

A CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD ACCORDING TO DR SP HEBART

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Introduction

The three lectures given by Dr S. P. Hebart to the Queensland District Pastor's Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia on the 22nd and 23rd June 1982 at Coolum "Luther Heights Youth Camp" are *important documents* in the history of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

Dr Hebart was for many years – ever since the union of the two Lutheran churches in Australia until a couple of years ago – the Principal of Luther Seminary Adelaide, the only seminary of the Lutheran Church of Australia. As lecturer in Dogmatics at Luther Seminary, as well as Principal, Dr Hebart was in a position to shape the doctrinal thinking and position of the pastors trained in our church perhaps more than any other man. In addition Dr Hebart was prominent on the Inter-Synodical Committees which drew up the Theses of Agreement which have become foundational document for the union of the two Lutheran Churches in Australia.

The importance of these three Lectures on THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD arises not only from the eminence of the author but also from his firm assertion at the close of the third lecture, in the face of opposition, that the position he had taken up in these lectures "is the position of the THESES OF AGREEMENT".

From another perspective also the crucial importance of these three written lectures will be evident. They were given to the Qld District Pastor's conference as a counter to Pastor C. I. Koch's paper on INSPIRATION INERRANCY and AUTHORITY of SCRIPTURE presented to the Pastor's Conference at Maroochydore Qld. Pastor Koch's paper was to have been read by pastors before that conference and he was given 15-20 minutes to highlight the main points after which about 40 minutes was allotted for discussion. Four hours of Pastor's Conference time were now allotted to Dr Hebart's lectures, after each of which there was allowed only about 15 minutes for discussion. The gross unfairness of the situation prompted the present writer to submit a resolution to the pastor's conference requesting the in-coming programme Committee to consider allotting a similar period of time to the Theology of the Word on the basis of papers presented by Clem Koch or his representatives. This was necessary because Dr Hebart's papers had raised so very many issues of which the Pastor's Conference had heard only one side. That proposal was hotly debated and we were told by one speaker the [sic] Hebart's papers were to have ended the matter. And that is what actually happened, because, by a vote of 17 in favour and 23 against, the pastor's conference refused to hear the other side.

We are, therefore, left with Dr Hebart's three papers as the final word on the matter as far as the pastor's conference is concerned for the foreseeable future. Dr Hebart's papers, therefore should be public material, readily available, and openly discussed in our church. They dare not be "swept under the carpet", by-passed, forgotten in contempt or in charity, or substituted with some other material unless and until the Qld District pastor's conference wishes to "hear the other side" of the numerous issues raised in Dr Hebart's three lectures.

The following critique is submitted as a humble contribution to the on-going debate on this centrally important issue – the Theology of the Word. If I have misunderstood Dr Hebart at any point I beg his forgiveness and I earnestly desire the patience of our brethren who should understand that where so little time was given at conference for question of discussion on so much controversial material one is able only to offer a critique on the written words themselves.

May God give clarity with charity.

A CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD LECTURE I

The reading of this Critique assumes that Dr Hebart's lectures will be in hand in their original form so that the context of quoted statements can be checked. When citing material from these lectures the Roman numeral will refer to the particular lecture I, II or III. The Page will relate to the page of that lecture paper in its original form and the paragraph will relate to the paragraph counting from the top of the page. The points taken from Dr Hebart's lectures shall simply follow in the order in which they occur rather than be grouped under any topics.

POINTS FROM LECTURE I

1. *Scripture as Record* Lecture I, page 1, paragraph 4

The Word and the RECORD of the Word. We agree that the term Word of God is wider than the term Scripture. We agree that God reveals Himself by words and deeds. God's mighty acts in the Old Testament history to a certain extent revealed the mind and will of God. God revealed Himself also in the incarnation, the passion death and resurrection of Christ. He reveals Himself still today, also in His creation. Because they reveal the mind of God and His nature the acts of God may properly be called the Word of God, and it is true that the Word of God in the sense of "acts of God" preceded the written Word of God.

To speak of the Holy Scriptures, however, as the "record of that word in that book" is inadequate and misleading, because, while the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures is indeed also a record of What God has done – yes indeed God's own record of what He has done – yet it is far more than a record. The term "record" connotes a recording or chronicling of events. Holy Scripture is not only a chronicling of God's acts but it is also God's own authoritative and inspired account of what these acts mean.

Acts or actions, including God's acts, can readily be misinterpreted and misunderstood by men. The most central acts of God: the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, have all been misinterpreted by men. God saw fit, therefore, to reveal to us in propositional statements the authoritative meaning of His divine acts in Holy Scripture. In Holy Scripture God also tells us many things in human language which are additional to and which go far beyond what the acts of God might reveal. The verbal revelation of God in Holy Scripture is explicit while the revelation of God in His acts is implicit. (c.f. Theses VIII, 2.)

2. *The Interpretation of Faith Clarifies God's Acts* Lecture I, page 1, paragraph 4

"So the interpretation of faith is needed"

That faith (*fides qua creditur*) should interpret the acts of God as Dr Hebart suggests, and so men of God with the "gift of insight and understanding" give an authoritative interpretation of these acts, is inadequate because faith itself is absolutely dependent upon the Word. (Romans 10:17). Apart from the Word of God faith is nothing but delusion or superstition. We need God's own interpretation of His acts. He gave His people such an authoritative interpretation in the inspired teaching and preaching and writing of the prophets and apostles. ("Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter 1:21.) All men have the same divinely inspired authoritative interpretation of the acts of God in the God-breathed writing of Holy Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (that is, *theopneustos* = God-breathed).

The Theses of Agreement state:

"We teach with the Nicene Creed and with the whole Christian Church that 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, whom He chose for oral proclamation or for written recording, 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." (Theses VIII, 6.)

3. *It is an Existential Word* Lecture I, page 1, paragraph 5 end

What does this mean? Certainly we believe that the Word of God is a living, powerful, active, challenging message which confronts and claims men. But God's Word is also propositional statements to be studied, searched, compared, accepted and believed. (John 5:39; Acts 17:11, etc.)

4. *Continuity and Discontinuity?* Lecture I, page 1, paragraph 8

"... the relationship between the two testaments is one of continuity and discontinuity ..."

It is not clear what this means. If it refers to the Scripturally indicated relationship of prophecy and fulfilment it is rather poorly expressed. But the same terms are used again on page 3, paragraph 2, lines 7-8. But there it seems

to confuse the literalist legalism of the pharisees in Christ's day with an inadequacy of the Old Testament itself. But surely the defective views and understandings of the Pharisees cannot illustrate a radical discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New.

5. *Christ is the Criterion for the Evaluation of OT Continuity* Lecture I, page 1, paragraph 8

What is meant by this that "... the ultimate self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ is the criterion for the evaluation of the Old Testament written word in terms of possible and necessary continuity and inescapable discontinuity."?

The meaning of this escapes me. Is this to be so for all the statements of the written word in the Old Testament? How does Christ serve as a criterion for the continuity of the written account of creation in Genesis 1, or of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19? Do these written accounts of the Old Testament have continuity, or do they not?

6. *The Thrust of the Old Testament is Towards Christ* Lecture I, page 1, paragraph 9

We wholeheartedly agree that: "The thrust of the written Word of the Old Testament is towards Christ, and Christ is the centre of the written message of the New Testament."

We agree also with the implications of these facts as stated on the next page with reference to the preaching of the church. We are a little uneasy, however with the use of the term "authentic *record*" in this paragraph because of its limitations which we noted in point 1 above. We agree too, as stated at the close of this paragraph on the next page that in this written word we do not simply get biography or history "but self-disclosure of God and the offer of eternal hope." While we do not *simply* get biography and history yet we do in fact also get these by divine authorship.

7. *It is Not Easy to Say Why this Written Word is Word of God* Lecture I, page 2, paragraph 2

Dr Hebart experiences difficulties here which those who believe in the inspiration of the *writings* themselves, (rather than merely an inspiration of the writers) do not experience. If we ask the Scriptures why those writings are the Word of God? Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16 answers that they are the Word of God because the writings are God-breathed. The term "God-breathed" means coming from the mouth of God. (theopneustos). God is the author of these words that is why they are the Word of God.

This is also very clearly the position of the Theses of Agreement:

"... 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, whom He chose, for oral proclamation or for written recording 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"

Contrary to Dr Hebart's experience also we have no difficulty in saying why the oral preaching of the apostles was the Word of God. Scripture answers this question too very simply by saying that the "holy men of God spake as they were moved (borne along) by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter 1:21.

A real problem arises in this area, however, only when, contrary to these passages, one holds that God did not breathe the very words themselves through the writers, but only somehow made use of human beings and the human words which men had spoken. If God Himself had no influence to initiate the choosing of the appropriate words but merely accepted the words which men, without His direction, had chosen, then indeed one is in difficulties to say WHY the written word is the Word of God.

8. *Every Word of Scripture is At Once Human and Divine* Lecture I, page 2, paragraph 3

We are happy with Dr Hebart's statement that "every word of the written Word of Holy Scripture is word of God, at once human and divine." (c.f. Theses VIII, 9.) We reject, as we believe that Dr Hebart would reject any

suggestion that some parts of Scripture are human and some parts are divine. All parts are fully human and fully divine.

We would have preferred it however, if Dr Hebart had not said in the next sentence: "It is an immediate testimony of God's self-disclosure given TO certain men" but rather given THROUGH certain men TO us all. Surely this Word of God and men is given to us all but through those whom God chose for this purpose. Both prepositions "to" and "through" are correct if one is not held to exclude the other. We would reject any suggestion that God spoke His Word to the Holy Writers and subsequently they give man's word to us in their writings.

When God spoke to, through, and by means of the sacred writers to us then every word that they wrote is both human and divine.

9. *Prophets and Apostles ... All Speak from the Conviction of Faith* Lecture I, page 2, paragraph 4

Dr Hebart is answering the question raised at the beginning of this paragraph "Why is Scripture the Word of God?" In this connection he stresses the fact that the prophets and apostles had the "conviction of faith that God Himself is present and speaking in His mighty words and acts of self-disclosure ..."

It is difficult to see why Dr Hebart emphasises this because in his very next paragraph he indicates that on those same grounds the Koran and the Book of Mormon claim to be the Word of God. One must assume therefore, surely, that the implication is that the argument is invalid. But then it is difficult to see why this point needs to be stressed when answering the question: why is Scripture the Word of God. There appears to be some confusion here.

10. *Holy Scripture Says Almost Nothing about its Nature and Origin* Lecture I, page 2, paragraph 6

Dr Hebart's statement that "Holy Scripture itself says almost nothing about its nature and origin." is patently false.

The Doctor himself contradicts it in the very next paragraph where he states: "Christ and the apostles looked on the Old Testament as given through men by the Holy Spirit, so that in all the written word of the Old Testament we do not just hear the word of authentic interpreters or eye witnesses ... but we hear the speaking of the Holy Spirit."

But the only way in which Dr Hebart could have come to this obvious and vitally important conclusion is from the numerous passages of the Scriptures where it does teach us of its origin and the nature where Christ and the apostles say so often: "Thus saith the Lord through the prophet ... etc." The inference is clearly that there are many more passages where Scripture teaches us of its origin than the two passages which Dr Hebart has listed and which he then disposes of.

It should be carefully noted that while Dr Hebart claimed that his lectures presented the position of the Theses of Agreement yet he insists that the Scriptures say almost nothing of its nature and origin and then he disposes of the passages 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 which the Theses repeatedly refer to as setting forth the inspired origin of Holy Scripture. The Theses declare: "We therefore accept the Scriptures ... as the only source and ultimate judge rule and standard of all doctrine ... also in the doctrines on the Holy Scriptures and on inspiration." (Theses VIII, 1.) The Theses of Agreement have a lot to say on the nature and origin of Holy Scripture and this is derived from the Scripture teaching about itself.

11. *2 Timothy 3:16 says simply that God's pneuma is present in the OT* Lecture I, page 2, paragraph 7

Dr Hebart says: "The first passage (2 Timothy 3:16) simply says that God's pneuma is present in the Old Testament."

We find this most objectionable. Here Dr Hebart, despite his claims to present in these lectures the position of the Theses of Agreement, flies in the face of what the Theses clearly teach and he twists the passage that the Theses

of Agreement repeatedly use to teach the inspired nature and origin of Holy Scripture in such a way as to say nothing of its origin but only to say that God's pneuma is present in the Old Testament.

The Theses of Agreement state very specifically:

"We teach with the Nicene Creed and with the whole true Christian church that 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 it must be said without limitation that it is God's own Word." (Theses VIII, 6.)

The Theses here very definitely take the Greek word "theopneustos" (God-breathed) to be a *PASSIVE* verbal adjective which teaches the source, nature and origin of the words of Holy Scripture as having come from the breath of God. Dr Hebart, however opposes the Theses of Agreement here again and contrary to the overwhelming usage he interprets "theopneustos" to be an *ACTIVE* verbal adjective indicating that the Scriptures *breathe* God's Spirit rather than that they *are breathed by* God's Spirit. In this very subtle way Dr Hebart would undermine the clear and emphatic teaching of the Theses of Agreement, on the basis of Scripture, while at the same time he deceitfully says that his lectures present the position of the Theses of Agreement. This is intolerable. Always, and without exception the Theses of Agreement use the passage of 2 Timothy 3:16 as teaching a Scripture "given by inspiration" not a Scripture "giving inspiration" c.f. Theses I, 1. VIII, 6. VIII, 7.8. etc. Especially in VIII 6 it is spelled out that "Inspiration in this sense was the unique action by which God the Holy Ghost gave His Word to men ..."

12. *The One Remaining Passage 2 Peter 1:21 is Found on the Edge of the Canon and So Is Disposed of* Lecture I, page 3, paragraph 1

"Indeed it is striking that the one relevant passage, 2 Peter 1:20 should be found on the very periphery and edge of the New Testament Canon. Undoubtedly this is the reason too why Luther says virtually nothing in explanation of the doctrine of inspiration."

Having rejected the Theses of Agreement's use of 2 Timothy 3:16 Dr Hebart imagines that he can now say of 2 Peter 1:20f that it is the one relevant passage. But although the Theses of Agreement repeatedly use 2 Peter 1:20f to establish the Scriptures own teaching about its origins Dr Hebart rejects the Theses use of this passage also since it occurs in Second Peter which is an anti-legomena, and one of the last books to be recognised as canonical Scripture. With this procedure of eliminating passages Dr Hebart feels justified in saying that "Scripture itself says almost nothing about its nature and origin." But we feel quite sure that then he is not justified in saying that the position he presents is the position of the Theses of Agreement.

Dr Hebart quite confidently asserts that undoubtedly Luther says virtually nothing in explanation of the doctrine of inspiration because the "one relevant passage, 2 Peter 1:20f" is found on the very periphery and edge of the canon. This assumption is quite unjustified particularly since Dr Hebart himself has to admit that "Luther himself never queried the formal matter of inspiration nor the traditional concept of inerrancy." (c.f. I p.6.par.2)

Dr Hebart is inconsistent not merely with Luther's position but even with his own position since, although he here lightly dismisses 2 Peter 1:21 as being on the edge of the canon and hence of not much authority, yet he states quite dogmatically on the same page in par.3 (one inch from the bottom) that we must unambiguously insist that 2 Peter is part of the Holy Spirit's book, the Bible. Once you have stated that so dogmatically you cannot dismiss the binding authority of the passage in question. It is a Lutheran principle that one Word of Holy Scripture is sufficient to give us direction. God should not have to speak a dozen times before we take notice.

13. *Christ and the Apostles Mistakenly Agree with Jewish Doctrine of Inspiration* Lecture I, page 2-3, paragraph 2

One of the most pathetic series of statements in Dr Hebart's lectures begins at the bottom of page 2, degenerates on page 3 and ends in disaster in Lecture III, page 7. We quote:

- a. "In this understanding Christ and the apostles are in agreement with the Jewish rabbis and theologians of their day." (I. p.2,par.7.)

- b. “ ... the early Christians simply adopted the Jewish doctrine of inspiration because they found it adequate for their own attitude to the Old Testament in regard to the origin of the written word.” (I. p.3,par.2.)
- c. “But surely this tacit adoption of a piece of Jewish and rabbinic theology raises a real problem.” (I. p.3,par.2.)

(then immediately an obviously false problem is put into the picture by suggesting a “radical discontinuity” that is a “critical rejection” of the “literalist legalism of the Pharisees” as if this implied some sort of criticism of the Old Testament itself.)

- d. “We have noted in a previous lecture that at the back of all this is an unbiblical Jewish, medieval, concept of inspiration ...” (III. p.7,par.2.)

How tragic that Dr Hebart implies here that “Christ and the apostles are in agreement with” “an unbiblical, Jewish ...” etc “concept of inspiration”.

Here again Dr Hebart’s theology brings him into opposition with the officially adopted doctrinal statements of our church namely the 1972 statement GENESIS 1-3: A DOCTRINAL STATEMENT where our church specifically rejects as false all such assumptions of “higher criticism which regard ... the apostles” and even our blessed Lord’s own understanding and interpretation ... as defective and questionable and as subject to progressive correction by subsequent biblical scholarship.’

“Such assumptions as these constitute an attack not only on the apostolicity of the church (Ephesians 2:20), but on the very Lordship of Christ. For this reason we reject them unconditionally.” (c.f. Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia B2 bottom of page.)

14. “No One Can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ Except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3 Lecture I, page 3, paragraph 2

This passage now becomes the seat of doctrine for Dr Hebart’s views on the origin of Scripture. That which says: “Jesus is Lord” is Spirit-given or inspired. This, however, proves too much for it puts our preaching and teaching on a level with the Holy Scriptures themselves. The Theses of Agreement do not use this passage when speaking of inspiration of the Scriptures. That Dr Hebart resorts to the use of 1 Corinthians 12:3 while dismissing the use of the passages which the Theses use to teach divine inspiration shows up his fundamental disagreement with the Theses of Agreement in the Doctrine of Scripture.

15. *Scripture is God’s Word Because it Conveys Christ* Lecture I, page 3, paragraph 2

Much confusion is evident in the two statements just above the middle of page three containing the word “because!”:

- a. “If the written word of the Old Testament and New Testament is Word of God, then it is BECAUSE Christ is the thrust and centre ...” (our emphasis)
- b. “... we regard them as the Holy Spirit’s writings ... BECAUSE in them we discover that message which only the Holy Spirit can give.” (our emphasis)

Here two entirely different meanings of the word “because” are confused. One meaning of “because” gives the reason why something is actually the case. The other gives the reason why we know that something is the case. It may be said that we can *recognise* the divinity of Holy Scriptures from the content of their message. But clearly that is not what *makes* them divine. What makes anything the Word of God is very simply the fact that God says it, even though it be by the mouth of Balaam’s ass.

If Holy Scripture is the Word of God because it conveys the Gospel, then pray tell us why the Gospel is the Word of God? What makes it so, if not the fact that God Himself speaks it?

Again, if it is the Christ *content* that makes Scripture the Word of God then, surely Scripture is the Word of God in quite the same sense as our preaching and teaching the Gospel. In the Preface to the Formula of Concord OF THE SUMMARY, CONTENT, RULE AND STANDARD (Triglotta p.777) we see an absolute insistence upon the proper distinction between the Scriptures as the only rule and standard and all other writings ancient and modern which are to be accepted only as witnesses but are not equal to Scripture as norm, rule and standard. This is, of course also the position of the Theses of Agreement.

Any theological argumentation through which it is shown that Scripture is the Word of God is absolutely inadequate unless it explains how Holy Scripture is the Word of God in a sense that is quite different from the preaching and teaching of God's servants today. Inspiration as the God-breathed words of Scripture does explain this vital difference. The Christ content of the message does not explain this difference.

Certainly Luther stresses the Christocentricity of the Bible's content and message. So do we all. But significantly enough nowhere does Dr Hebart quote Luther's words to prove his contention that Luther held that the Bible is the Holy Spirit's book for the reason that the Christ content of Scripture makes it the Word of God.

Dr Hebart's theory that the Content of the message is what makes Scripture God's Word is without Scriptural foundation and without support in the Lutheran Confessions or in our Church's Theses of Agreement. It is both false and dangerous because at the very least it blurs, if not denies, the vital distinction between the Word of God and all other writings. And yet this confused and confusing theory is absolutely fundamental to Dr Hebart's whole theology of the Word as developed in these lectures. Without this false foundation the whole structure collapses.

16. *Problems Created by [Dr] Hebart's Theory that the Christ Content Establishes Scripture as Canonical Word of God* Lecture I, page 3, paragraph 3

Dr Hebart says: "But if we say with Luther that for us the Bible is the Holy Spirit's book because its content and thrust is Christ, then we are faced with the question whether such time-bound passages as the codes just mentioned preach Christ and hence are canonical. These sections of the canon are clearly problematic for us ..." "Are they therefore, to say it again, uncanonical, not Word of God, if we are to take the thrust towards Christ as our criterion."

Dr Hebart's problem stems from the fact that [this is] a priori assumption that Christ content establishes Word of God logically drives him to the conclusion that there is in reality non-canonical material within the canon of God's Word. At this point he rejects the necessary consequences of his major premise and asserts boldly that we must quite unambiguously accept the passages and the books in question as canonical Word of God even though no thrust towards Christ may appear to be present in them. The argument collapses at the turn of page 3 to page 4 and the desired conclusion is reached nevertheless by a blind leap of faith on the top of page 4 followed by an almost unbelievable justification of the conclusion which resorts, ironically, to inspiration as establishing the Word of God. Dr Hebart says: "... therefore the *total* canon is the Holy Spirit's book, that is, given by him through inspired human writers." So, in spite of earlier rejections of this position and in spite of later substitution with the theory "Christ-content makes Word of God", ultimately, when the chips are down, nothing else but God speaking His Word through inspiration can make written words the Word of God after all.

17. *A Dogmatic Canonisation of the Antilegomena* Lecture I, page 3, paragraph 3

It is surprising to see Dr Hebart going beyond Luther in dogmatically asserting that the books of the Antilegomena – Jude and Second Peter, etc – quite unambiguously belong to the Holy Spirit's book. The Lutheran church has not dogmatised to solve the historical question of the homologoumena and the antilegomena, as did the reformed. This remains a historical question.

Dr Hebart's dogmatism here is responsible for his confusion later and his failure to see that the way in which Luther regarded James and some other books of the antilegomena was *not* the way he regarded Holy Scripture as the Holy Spirit's book. It is a radical misrepresentation of Luther to suggest that he regarded Scripture in the way in which he regarded the Book of James. This Dr Hebart does not seem to understand.

18. *Bible Written by Sinners, Fallible and Imperfect Authors* Lecture I, page 4, paragraph 3

We agree that the human writers of Scripture were sinners, fallible and imperfect men. St Peter had to be corrected by St Paul in his behaviour at Antioch. And yet we are not aware of any instances in the Scriptures where, when it is speaking of these men as writers of Sacred Scripture, they are spoken of disparagingly or their sinfulness and fallibility is emphasised. On the contrary they are referred to in this connection rather as “*Holy men of God*”.

But the important question is not what sort of men they were on their holidays – since God used even Balaam to utter an inspired prophecy, and also Caiaphas – but the important question is did their sins and their fallibility come through in their writing the God-breathed words of Holy Scripture.

While the Theses of Agreement mention the fact that God for His purposes “sanctified ... sinful men and put His Word into their heart and mouth” (c.f. Theses VIII.9) yet they nowhere emphasise the fallibility of the writers in connection with their writing of the Word of God.

19. *Karl Barth Responsible for the Demise of Liberalism* Lecture I, page 4, paragraph 4

Conservatives in the Lutheran Church would regard this as a very poor joke. The fact is that terms like “*Liberalism*” and “*fundamentalism*” are terms which in their usage today have both a narrow, restricted meaning as well as a wider connotation.

If it satisfies Dr Hebart that liberalism in some very narrow sense of the word is dead he is welcome to that satisfaction. But let him not imagine that liberalism in the wider and more universally accepted sense of “*opposition to conservatism*” or the tendency among theologians to undermine Scriptural authority and hence to allow wide latitude of religious beliefs is a thing of the past. Liberalism in this widely accepted sense is very much a thing of the present. It is in this latter sense that the word liberalism has been applied by conservatives also to the kind of theology that is coming through in these lectures under discussion.

The same is true of the term “*Fundamentalism*” which is used by liberals to rubbish the position even of conservative Lutherans. Strictly speaking there can be no such thing as a Lutheran Fundamentalist, because Lutheranism out-fundamentalises the fundamentalists. Fundamentalists drew the line at the so-called fundamental doctrines of Scripture which dare not be sacrificed. Lutheranism draws the line at *all* doctrines of Scripture. But it is true that the term “*fundamentalist*” has a wider connotation today and may denote an outlook towards Scripture that is defined according to the taste of the user but which usually places heavy emphasis upon the authority of Scripture.

Name-calling and branding with “*dirty words*” and the use of slogans and tired clichés is a very shallow and unworthy form of discussion more closely related to quarrelling than to argument, to the application of heat rather than light. Without exposing himself to the risk and hard work of careful definition the name-caller can muster the full emotional impact with a few loaded terms. It has the same chances of being useful in an argument as major surgery without diagnosis.

We are all guilty of this evil and should discipline ourselves to avoid it.

The Theses of Agreement, unlike Dr Hebart however, do not take the view that liberalism has suffered a “*demise*”. On the contrary Theses VIII,10 speaks of “*modern religious liberalism*” and its attempts “*to make man the judge of the Word of God*”, as an ongoing thing today which we must reject.

20. *Divine and Human Scripture – Analogy of Christology* Lecture I, page 4, paragraph 4f

We agree with the statement: “*So the Bible is in all its words and parts human and divine*”. We agree too that there is an analogy between Christ as the Word of God and Scripture as the Word of God. c.f. Theses VIII, 9.

But we are disappointed that Dr Hebart does not spell out specifically what he has in mind when he charges that people emphasise the divine side at the expense of the human side of scripture. He labels this as the horrible Monophysite heresy and Docetism.

We are not aware of anyone who denies the human side of the Holy Scripture, minimises it, or fails to emphasise it excepting for one thing and that is the occurrence of errors and contradictions in the Scripture as if that were necessarily implied by the fallibility of the imperfect authors. It appears to us, however, that that is unfortunately what Dr Hebart has in mind. The implication of his words is that the *human side* of Scripture must imply also human fallibility and human errancy which is responsible for genuine (not merely seeming) errors, contradictions and discrepancies. This is evident from the many scathing remarks against the “perfect book”, his declaration that there are “*irreconcilable differences*” (c.f.l.p.6,par4), and finally on page 6 where he objects to the efforts of *harmonisation* of differences in accounts which “had to be undertaken *for the sake of inerrancy* ... and so the human side was *wiped out*”. (my emphasis) So Dr Hebart is talking about errors. When harmonisation, by removing what appears to be errors, or rather more precisely, when harmonisation makes *unnecessary the human judgment that a passage of Scripture is in error* in the sense that it conflicts with the facts, then Dr Hebart asserts that *human side* is “*wiped out*”.

We find this to be in direct conflict with the church’s declared doctrinal position in the 1972 Statement of THE THESES OF AGREEMENT AND INERRANCY. There in paragraph 1 and 2 we are told that the word “inerrancy” in the Theses of Agreement is used “in the normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction, ‘factual’ as well as ‘theological’ ...

“This understanding of inerrancy implies that, although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures, it is not really so.”

Far from the Theses of Agreement giving the impression, as Dr Hebart does, that when the necessity of the human judgment of error is eliminated by harmonisation, then the human side of Scripture has been wiped out, they assert rather that then the human *judgment*: “there is no error” agrees with the facts: “it is not really so”.

Of course such “harmonisation” of passages in seeming contradiction does not prove inerrancy. Our belief in inerrancy is a matter of faith resting upon the *teaching* of Scripture not upon our analysis and harmonisation. In the same way we do not prove the doctrine of the real presence by analysing the wafer in a test for human body content but simply as a matter of faith believe what Christ teaches.

While harmonisation of seemingly contradictory passages is not rejected in the Theses, as if it wipes out the human side of Scripture, it is stated to be unnecessary because our faith in the inerrancy of God’s Word does not depend upon it.

“How in such cases it is possible that differing accounts of the same event or the same saying are the true and inerrant report of one and the same fact cannot and need not always be shown by rational harmonisation. We much believe it ...” (Theses VIII,10. Line 21ff.)

It is precisely in the assumption that error is implied in the “human side” of Scripture that Dr Hebart’s analogy to Christology condemns his own point of view. All notions of fallibility in Christ in the state of humiliation, all notions of errancy, sin and untruthfulness in our Lord’s human nature are Nestorian and rejected by the Lutheran Confessions. (c.f. Formula of Concord Solid Declaration par.75 against the Arian Agnoetae)

The analogy of Biblical Christology supports those who insist upon the inerrancy of Holy Scripture in the full and proper sense of the word: “factual as well as theological”. While Christ was thoroughly human, yet he was without sin. Sin is a corruption of the human nature and does not belong to the essence of the human nature itself. “Christ was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15.

21. *The HOW of Inspiration* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 1

Dr Hebart says: “What happens when the Holy Spirit speaks God’s Word in and under human words? Our fathers attempted to penetrate the ‘how’ of the event although the New Testament itself is silent here. They spoke of the *impulsus ad scribendum* (the impulse to write), the *suggestio rerum* and the *suggestio verborum* (the suggestion of ideas and of words). This is not at all helpful, particularly as it takes us into the realm of psychology ...”

While we will never fully understand the 'how' of inspiration since it is God's miracle, yet we can indeed know very simply *HOW*, or in what sense, or by what means, the word of men in the Scriptures is the Word of God. The Scriptures are not silent on this matter but they clearly teach that the words, or writing (graphe) of Scripture are "God-breathed" words. That is *how* they come to be the Word of God.

Dr Hebart is wrong when he says that it is not at all helpful to say that the sacred writers were given the impulse to write. Scripture teaches that itself in 2 Peter 1:21. "Holy men of God spake *as they were moved* by the Holy Ghost." That is the impulse to write. How can we say that that is not helpful when God's word says that all Scripture is helpful or profitable for doctrine ... etc. Certainly not everything, but definitely something, of HOW God's word comes to be in human words [WORDS MISSING FROM BOTTOM OF PHOTO]

22. *Many are Disturbed by Human Features* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 2

When speaking of the obvious humanity of Scripture Dr Hebart says: "At this point many experience obvious discomfort. They are disturbed by human features which can hardly be argued away and with the best of intentions they set about to obliterate what they see as blemishes, so that the Holy Spirit's book may be truly that Holy Spirit's book, worthy of a *theologia gloriacae*."

At the oral presentation of this paper at Coolum Dr Hebart made it clear that what he was referring to here by this reference to people obliterating what they see as "blemishes" was "attempts at harmonisation" (I noted that in my copy at the time).

The attempts at harmonisation or "arguing away" what appears to be blemishes, because passages seemingly do not fit together, or to be in contradiction of each other comes in again here for Dr Hebart's severe stricture: "worthy of a theology of glory", because it would "wipe out" the human side of Scripture. I am not aware of any "obvious discomfort" at the humanity of Scripture other than when it is suggested that the humanity of Scripture implies that Scripture contains errors and contradictions and "irreconcilable differences" which "cannot be argued away", in other words REAL, and not merely SEEMING, discrepancies. If Dr Hebart is referring to "obvious discomfort" at this, then one is forced to conclude that he is happier to have persons left with the impression that there are real contradictions and errors in the Scriptures rather than to be shown that "this is not really so" (c.f. 1972 Statement quoted under point 20). This attitude conflicts with the Theses of Agreement.

23. *The A Priori Concept of a Perfect Inerrant Scripture – Super-book* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 3

Dr Hebart suggests that behind the desire to have an inerrant Scripture is the a priori concept of the perfect, inerrant super-book. This concept he holds is "a priori" that means that it is a theory devised and assumed before coming to the Scripture. He calls it a "theological theory which is set up as a pre-supposition. This model then becomes an overriding principle to which the book must conform."

Dr Hebart is quite gifted in caricature and this is one of his better examples. There is an element of truth in this caricature, of course, but it grotesquely distorts the truth.

It is true that conservative theologians operate with a belief that the Scriptures are infallible and without error or contradiction as is clearly taught in our Theses of Agreement and our Church's adopted Statements. This means that when we come across what seems to be an error in the Scriptures, or a couple of passages that do not seem to fit together, then we know "a priori", before any harmonisation is undertaken, that "IT IS NOT REALLY SO" (1972 Statement). But that this is an "a priori" belief, a theological theory or "model" in the sense that it is assumed BEFORE one approaches the Scriptures is quite *false*. Dr Hebart knows that this not true. The belief in the inerrancy of Scripture – that it is "not really so" that there are errors 'factual' or 'theological' – is emphatically an article of faith as the Theses say (VIII,10. line 8) based upon the Scriptures own teaching about themselves: Again the Theses declare: "We ... accept the Scriptures ... as the only source and ultimate judge ... of all doctrine ... also in the doctrines of Holy Scriptures and on inspiration." That the Scriptures themselves teach their own inerrancy is declared in the Theses of Agreement on the basis of such passages as John 17:17, John 10:35, etc c.f. Theses VIII,10.

When Lutheran theologians would interpret the Holy Scriptures they reject from the outset, 'a priori', any interpretation which would be contrary to the analogy of faith or contrary to the gospel of justification by grace through faith. We dare not criticise this because that is the central and clear teaching of Scripture – the Material Principle. Similarly when interpreting passages that SEEM to be in conflict we must interpret them in such a way as not to bring them into conflict because we know that Scripture teaches its own inerrancy and authority – the Formal Principle.

It does seem to me that when Dr Hebart uses the term the "perfect, inerrant super-book" he is saying this with criticism. Certainly the term "perfect" is used in the Theses of Agreement of Scripture. "Because Holy Scripture is the Word of God it is perfect ..." (Theses VIII,10. line 1). The term "inerrant" is also used repeatedly. The term "super-book", however, is not, to my knowledge, supported by the Theses, and Dr Hebart's use of this term is the first time I have heard it.

24. *Since Scripture is a Human Book What Must Inerrancy Mean?* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 3

What are we to make of Dr Hebart's statement that we should indeed associate such attributes as "perfection, holiness, infallibility and truthfulness" with the Bible "because it is a divine book". But "since it is also a human book" with "obvious human features" we should ask ourselves what "perfection and truth and inerrancy must mean." This is either confusing nonsense or it suggests that somehow the attributes of perfection, truth and inerrancy may mean something else than what these terms express when they are linked with the human side of Holy Scripture.

But we must reject this as being contrary to the Scriptures as shown in the Theses of Agreement. There it is stated quite specifically: "None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind even when under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can impair the authority of the Bible or the inerrancy of the Word of God ..." (Theses VIII,10). The same paragraph of the Theses shows first that "the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant" and then it shows that the *inerrancy is not impaired* by the limitations of the human mind. This clearly means that the word "inerrancy" is being used in the same sense when applied to the human side of scripture as when applied to the divine side. Dr Hebart's suggestion, therefore, that there may be a difference in the meaning of such terms as "inerrancy" when they are applied to the Human side of Scripture is in direct contradiction to the Theses of Agreement and has no place in our church.

25. *The Problem of Authority* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 4

The Second aspect of the concern shown by those people who want to have a perfect book worthy of a theology of glory is that they derive the authority of Scripture from its truthfulness. This is regarded as illegitimate. Dr Hebart says critically: "God is the author, God does not lie, therefore in every detail every statement of the Bible is true. Therein lies its authority".

This argument he criticises as being "a development from the a priori model of the perfect book."

While [Dr] Hebart does not at this place spell out his beliefs on the source of Scriptural authority he does so in the third lecture where he says specifically on page 6, para 8: "Authority, we said, is not based on the belief in the Book, but rather in its content, which is Christ."

But Dr Hebart is here again in conflict with the Theses of Agreement because they expressly teach what Dr Hebart rejects: "*Because Holy Scripture is the Word of God* it is the perfect (Psalm 19:7) authoritative (John 10:35) ... revelation of divine truth". "... We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant." (Theses VIII,10.)

26. *"So We Have Certainty and Security"* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 4

Following on from the last statement in which the view is criticised that the authority of Scripture lies in the fact that every statement of Scripture is true since it is God's Word, since God is the author, Dr Hebart says: "So we have certainty and security". This statement on its own would be fine. But I believe that Dr Hebart's statement is meant as a criticism suggesting that we really have no right to certainty and security on the basis of truthfulness

of God's Word in every detail. But Jesus Himself teaches the validity of finding certainty and security in His Word when He says: "If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32.

Dr Hebart did not indicate clearly whether his criticism is against the enjoyment of "certainty and security" on the basis of the inerrancy and detailed truthfulness of the Bible, or whether, together with many modern theologians, he sees "certainty and security" as an arrogant presumption. Luther says:

Christians love firm positive assertions: "Not to delight in assertions is not becoming to a Christian heart. Nay, a man must delight in assertions or he is no Christian ... I am speaking about the asserting of those things which have been divinely delivered to us in Holy Writ ... Far removed be skeptics and academics from us Christians ... " (What Luther Says, 4484) "The Holy Spirit is not a skeptic, nor has He written doubts and mere opinions into our hearts. He has written assertions more certain and firmer than life itself and all human experience." (What Luther Says, 4486)

27. *The Decisive Role of Inspiration* Lecture I, page 5, paragraph 6

Dr Hebart says: "... inspiration plays a decisive role in the thinking of those who find the humanity of Scripture a problem."

We certainly regard divine inspiration as playing a decisive role in our thinking of Holy Scripture, but we resent the implication that we find the humanity of Scripture a problem. This is not true. The humanity of Scripture, as I have shown, does not imply fallibility or errancy in the Scriptures. If it did it would be a problem. It would conflict with what the Scriptures teach about themselves.

There can be no question that in our Theses of Agreement divine inspiration is presented as playing a decisive role in making Holy Scripture the Word of God. See Theses VIII, 6.

"We teach with the Nicene Creed and with the whole true Christian Church that 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, whom He chose for oral proclamation or for written recording, 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."

If Dr Hebart does not regard the fact of divine inspiration as playing a decisive role in answering the question "why is Scripture the Word of God?" then he cannot truthfully say that his position is that of the Theses of Agreement.

28. *Mechanical Dictation Theories of Inspiration* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 1

We do not accept Dr Hebart's assertions that the Lutheran Orthodox theologians in the 17th century held to the crude mechanical caricatures of inspiration which Dr Hebart attributes to them. Dr Preuss in his book "The Inspiration of Scripture" has long ago demonstrated the unfairness of such assertions.

29. *Inerrancy Tied Up with Mechanical Dictation* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 1

After presenting a crude theory of mechanical dictation of Scripture in which the holy writers are nothing but "hands" and "pens" of the dictating Holy Spirit Dr Hebart asserts: "The idea of the perfect book and the related idea of inerrancy are tied up with this background." We reject this statement as blatantly unfair.

What exactly Dr Hebart means by his term "the perfect book" I do not know. I do not imagine that the term "book" in his phrase is intended to refer to the binding and paper of the sacred writings. But if it refers rather to the contents as synonymous with "the written word of God" then we would have to remind Dr Hebart not to speak disparagingly of Scripture in this way for the Theses of Agreement refer to the Scriptures as "the perfect ... revelation of divine truth". (VIII,10.) The Theses also insist upon the inerrancy of Scripture but they do not tie this up with a background of crude mechanical ideas of inspiration.

30. *Luther Accepted Inspiration and the Traditional Concept of Inerrancy* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 2

Dr Hebart correctly says: "Luther himself never queried the formal matter of inspiration, nor the traditional concept of inerrancy. For him, as for all his contemporaries, this was self understood."

But by the time Dr Hebart gets to Lecture III he has forgotten the asserted position of Luther on inerrancy for there he blames Lutheran Orthodoxy for not "remaining with Luther" but postulating instead "the supernatural book of doctrine which is the inerrant Word of God ..." (c.f. Lect III,p.7,para.1.)

Dr Hebart makes a valiant effort in the same paragraph to interpret Luther's position as moving towards a radical new approach and even towards literary criticism. With this wishful thinking he would like to have Luther on his side. But the clear and emphatic statements that Luther made on the matter forces the conclusion that "Luther never queried the formal matter of inspiration nor the traditional concept of inerrancy."

31. *Irreconcilable Differences in the Old Testament and Acts* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 3

Now Dr Hebart speaks of "*irreconcilable differences*" in the accounts of the Old Testament and statements made by Stephen in Acts 7. The word "*irreconcilable*" means that they *cannot* be reconciled or brought into harmony. They are implacably hostile or mutually exclusive to each other. This means that at least one of these accounts in the Scripture must be in error in the sense of the Theses that its statements do not confirm to the facts.

The Church's adopted Statement on the Theses of Agreement and Inerrancy declare:

"This understanding of inerrancy implies that, although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures, it is not really so." And again:

The term inerrancy is used "in the normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction, 'factual' as well as 'theological' (c.f. paras. 1 & 2.)

32. *Lutheran Orthodoxy Maligned* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 4

The poor old Lutheran Orthodox theologians after Luther come in for another attack in this paragraph. But see point 28 above.

33. "*Propositional Truth*" and "*cold facts*" Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 4

Emotive language doesn't help the argument. Why must facts be cold? They might just as well be "hot". It is sad to see the tired old clichés about "personal" versus "propositional truth" being trotted out again even though they have been refuted many times. "They are the boring and worthless leftovers from the mostly evaporated neo-orthodoxy of Barth" (Kurt Marquart).

34. *Scripture Statements True No Matter What They Deal With* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 4

[Dr] Hebart's criticism here seems to suggest that the Scriptures are true and inerrant, perhaps, when dealing with theology or salvation history, but not when dealing with chronology or genealogy etc. Jesus said: "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" John 3:12. The Theses of Agreement define the inerrancy of Holy Scripture as "freedom from all error and contradiction, 'factual' as well as 'theological'.

It is a dangerous anti-Scriptural heresy for anyone to teach that the inerrancy of Scripture is limited to the theological content. Then ultimately man becomes the arbiter over the Scripture and the whole Scripture principle is lost. c.f. Theses: I,4,b. We believe that all doctrines of Holy Writ are equally binding; nevertheless not all things in Scripture are of the same importance when viewed from the centre and core of the Scriptures."

35. *Harmonisation of Differences Had to be Undertaken* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 5

Dr Hebart states: "As a result harmonisation of differences in accounts of one and the same event had to be undertaken for the sake of inerrancy."

He is wrong here. Harmonisation, as interesting and as useful as it might be, did not have to be undertaken for the sake of inerrancy. Our Church's statement on Inerrancy declares:

It is "contrary to the sound doctrine of the Scriptures ... 5. to make faith in the inerrancy of Scripture in any way depend upon the human certainty attained by rational argument and demonstration."

Inerrancy is a matter of faith in the Scriptures own teaching about itself, not the result of demonstration. If someone wishes to present a harmonisation of two seemingly contradictory accounts he is at liberty to do so. He may be correct or incorrect in his presentation. But in any case his efforts are unnecessary to prove the inerrancy of Scripture. (Theses VIII,10. since "although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures it is not really so. (1972 Statement para.2.)

We know that some rather ridiculous attempts at harmonisation have been made just as some ridiculous attempts at bringing Scriptures into conflict have been made and many ludicrous and unproven statements have been made to give credence to the so called JEDP source hypothesis.

A Lutheran theologian worthy of the name will have the humility to realise that since we today are removed from the writers of Scripture by an interval of 2000 years and more we cannot be so sure of the circumstances and details of those times as to assert that differing accounts are irreconcilable. We just don't know that much of history but we do know from God's own Word "it is not really so" (1972 Statement para.2.)

36. *"So the Human Side was Wiped Out"* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 5

To Dr Hebart harmonisation of differences wipes out the human side. It shows how fundamental to his concept of the human side of Scripture the need for errors and discrepancies and contradictions is. We cannot escape the impression that this shows a fundamental opposition to the position of the Theses of Agreement which assert:

"None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind even when under inspiration of the Holy Ghost can impair the authority of the Bible or the inerrancy of the Word of God ..." (Theses VIII,10.)

37. *Fundamentalist Literature Influenced Lutheran Dogmatics of Pieper* Lecture I, page 6, paragraph 6

It is a pity that Dr Hebart's lecture had to end with this unproven jibe.

This critique is offered here without any malice against the person of our very loveable Dr Hebart, who, with his mild and gentle nature commands our admiration.

But personalities dare not obscure important theological realities. We have no intention of embarking upon a witch-hunt. But God forbid that we should therefore close our eyes to witchcraft. May God help His Church.

MJ Grieger
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