessory prayer.

As we read these outpourings, we listen in on a man as he meditates on the Bible, a man who is enlightened by God’s Spirit as he contemplates what the triune God is saying to him there and then in that word, a man who sees what God is saying as he listens with his heart.

At the same time, we also listen in on a man who learns to pray as he is guided by the word of the Spirit and the Spirit of prayer who intercedes within him, just as Jesus intercedes for him. The turning point came for him with ardent prayer. Thus Hamann says:

In the tumult of all my passions, which so overwhelmed me that often I could often hardly breathe, I kept on praying to God for a friend, a wise, sincere friend, such as I could no longer envisage. Instead of that I had tasted, tasted enough, the bitterness of false friendship and the unlikelihood of a better friendship. A friend who could give me a key to my heart, the thread that would lead me out of my labyrinth — — was a wish that I often had, without understanding and discerning its content rightly.³²

³⁰ BW 349, 429, 431–432/LW 294, 362, 364–365.

³¹ See BW 103, 323, 347–348, 353–372, 380, 381–394, 403, 432, 445/LW 42, 269, 292–293, 295–316, 324, 324–337, 344, 365, 375.

³² BW 342/LW 288.

These prayers range from short exclamations³³ to extended intercessions and supplications.³⁴ They occur more often as he becomes more confident in prayer and of the Spirit's guidance in his praying. By listening to God the Father speaking the Spirit to him through the Son, he speaks to the Father through the Son by the Spirit.

Conclusion

Hamann's intellectual peers fancied that they would be enlightened by the critical exercise of observation and reason; they imagined that through their reason they could overcome the blindness of ignorance and understand all natural phenomena. Theirs, after all, was the age of philosophy and science, the age of comprehensive systems that seemed to explain everything and encyclopedias that claimed to encompass the sum of human knowledge. Enlightened by the superstitious faith in their sovereign reason, they wanted to be the new seers, independent thinkers.

In contrast with them, Hamann acknowledges the limits of human reason and knowledge and his utter dependence on God's revelation. Like Socrates, he presupposes his own ignorance and seeks a different kind of enlightenment through God's word and his Holy Spirit. This is how he describes that kind of prophetic seeing:

*What is the origin of the high regard for the arts of divination and of the great number of them which are based on nothing but the misunderstanding of our instinct or our natural reason? We are all able to be prophets. All natural phenomena are dreams, visions, riddles, which have their meaning, their secret sense. The book of nature and the book of history are nothing but ciphers, hidden signs, which require the same key that interprets Holy Scripture and is the purpose of its inspiration.*³⁵

Here Hamann refers to the misuse of natural reason by the philosophers of his day, rather sarcastically, as the practice of divination, the attempt to discover the secrets of the natural world, the occult meaning of natural phenomena, so that they could foretell the future and gain control of the whole natural world for their benefit.

He regards this as a case of superstitious overreach with its abuse of created, human powers. It exploits our human calling to be prophets, people who are called to hear God's voice, receive his Spirit, and speak his word. That prophetic vocation

³³ See BW 66, 71, 128, 131, 148, 323, 328, 345, 353, 403/LW 4, 11, 68, 71-72, 89, 269, 274, 290, 296, 344.

³⁴ See BW 123-124, 131, 313-314, 347-348, 377-379, 436-437, 441-446/LW 63-64, 71-72, 260-261, 292-293, 321-322, 369-370, 371-376

³⁵ BW 417/LW 355.

is abused by people who attempt to become seers by the exercise of natural instinct and reason rather than by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So the key to true enlightenment is the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who has inspired the Scriptures, so that we may be inspired by him through them and receive enlightenment in the three main domains of our existence: our salvation, nature, and history. First, the Spirit himself interprets his book for us and enlightens us through it, so that we see what God has done, is doing, and will do for our salvation.

Then the same Spirit uses his book to interpret the book of nature and the book of history, so that we see how the triune God is at work in a hidden way in the natural world and in human affairs. The Holy Spirit, the divine Historian, the Author of the Bible, condescends to “reveal the counsels, mysteries and ways of God to people in their own speech, their own history and in their own ways.”³⁶ He accommodates himself to our all-too-human limitations.

As we read the Bible with the faith that the Spirit produces in us, all the miracles of the Bible occur in our own souls.³⁷ Thus Hamann confesses:

I am convinced that every soul is a stage for the great wonders that are contained in the history of creation and the entire Holy Scripture. The course of the life of every Christian is included in the daily work of God, in His covenants with people, in transgressions, warnings, revelations, miraculous preservations, and so on. For a Christian, who has passed from the death of sin into a new life, can the preservation of Jonah, the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the cripple, and so on, be conceived as greater miracles? Does not the Savior Himself say: “Which is easier, to forgive sins or to say: take up your bed and walk?”³⁸

All this depends on the Holy Spirit. He enlightens his readers through his word and teaches them how to read it. Hamann therefore concludes:

It is not Moses or Isaiah that has left behind their thoughts and the events of their time as earthly authors and writers for future generations or their people. It is the Holy Spirit that has revealed Himself through the mouth and pen of these holy men. The Spirit who hovered over the waters of the young, unformed earth, who overshadowed Mary and acted so that the Holy One would be born, the Spirit who alone is able to search out and discover the depths of the Godhead. This should move us to read the divine Word with very great reverence and enjoy it too.³⁹

³⁶ BW 152/LW 93.

³⁷ BW 139/LW 80.

³⁸ BW 403/LW 344.

³⁹ BW 304/LW 251.