

A CRITIQUE OF DR SP HEBART'S

THEOLOGY OF THE WORD LECTURE III

THE WORD AND THE CHURCH

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Introduction

It appears to us that the central thrust of this Lecture III is that the Scriptures have authority not because they are the inspired (God-breathed) words of God, but because of their Gospel content.

In the brief discussion following the oral presentation of this Lecture we declared (and later many other pastors agreed with us) that this was a totally new approach to us. We had never heard anything like this in our church before. When Dr Hebart asserted that his position here was the position of the Theses of Agreement we declared that either he was deceiving us or we had been deceived by our theologians before the union of the two churches for we had never heard this slant being given to the Theses of Agreement before. We thanked Dr Hebart for "letting the cat out of the bag" in these lectures because it was now clear why, with such a totally different approach to Scripture, it had been quite useless in all those past years to talk, and to quote the Scriptures, because to the others the Word of God apparently had no authority of itself but only in as far as it presents the Gospel.

Since we unashamedly wish to think logically, and lay no claim to even a meagre capacity to "think dialectically", as Dr Hebart says he does, we will be on a somewhat different wave-length throughout this lecture also, and hence beg our doctor's dialectical pardon for any inability to grasp the full profundity of his non-logical utterances. May love and kindness temper our efforts at clarity and honest criticism.

POINTS FROM LECTURE III

1. *The Authority of the NT is the Basis for the Authority of the OT* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 2

Dr Hebart's statement: "first of all we must examine the authority of the NT. Since this is presupposition for the authority of the OT ..."

This statement already betrays the inadequacy of Dr Hebart's theory of Biblical authority. If the authority of the OT is dependent upon the authority of the NT what kind of authority could the OT have had before the NT was written. But very clearly Jesus and the apostles speak of the authority of the OT, and insist that people should recognise its authority before the NT came into being. C.f. John 10:35. "Scripture cannot be broken."

2. *The Authority of the Bible is Not That of the Book* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 3

Dr Hebart's term "the book" occurs repeatedly throughout these lectures. I cannot help but feel that it is intended to be a somewhat critical term of derision and dis-respect closely related to the hated "biblicism". We take it, therefore, as an emotive term indicating Dr Hebart's disapproval and disdain, but for the sake of this critique we are interested in the substance and we will have to substitute something like "the Word of God" where Dr Hebart uses "the Book". We do this on the assumption that Dr Hebart is not so concerned about the form of "the book", its size and paper and binding and cover, etc, but its content. "The Book" is Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is the Word of God.

As soon as we remove the emotive language to highlight the substance of Dr Hebart's statement, however, the error or fallacy is immediately apparent. To say: "the authority of the Bible is not that of the Word of God as such", is false. Our Theses state:

“Because Holy Scripture (the Bible) is the Word of God, it is the perfect ... authoritative ... revelation of divine truth.” (Theses VIII, 10.)

The fact that it is God’s Word, having come from God to us by the “unique action” of inspiration (Theses VIII, 6.) gives Holy Scripture (“the book”) its authority.

3. *Basis of Scriptural Authority is the Gospel* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 3

Dr Hebart alleges that Luther stresses that: “the true basis and extent of a rightly understood authority of Holy Scripture is in the Gospel and its keregma of Christ.”

No quotations from Luther are given to substantiate this claim, and we do not accept it on the basis of Dr Hebart’s say so. He has misunderstood Luther in other matters and undoubtedly he is misunderstanding Luther here also.

That the Gospel is the basis of the authority of Holy Scripture is the main thrust of this whole lecture. But nowhere does Dr Hebart cite passages of Scripture to prove this. He, therefore, must face the same charge which he has levelled against others in Lecture I page 5, par.3. for approaching Scripture with an “a priori concept”, a “theological theory” which is set up as presupposition, an “a priori model which becomes an overriding principle” to which the book must conform.

Precisely what are the sources for Dr Hebart’s theory that the Gospel content of Scripture is the basis for all biblical authority? We have a right to know this and Dr Hebart has the duty to tell us.

We have a right, in fact, to insist that this principle must be shown to be demanded by Holy Scripture itself or to be rejected. Our Theses of Agreement state that: “We therefore accept the Scriptures, ie, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the ONLY SOURCE and ultimate judge, rule, and standard of ALL doctrine of the Church, also in the doctrines on HOLY SCRIPTURE...” (Theses VIII, 1.) (Our emphasis).

We require of Dr Hebart that he spell out quite precisely how, in what way, and with what passages, the Holy Scriptures demand his theory that the Gospel content is the true basis and extent of the authority of Holy Scripture. If this cannot be proven from Scripture this should be rejected. From our reading of the Scriptures, the Confessions and the Theses of Agreement we would regard such a statement as false.

Certainly we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is the basis of the “*causitive* authority” in Holy Scripture, if we may use that term. By this we mean that it is the Gospel which causes or creates faith in us to believe in Christ. We believe also that the Gospel is *normative* for Biblical interpretation. This means that since the Gospel of Christ crucified for sinners is the central message of the whole of Scripture, not one passage of Scripture dare be given an interpretation by a Christian theologian which contradicts the Gospel, *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. Scripture cannot be against Christ or in conflict with the chief article of the Christian faith. This is what we mean when we say that Christ or the Gospel is THE MATERIAL PRINCIPLE.

We absolutely reject and condemn as false any suggestion that the Gospel is normative over the Scriptures or the basis of Scriptural authority in such a way that it qualifies the divine authority of ALL Scripture, or relativises the rest of Scripture, or makes only the Gospel the norm of theology. We condemn this as Gospel reductionism which is a repudiation of the authority of Holy Scripture. This means that the Gospel as the centre of Scripture dare not become a device to sanction a view of the Bible or our interpretation of it which virtually denies that the whole Bible is God’s inspired, inerrant and authoritative word on ALL matters of which it speaks.

When we say that the Scriptures are the normative authority of the Gospel or that the FORMAL PRINCIPLE is authority for the MATERIAL PRINCIPLE we do not mean that we can prove the Gospel by the Scriptures (the Gospel proves itself) but we mean that only by the Scriptures can we prove that the Gospel which we teach is the real Gospel. Every “gospel” which is not established by the Scriptures is a false gospel, cursed by God. As we prove the correctness of our gospel teaching from the Scriptures alone, so also we prove all our other teachings from the Scriptures alone, and not somehow from the Gospel.

We are not saying by this that the power of the Gospel is derived from the Scriptures or from inspiration of God's Word, for the Gospel was the "power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16) even before it was committed to writing. The *normative* authority of the Scriptures does not make the Gospel the powerful Word of God but it judges and defines precisely *what* Gospel truly is the powerful and living Word of God.

Not ultimately, but certainly *for us today*, the Material Principle is tied inseparably to the Formal Principle; the Material Principle (Gospel) is derived from the Formal Principle (the Scriptures). *We cannot affirm the Gospel except on the authority of "the book", the Holy Scriptures.*

That little digression was thought necessary to prevent misunderstanding.

4. *The Bible Not a Book of Law* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 3

Following immediately after the previous statement Dr Hebart affirms: "For that reason we cannot regard the bible as a book of law ..."

We have always believed that there are two great doctrines in the Bible, the Law and the Gospel. We believe that the Bible is a book of Law and a book of Gospel, and that the two must necessarily go hand in hand.

We feel, however, that the evidence is mounting to drive us to the unpleasant conclusion alluded to in point 14 of the previous critique on Lecture II, that Dr Hebart is using the term "book of law" as another emotional and derisive term meaning a clear, precise, and specific formulation of moral and theological principles which are normative for us, and so limits our "evangelical" freedom. That he does not mean "a book of law" in the sense of setting forth God's Law as distinct from the Gospel is evident from the fact that a few lines further on he chastises the Calvinist denominations for such a view of Scripture which sees it as "a book of moral codes and *doctrines*". Doctrines are formulations of teachings which certainly involve the very Gospel itself. From such a point of view the term "book of law" betrays an uncomfortable chafing under the restrictive *normative* authority of Holy Scripture which violates the "freedom of the Gospel". This is a side-swipe at the whole normative authority of Holy Scripture as taught in our Theses of Agreement and confessions. (Theses I, 1.2.3. Theses VIII, 1.10.)

5. *The Authority of the New Testament is the Gospel* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 4

"The authority of the NT is the Gospel, the fact that its writings proclaim Jesus Christ as Saviour and preach the free grace of God."

and

"It is not the formal authority of a book as such, but the authority based on the gospel content of the whole of the NT."

Here we have the same theme again: Not the book, but the gospel content. See our comments under point 3.

6. *What is Less Clearly Gospel is Carried Along by What is Most Clear* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 4

[Dr] Hebart's theory that Gospel content establishes canonicity and gives authority of itself fragments the Scriptures because the Gospel content is not everywhere apparent. Rather than leave holes in the Scripture, Dr Hebart has to resort to this novel device, which, like his major theory itself, is not substantiated by Scripture, but serves [to] nicely conceal the glaring inadequacies of the theory: Christ-content establishes authority. This little device is nicely expressed thus: "What is less clearly Gospel is, as it were, carried along by what is most clear."

7. *Oneness of Thrust Constitutes the Inerrancy of NT* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 4

Dr Hebart says: "It is this oneness of thrust which constitutes what we may call the infallibility, the inerrancy of the NT writings."

Here, at last, we have the *new meaning of infallibility and inerrancy*. It seems that what has happened is that inerrancy in its "normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction factual as well as theological" (1972 Statement) has been denied by Dr Hebart in Lecture I, page 6 (see our notes on point 36).

But then our good professor is aware that the terms “infallibility” and “inerrancy” have been firmly embedded in documents of constitutional and positional authority in our church and so he has to look around for some new and toothless meaning for the unavoidable terms. We are given warning of this already in Lecture I.p.5. where he asks: “What in the light of the obvious human features ... inerrancy must mean.”

And now, at last, here in Lecture III, we are told what “inerrancy” means to Dr Hebart. It means this “*oneness of thrust*” in the Scriptures. It would be quite unjust, therefore, Dr Hebart would feel, if we were to charge him with denying the inerrancy of Scripture. He confesses the inerrancy right here in Lecture III, in writing. But will the Church be happy with his confession of the inerrancy of Scripture as “oneness of thrust” when it has clearly declared in its officially adopted statement that we: “understand inerrancy in the normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction, ‘factual’ as well as ‘theological’”.

We thank Dr Hebart for the honesty with which he has stated this in this lecture as well as for the frankness with which he admitted this also orally to this present writer and others after Lecture I was given at Coolum.

8. *Single Texts Should Not Be Singled Out to Bear the Weight of Authority* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 4

Because of this “oneness of thrust” which is the “inerrancy” of the New Testament we are told: “Hence single texts and thoughts should not be singled out to make them bear the weight of authority. They are authoritative in the context of the total witness of the Gospel.”

Certainly it is quite true that Biblical statements are not to be wrested from their context and manipulated like isolated oracles. But when Scripture passages are cited in a way that does not twist their meaning but uses them as an authoritative sample of what God’s Word says on a particular matter this is quite legitimate and proper. Many liberals refer to this sarcastically as “the proof-texter method”. But our Lord Jesus Christ himself used Scripture in this way against the devil with considerable power, and to prove his teachings. So did the apostles. So did Luther and the confessors. Our Theses of Agreement too are replete with examples of this. If Dr Hebart is opposed to this, as the lack of Scriptural proof in his lectures may indicate, then he is opposed also to our Lutheran Church’s position.

9. *The Authority of the NT is Confirmed By its Power to Awaken Faith* Lecture III, page 1, paragraph 5

We wholeheartedly agree with Dr Hebart’s statement at the bottom of page 1: “This authority of the NT is confirmed by its power to awaken faith in the hearer. Hence we cannot first say: I believe in the Bible, and then I believe in Christ.”

Our understanding of this was shown under point 3. Unfortunately soon after one turns to page 2 there seems to be some more confusion between the causative authority of the Gospel on page 1 and the normative authority of Scripture on page 2. Certainly the fact of inspiration by which God spoke His word in human language is the basis of the normative authority of Scripture by which all our preaching and teaching must be judged. That this is seen as placing another foundation *alongside* of Christ, or a foundation *for* Christ is nonsense. Scripture is a “foundation” if you like for the Gospel in the sense that it authoritatively reveals what the Gospel is. The proper Scriptural relationship is given in Ephesians 2:20. “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Incidentally one is amazed that Dr Hebart does not refer to such passages of Scripture. Does he regard this as the “proof-texter approach”?

10. *Truth is a Person, Not an ‘It’* Lecture III, page 2, paragraph 1

Dr Hebart says of the truth of Scripture: “Truth is a person according to the Gospel of St John, not an ‘it’.”

This again is a most unfortunate statement. How sad that we have to go over all that tired old neo-orthodox stuff again which has been refuted dozens of times. Certainly St John refers to Jesus Christ as “the way the truth and the life.” But he also says “Thy Word is truth.” (John 17:17) Jesus Himself there refers to truth as an ‘it’.

11. *Authority of the NT Not Based on Inspired Apostles* Lecture III, page 2, paragraph 2

Dr Hebart states: “We should likewise refrain from basing the authority of the NT on the fact that the apostles were inspired.”

God’s Word in 2 Timothy 3:16 says that the “writing” was inspired (pasa graphe theopneustos). After missing the mark and focussing upon the persons rather than the words written by the apostles, Dr Hebart casts aspersions upon inspiration as source of Biblical authority by some confusion about who is an apostle. With this manoeuvre he shifts authority away from authorship to content contrary to Ephesians 2:20. We still go begging for Scriptural proof for [Dr] Hebart’s theory of Christ-content establishes biblical authority.

12. *“Whatever is New Must Stand the Gospel Test”* Lecture III, page 2, paragraph 4

Certainly anything new must not be contrary to the Gospel, in the theology and practice of the church. But Dr Hebart’s way of speaking here is decidedly NOT the way the Theses of Agreement speak. They do not tell us that all new doctrine and practice in the church “must stand the gospel test”. That is just Dr Hebart’s theology of the Word. The Theses say: we must accept “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and as the only and true source, norm, and rule and standard of all teaching and practice in the Christian church.” (Theses I, 3.) (Theses VIII, 1. etc)

I find it incomprehensible that while Dr Hebart says he presents the position of the Theses of Agreement in these lectures, yet he does not speak the way the Theses speak even on this most basic issue.

13. *Contextualisation of the Gospel Into Theologies* Lecture III, pages 2-3

While we would agree that the Gospel has to be applied in every age and locality we believe that Dr Hebart’s presentation of this matter here on these pages is far too complicated and unguarded so as to allow all kinds of interpretations and abuses.

To conclude that, just because the different New Testament writers had different audiences and different localities and circumstances, therefore they had different theologies: so that “the theology of Mark is different from that of Luke, from that of John, from that of Hebrews” is quite unwarranted and confusing. We believe that the use of the term “theology” in that context is quite unwarranted. The expression “application of the Gospel” would have been much clearer if we understand what he is saying.

Behind this kind of language lurks the relativism of Kaesemann who denies the theological unity of the New Testament. This, in turn, is the basis for Lutheran World Federation’s (1977) concept of “reconciled diversity” – full church-fellowship across confessional boundaries while allowing the confessional differences to remain, and, in fact, justifying them on the basis of the variety of “theologies” in the New Testament.

It is a fatal mistake, we believe, to exalt this Gospel/theology dichotomy to such an extent that we may regard and treat the Sacred Scriptures as though they were historically conditioned human writings which contain conflicting traditions and diverse theologies from which no absolutely reliable historical information or permanently valid doctrine can be derived.

Dr Hebart exalts this thing to such an extent that it becomes the task of the specialist theologian to extricate what is binding in the Gospel from what is time-bound in the various theologies of the New Testament and even the theologians disagree and make “frightful mistakes”. All this complicated and confusing uncertainty, doubt, and speculation does not ring true with the Gospel as we see it. The Gospel is essentially very simple. Jesus said: “I thank thee my heavenly Father that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and hast revealed them unto babes.” I am not able to see the essential clarity of the Scriptures as is taught in our Theses of Agreement (VIII, 10) in all of this.

14. *The Original Theology is Made to be a Doctrinal Law* Lecture III, page 3, paragraph 3

Here again we have a statement which betrays a fear that when doctrine becomes precise, clear, and authoritative for us for all time it becomes “law” (even though it may be Gospel) and so eliminated the freedom of the Gospel. See point 4.

15. *Paul’s Negative Assessment of Marriage Not in Accord with the Gospel* Lecture III, page 3, paragraph 4

Dr Hebart says: “The context of the gospel may have left its mark in the NT by the inclusion of elements which are not in accord with the Gospel, eg, Paul’s negative assessment of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7.”

We are rather shocked by this statement that Paul has written into the Scriptures elements “which are not in accord with the gospel”. This is another clear case where Dr Hebart uses the gospel against the Scriptures. We believe that whatever is truly Biblical does not negate the Gospel, and that the true and genuine Gospel does not negate or come into conflict with whatever is truly Biblical. If Dr Hebart would allow the Scripture to interpret Scripture here, he would see that what St Paul is saying here is in fact in accord with the Gospel. If this is not granted, one must suspect that a different meaning for “gospel” is also beginning to emerge, as has been seen to be the case with “law”.

16. *A Mere Formal “It is Written” Will not Help Us* Lecture III, page 3, paragraph 4

[Wendy, seems like the numbering of these has gone out of whack in the original. I’ll continue on as should be, not what is. 😊]

It would seem to me that the one who is being criticised perhaps more than anybody else here by Dr Hebart in the application of his principles is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He uses the “It is written” when quoting the Scriptures against the devil in Matthew 4. These Scriptures came from quite a different context, but were still suited to the occasion. Where the application of a Scripture passage is similar to that of its original context – whether it applied to quite different circumstances or not – it is quite legitimate to quote one verse or one single thought from scripture saying “It is written”. Our Lord Jesus Christ did this, and if our Theology of the Word does not fit His usage of Scripture, ours is not a Christian theology.

Certainly we are not to *twist* Biblical statements and say “it is written.” But I do not understand, rightly or wrongly, that that is what Dr Hebart is referring to here.

17. *What is the Basis for the Authority of the OT?* Lecture III, page 4, paragraph 1

“For us this will mean a critical assessment of the OT writings, using the gospel as criterion.”

Nowhere in the statements of our church is this kind of procedure resorted to to establish the authority of the OT scriptures. The very first sentence of our Theses of Agreement has set our Church’s approach to this whole matter it states:

“We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible Word of God, written by inspiration of God, 2 Timothy 3:16, by holy men of God, 2 Peter 1:21, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4.”

If our Theses held Dr Hebart’s theory on Scriptural authority they would have said: “We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible Word of God since they point us to Christ.”

Throughout the following section this is the refrain that runs through everything: Whatever of the OT that has a thrust towards Christ has authority for us and whatever has no thrust towards Christ has no authority for us. Note the sentence: “The authority of the OT is determined from the critical stance of the gospel and hence from the content of its message.” (III. p4. par.2) And again: “The authority of the OT ... is to be seen ... in all these things in the way in which its thrust is towards Christ.” (III. p4. par3)

18. *Authority of Scripture is Confused with the Application of its Commands* Lecture III, page 4, paragraph 1

Dr Hebart finally betrays the reason for his thorough confusion in the issues of Biblical authority with the sentence: "In this whole area, then, the OT has no authority for Christians, even though it is Word of God."

Dr Hebart had just shown correctly that Luther and our Confessions teach that many of the OT commands were given by God for the Jews only and do not apply as commandments to us today. We certainly agree with this. But it does *not* follow from this as Dr Hebart concludes: Therefore "in this whole area ... the OT has no authority for Christians, even though it is Word of God." What *does* follow from this is rather: In this authoritative Word of God we see that God gives specific commands to specific people."

We might say the same about many many portions of both Old and New Testament Scriptures: Are we going to say that Genesis chapter 7 has *no authority* for us Christians because God said to Noah there: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." and this does not apply to us since we have no ark today? This is nonsense. This applies to the NT too. When God said to Joseph: "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife." (Matthew 1:20) must I conclude: too bad, this NT passage has "*no authority*" for me since my wife is not called Mary, or, if I insist that these passages are authoritative, then I had better go and marry also a Mary. This may be dialectical thinking, but it is not logical and it makes no sense to me.

Plainly Dr Hebart is confusing too quite different things here. He is confusing the normative authority of the Word of God with the applicability of specific commandments. It is confusions of this kind that run through these lectures which make it very difficult to follow precisely what is meant.

Not one of the instances given here undermines the normative authority of God's Word or any part of it. When Scripture tells us of God's commands to the Jews it is God's authoritative Word telling us infallibly and inerrantly precisely what God commanded to the Jews. We are bound by the normative authority of God's Word to confess and not to deny precisely that is what God did command to the Jews.

Approaching the whole OT now, with this a priori basic fallacy that somehow the non-applicability of specific passages to us overthrows its authority for Christians, Dr Hebart under the three categories of: Nationalistic Bondage, Empiricist Bondage, and Legalistic Bondage (pp.4,5&6), eliminates much of the Old Testament as not authoritative for us Christians. After this onion-peeling exercise very little of the Old Testament indeed would remain as having any authority for us today. That is finally where Dr Hebart's "*Gospel Test*" applied in a dialectical way (II. p8. par.2) gets us. Sadly we see how this a priori theory conceived in confusion, and born of derision against Lutheran Orthodoxy, finally ends in such nihilism towards Biblical authority.

This is emphatically NOT the approach to Biblical authority presented to us in the Lutheran Confessions or the Theses of Agreement. It does not have its origin in Holy Scripture.

19. *More Irreconcilable Contradictions* Lecture III, page 5, paragraph 1

"... two kinds of prophecy of the Spirit and the flesh, irreconcilable."

"... this difference of hope ..."

Again here there is confusion in the mind of Dr Hebart. He uses examples of false and unjustified hopes and aspirations of the Pharisees and Zealots to demonstrate a failing or fallacy of the OT text itself, so that he wrongly concludes: "Such passages have no authority for us and they certainly express with more than usual clarity the humanity of the Scriptures."

A similar confusion and misunderstanding occurs in the following paragraph where Dr Hebart refers to the failings of God's OT people – perhaps even misinterpreting some cases – and then uses this as a slight against the OT text itself, saying: "In the light of the gospel such OT passages cease to have authority for us, and again are evidence of the earthen vessels in which God's Word comes to us."

20. *In the OT the Gospel is Still Caught up in a Legalistic Bind* Lecture III, page 5, paragraph 3

Under the legalistic bondage Dr Hebart says: "The OT does know of the Gospel of forgiveness, of the mercy and grace of God. But the gospel is still caught up in a legalistic bind."

That is impossible. Any bit of legalism destroys the Gospel. "If it is by grace, then it is not more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." Romans 11:6.

Dr Hebart says: "The realisation is not yet, that man's basic moral direction is revolt against God. So the grace of God *cannot* be understood in the NT sense." (III. p6. par.1)

We do not believe that Dr Hebart is in a position to make this kind of judgement against the people of God in the Old Testament. We believe that the words of our Lord and the frequent reference to the OT by the apostles show that God's grace was understood in the OT. The OT is used to substantiate NT teaching. We do not subscribe to the evolution of religion hypothesis.

This confusion again leads Dr Hebart in applying his "gospel test" to reject OT authority. He says: "Once again this legalistic understanding of grace and forgiveness has no authority for us in the light of the gospel ..." Or again: The Authority of the OT is therefore above all determined by its content in the light of the Gospel and hence to some extent that authority is limited." (III. p6. par.5)

If Dr Hebart's theory were correct about the OT legalistic understanding of grace, etc, then he would have to blame God for those *theological* failings or deny the inspiration of the words of Scripture. But it appears that Dr Hebart escapes this by relegating those failings and errors to "the earthen vessels" or the human side of Scripture.

It appears to me that we cannot escape the fact that Dr Hebart has asserted in this section that the OT actually teaches doctrinal positions that conflict with the doctrinal position of the New Testament. He comes to this position because he does *not* use the *material principle* (Christ and the Gospel) to determine his understanding and interpretation of the Scripture passages *but* to undermine and limit the Formal Principle (Scriptural authority). This is wrongly to bring the Material Principle in conflict with the Formal Principle, rejected by our Theses of Agreement. "We dare not stress the material principle at the expense of the formal principle, or vice versa." (Theses I. 5)

21. *Biblical Authority Tied to Inspiration Rejected by [Dr] Hebart* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 1

Dr Hebart states that his remarks are directed "against the conception of Scriptural authority as developed by Lutheran Orthodoxy. Its understanding of the authority of the Bible is tied up with its teaching on inspiration."

Contrary to Dr Hebart's views about Scriptural authority being linked with Christ-content, and in disagreement with his rejection of Lutheran Orthodoxy's linking Scriptural authority with inspiration, our Theses of Agreement do precisely that: they link Scriptural authority with inspiration and inerrancy and not with Christ-content. The theses do this in two steps. They state:

- (1) "Inspiration ... was the unique action by which God the Holy Ghost gave His Word of revelation to men, ... so that of this their ... written word it must be said without limitation that it is God's own Word." (Theses I. 6)
- (2) "Because Holy Scripture is the Word of God, it is the perfect ... authoritative ... revelation of divine truth." (Theses I. 10)

We can only conclude again that Dr Hebart's theory that Christ-content of Scripture establishes the Authority of Scripture is NOT in harmony with the position of our Church and must be rejected.

22. *What! No errors in Scripture!* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 1

That Dr Hebart really chafes under the insistence upon infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture is shown again in his jibes against Lutheran Orthodoxy. He says: "Instead of remaining with Luther and basing that authority on the witness to Christ in Scripture, the Orthodox theologians postulate the supernatural book of doctrine, which is the inerrant word of God, not only in its central spiritual concerns, but also in the fine details of historical and this-worldly matters, without any fallibility in word or expression. ... a divinely guaranteed sacred codex is necessary."

By this time we feel almost sorry for Dr Hebart because in his vitriolic attacks against Lutheran Orthodoxy he is in fact attacking our Church's position in the Theses of Agreement whether he knows it or not. As we have repeatedly shown the Theses teach the full inerrancy of the Scriptures just as does Lutheran Orthodoxy. By the term Inerrancy the Theses of Agreement "mean to stress" the "full authority" of Scripture, (1972 Statement first lines) asserting that the term "inerrancy" is used "in the normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction 'factual' as well as 'theological', and insisting that this implies that "although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures, it is not really so." (Statement on Inerrancy 1972. 2nd par.)

What Dr Hebart finds intolerable in Lutheran Orthodoxy is, in fact, precisely the position of our Church.

By his repeated attacks on those who hold to a real infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures, "factual as well as theological", we cannot but conclude that Dr Hebart wants a position to be maintained which allows for real errors and contradictions in the Scriptures. As we said previously, this must be the reason why he also opposes any attempts at harmonisation of seeming discrepancies. We should like to add here that in the single instance where the Lutheran Confessions refer to a seeming contradiction in the Scriptures they offer a solution which completely removes the difficulty. Yes, the Lutheran confessions engage in harmonisation which, according to Dr Hebart wipes out the human side of Scripture (l. p6. par5). This instance is in Apology XXIV, 28. Triglotta p.393. It relates to a seeming contradiction between Jeremiah and Moses.

23. *"Not Simply Certainty but Security is Desired"* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 1

We link this sentence of Dr Hebart with his sentence in Lecture I, p.5 par.4 where he says – in what we cannot now but interpret as a jibe – "So we have certainty and security." We refer our reader to point 26 in Lecture I. for our comments. We thank God for both the certainty and the security that we have in the real Word of God (as Jesus said in John 8:31-32) which is clearly not available to us if we operate with Dr Hebart's theology of the Word, and which he apparently does not want us to enjoy.

24. *"Jewish, Medieval, Concept of Inspiration."* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 2

Dr Hebart says: We have noted in a previous lecture that at the back of all this is an unbiblical, Jewish, medieval, concept of inspiration which lifts the holy writers beyond their stance in history."

We noted this matter in point 13 of Lecture I. where we showed that in that lecture p.2 at the bottom. Dr Hebart admits that: "Christ and the apostles looked at the Old Testament as given through men by the Holy Spirit ..." and that "in this understanding they were in agreement with the Jewish rabbis and theologians of their day." Now he calls it an "unbiblical, Jewish, medieval concept of inspiration."

Our church has declared that the assumption that our Lord and His apostles may have had a defective view on such matters is an attack "not only on the apostolicity of the Church (Ephesians 2:20) but on the very lordship of Christ." (c.f. Genesis 1-3 Doctrinal Statement B2 bot.)

25. *"The Incarnate Humanity of the Bible is Thus Denied."* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 2

The humanity of Holy Scripture is *not* denied by our position on inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. We clearly and unequivocally confess this in our Theses I.9.10. It would appear that the one thing that is missing from our concept of the humanity of Scripture which is demanded by Dr Hebart's theology is real errors and contradictions and irreconcilable discrepancies.

26. *Inspiration Means that Through the Writers there is Witness to Christ* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 3

Here now we are given the "filling" with which the hollow shell of divine inspiration, which is left after these lectures, is to be stuffed.

Dr Hebart redefines inspiration thus: "Certainly we must speak of inspiration, but in the sense that through the writers there is witness to Christ, and that the Holy Spirit is behind and in all this."

Why must we speak of inspiration? In Dr Hebart's approach we could well do without speaking of inspiration. But, I suppose, we must speak of inspiration because our church has spoken of inspiration and this uncomfortable word is firmly entrenched in the constitution and positional documents of our Church. So let us agree to use the term. But we shall give it our own definition. That seems to be the approach.

But so is the definition of inspiration firmly entrenched in the Theses of Agreement. We read in Theses VIII, 6. "We teach the Nicene Creed and with the whole true Christian Church that the Holy Scripture is given by inspiration of God the Holy Ghost (theopneustos), 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19ff. Inspiration in this sense was the unique action by which God the Holy Ghost gave His Word of revelation to men ... so that of this their spoken or written Word it must be said without limitation that it is God's own Word. 1 Thessalonians 2:13."

It is not part of our "freedom under the Gospel" to redefine the basic words of our Church's confessional position, and then say that we hold to the position of our church. Earlier (Lecture III.p.1. see point 7) we had a new definition of inerrancy which was quite contrary to the Theses of Agreement, and now we have a new definition of "inspiration" which flies in the face of our Church's position. This cannot be tolerated.

27. *Further Chafing under Inerrancy* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 4

Dr Hebart says: "The Postulate of an inerrant book in *all* matters on which that book speaks, and hence of its authority in *all* these spheres, forced the Orthodox theologians to isolate the process of writing."

That part of the hated Orthodox Lutheran position which Dr Hebart spells out here is precisely the position of our LCA spelled out in our Theses of Agreement and doctrinal Statement on inerrancy as we have repeatedly shown.

Our Theses of Agreement too ISOLATE the writing of Holy Scripture from the writing of all other books. They say: "Inspiration in this sense was a unique action by which God the Holy Ghost gave His word of revelation to men ..."

Inspiration means it was a unique or isolated action. Of course Dr Hebart does not like this because such a unique action by God certainly gives to the Scriptures divine authority in all its details. He wants the Gospel to be the only source of Biblical authority.

28. *Only the Original Text is Inspired* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 4

Dr Hebart criticises this statement of the Lutheran theologians that "only the original text is inspired."

Because the writings (graphe) are inspired or God-breathed they are the very word of God and so inerrant. But our Theses indicate that this inerrancy does not apply to the variant readings which may be found in extant textual sources because of copyist errors or deliberate alterations. This is saying very clearly that our church's Theses hold the original text to be inspired and not all sorts of variant readings.

The value of inspiration and inerrancy of the original text is self-evidently of value also for translations if they are faithful to the original manuscripts. Why bother to get back to the original text if, according to Dr Hebart's scheme, it is only the Gospel that is authoritative? The value of textual criticism under Dr Hebart's scheme is merely archaeological rather than theological.

29. *"Orthodox Emphasis on the Book"* Lecture III, page 7, paragraph 5

"The Orthodox emphasis on the book as such transfers the significance of the Word of the Holy Spirit from the creation of an I – Thou relationship with God in Christ, to an I – it relationship with a book."

More of that tired existentialist nonsense. "The book" is not worshipped any more than the crucifix is worshipped in the Lutheran church. We do not wish to respond to Dr Hebart's loaded emotional terms with a tirade about iconoclasm and Reformed radicalism. But if we strip the emotionalism out of the sentence and go to the substance calling "the book" the Word of God then it makes good sense.

Similarly in the following sentence: "This leads to the claim that the book has absolute authority in the totality of its statements." This makes very good sense when we strip away the emotions and say: "This leads to the claim that the *Word of God* has absolute authority in the totality of its statements." Again our Theses say precisely that: "Because Holy Scripture is the Word of God it is authoritative." (VIII, 10.) And it is inerrantly inspired in every word. (Theses VIII, 7.)

30. *Dr Hebart's Venom Persists to the Bitter End.* Lecture III, page 8, paragraph 1

The famous last words: "... now human reason and logic are the criteria for the absolute divinity of the book. So the understanding of revelation and its authority is intellectualised, and the word becomes a series of propositions and doctrines and faith is the acceptance of these propositions as correct, without query. That is the beginning of rationalism."

Time is running out and so the few words that will yet be permitted are loaded as heavily as possible with emotional impact. Reason and logic are gifts of God approved in our Church's Statement on Genesis 1-3. "The proper function of reason, ... is in every respect *under* and not *over* Scripture. ...we affirm the fullest use of reason with all its scholarly tools, as a servant, ..." (b3 top.)

When people implicitly accept what the Holy Scripture say and teach, and when they use their reason to grasp and to understand what Holy Scripture is saying to them and conclude that it is teaching its absolute authority to which they are to submit in all humility, this is not the beginning of rationalism.

CONCLUSION

Our critique of these Lectures of Dr Hebart was a very sad and irksome duty. We want it to be clearly understood by all that throughout our comments we have personally not felt bitter against our venerable Dr Hebart and we do not wish that any of our words would be misinterpreted in that way. If we have, at times, appeared to "rub in" a particular point, we believe that we would have done the same thing orally and to the face of Dr Hebart in the spirit of loving concern, and we are confident that he, as previously, would also understand it in that way. Certainly, in the interests of truth and love we have had to be as precise and as keen as we are capable of. Our efforts have fallen a long way short of the precision that we would have liked to have shown. In the short time available, however, we have tried to do our best.

May God have mercy upon His Church.

MJ Grieger
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