

II. ALL THESE PROBLEMS RELATE TO OUR ATTITUDE TO SCRIPTURE

While earlier reformers concentrated upon cleaning up the immorality in the church Luther saw very clearly that it was the doctrinal corruption in the church of his day that was the cause of the moral decay. He believed that if that were corrected then the life of the church would improve as well.

It appears to me that the one common denominator that lies beneath all the problems that we have discussed, and many others, is a new attitude towards Holy Scripture. Actually it is not really very new (it has been gaining ground in our church for the last 20 years or so) but its impact is being felt keenly today because it has now well and truly infiltrated the church.

In dealing with so many problems and issues of the kind that we have discussed it became perfectly clear to me – as also other pastors told me personally – that there is no point in further discussion on these matters, we can get nowhere, because the real point of division lies much deeper, namely in the whole attitude towards the Holy Scriptures.

To illustrate this I refer again to the debate on the Women Synodsmen issue at the Gatton Pastor's Conference, QLd.1981. When it had been shown quite clearly that Christ and the apostles would have rejected the idea of women exercising the kind of authority in the church that was being offered in the proposal to enable them to be synodsmen representing congregations and parishes at the district and general synodical levels, then the answer came back in essence: "So What!!! Does that blind us?" The thinking is apparently that we must not become guilty of "absolutizing" the theology of Paul at Corinth for our day. As if we can't apply the theology of those times to our present time. The apostles asked the early Christian church also to abstain from blood. We eat blood today in sausages. We are not bound by their theology. Elsewhere it was subsequently spelled out that there are numerous different theologies in the New Testament, the theology of Matthew is not the same as that of Mark or of Paul or of John etc. If one tries to make the one theology of Paul, for example, fit all ages, he becomes involved in legalism or making the Scriptures into a "book of doctrinal law".

When that point is reached the primary importance of the Scripture issue must be evident to all. Unless there can be greater clarity and agreement on this central issue all other agreements will be impossible or mere illusions.

It appears to me that an important aspect of this common denominator that runs through all the other issues is what has been called "Gospel reductionism". By this it is meant that everything must somehow be connected with Christ or the Gospel if it is to have any value.

Christ is indeed the Centre of Scripture. To set forth the Gospel justification by God's Grace for Christ's sake through faith is indeed the central purpose of Scripture. There can be no debate about that (46). It is correct also that the Gospel is true of itself, apart from, and before, it was written up in the Scriptures. It is correct also that the gospel is judge

(46) Theses of Agreement I,4,b."...all doctrines of Holy Writ are equally binding; nevertheless not all things in Scripture

and norm in the Scriptures in the sense that we are not to interpret passages of Scripture in a way that contradicts the Gospel as set forth in clear Scripture passages. Nothing in the Word of God can contradict its very heart.

The lie of Gospel Reductionism, however, is that the Gospel is so central in Scripture that everything else in Scripture is true because of the Gospel. As if essential truths of the Christian faith and other matters and information in the Scriptures somehow derive their validity or truthfulness from a connection with the Gospel, rather than from the fact that God has spoken these things in His Word. The Gospel is seen to be so central in the Scriptures that it becomes the judge of what is true in Scriptures. This confuses what Scripture says by the authority of God with the main purpose for which these matters are revealed. Much of what God tells us in Holy Scripture is true and authoritative simply because the Scriptures are God's Words given by inspiration (as, for example the dimensions of the ark) and not because it is somehow connected with, or derived from, the Gospel. The Gospel Reductionist position ultimately makes the Gospel not merely the central and most important truth of divine relation but really the only truth of divine revelation. As if God could reveal to us nothing but the Gospel or as if nothing can have any value or worth for us for its own sake but only because it is somehow related to the Gospel.

In practice we see the Gospel Reductionist's position exposing itself in arguments by always asking the question: "Did the Gospel get through?" It is assumed that if the Gospel got through, this then, somehow, justifies all the rest. The end justifies the means because the only valid principle of evaluation is the Gospel.

The nature of recent worship orders and their supporting arguments would indicate that such concepts as "beauty", "art" "refinement", "reverence" etc. indicate to some no value of themselves. They have value only if they become a means for presenting the Gospel. But then, if the opposite qualities such as "ugliness", "coarseness", "cheap junk", "profanity" etc. can also convey the Gospel then they must be just as good or valuable. This follows naturally from the false theory that the Gospel is the only criterion of evaluation.

How pointless, then, to try to discuss whether any specific order of service, for example is appropriate. The only question can be: Does the Gospel come through? That justifies everything.

The same assumptions of Gospel Reductionism offer an easy short-cut approach to counselling. The one and only concern is to have the Gospel come through. Whatever else Scripture says on matters of life and the Law only needlessly complicates the process. If the person is confronted with the Gospel the objective has been gained.

The Point need be laboured no further: OUR ATTITUDE TO THE SCIRPTURES WILL AFFECT EVERYTHING IN OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE.

are of the same importance, when viewed from the centre and core of the Scriptures, Christ and justification by him through faith."

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SCRIPTURE ISSUE

Even though the Theses of Agreement VIII on Scripture and Inspiration was adopted on the 13th Dec. 1951, yet there was considerable divergence from the position of our Theses in the faculties of both churches prior to union in 1966.

It was the Declaration and Plea which really smoked out the foxes. This solemn declaration of conscientious convictions was recommended by the Qld. District Pastor's Conference of the E.L.C.A. to be inserted into the constitutions of the congregations (47) and adopted by the Qld. District Synod May 6-7th 1966. (48) It specifically rejected the positions "that 'inerrancy' as applied to Scripture might mean something other than total absence of any errors or contradictions whatsoever". This was found to be totally unacceptable to the theologians in Adelaide. Coming as it did just before planned union this caused great repercussions amongst the leaders and officials of both Lutheran churches.

Four of us were requested to attend a special meeting at Concordia Seminary, Adelaide, on July 20-21st 1966 at which members of both faculties and a number of officials of the former churches were present. We, Pastors K. Marquart, M. & V. Greiger, and Pres. F.W. Noack, were told quite frankly by various seminary professors from both churches that there were numerous (some said hundreds of) MISTAKES, ERRORS and CONTRADICTIONS in the Scriptures and that the Holy Spirit made use of these human weaknesses and ERRORS in giving us His Word. This was before the disguise "discrepancies", rather than the more honest "errors" and "contradictions", had come into regular use. A few examples of these ERRORS and CONTRADICTIONS were given, namely: the two asses of Matthew 21,1-7 compared with Mark 11,1-7 and Luke 19,29-35; the "obvious exaggeration" of the 600,000 Israelites who came out of Egypt; the alleged 18,000 men working on the temple (but c.f. 1 Kings 5, 13ff); the hearing of the voice on the road to Damascus (c.f. Acts 9,7. With Acts 22,9.) and the alleged pseudonym of 2 Peter.

We expressed shock that the very men at whose feet we had sat and who had taught us a clear confession of the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures were now openly declaring that there were numerous ERRORS and CONTRADICTIONS in the Scriptures.

We were told by a senior seminary lecturer that those who still hold to the 'old view' of Scripture – that the Bible is without ERROR and CONTRADICTION have a very weak faith, because if it could be shown that even one real ERROR existed in the Scriptures they would then distrust the whole of Scripture and their faith would be lost. Those, on the other hand, who accepted the possibility of numerous ERRORS and CONTRADICTIONS in the human side of Scripture would not be at all affected. (49)

(47) See official Minutes of Qld.Dist. Past.Conf. of E.L.C.A. 5th May 1966 Toowoomba.

(48) Synodical Report of Qld.Dist.E.L.C.A. Special Convention Toowoomba May 6th – 7th 1966 pp. 52 & 35ff.

(49) See Rev V.S. Greiger's report in "The Inerrancy of Scripture – The Struggle to Make the Christian Message Meaningful to Modern Man – "Historical Introduction" p.1. Also Official Minutes of the Meeting with Qld.Pastors 20-21/7/66 p.2, and notes taken during the meeting.

As a matter of urgency members of the faculty were asked to attend the next Qld.District Pastor's Conference of the E.L.C.A. to continue the discussion on these matters. Dr H.P. Hamann and Dr. Sasse attended this conference at Toowoomba 15th – 17th Aug. 1966. Although the special Adelaide meeting had requested that Dr. Hamann present an essay on "Interpretation of Scripture" at the Toowoomba conference Dr. Koehne presented its presentation "because he could not attend our conference and had discovered after Dr.Hamann had left for Qld. that the essay was contrary to an agreement which he had researched with Dr. Hamann before he left for Qld. (50). While the expressions about ERRORS and CONTRADICTIONS in Scripture were now much more guarded at this Pastor's Conference many similar thoughts were expressed which gave more of our pastors in Qld. the opportunity to become aware of what was happening in our seminaries. Genesis 1-3 were not regarded as History. That begins only with the call of Abraham, according to Sasse. Can we really believe that the stars and the vast universe were created only after the earth? Dr.Sasse questioned the statement in the Declaration and Plea that there can be no contradictions in Scripture. (51).

Shortly after this, Sund. Sept. 16th 1966 another meeting with Qld. pastors: C. Preiebbenenow, K. Marquart, D. Hoopmann, M. & V. Greiger, and President F.W. Noack, was held at Concordia Seminary Highgate, to discuss further the issues of the inerrancy of Scripture and the Theses of Agreement. At this meeting a statement was adopted: "Since God indeed cannot lie or lead astray, no Christian should say that the Bible endorses errors or mistaken human notions. It is, in fact, God's inerrant and non-deceiving Word..." Pastor K. Marquart said that he would not vote on this because he did not want to pretend that this statement settled anything. He would wait, among other things, for the faculty opinion on the Declaration and Plea. (52)

On the following day 19th Sept. 1966 at a meeting with the Church Council and Qld Pastors it was resolved that "No teaching or theological work shall be regarded as in harmony with the Theses of Agreement if it conflicts with this statement" (v.s. the statement adopted on the previous evening) (53).

Though various assurances were given attempting to calm the troubled waters after these high-level challenges to the real inerrancy of Scripture, yet it was quite clear that there was no true agreement on the question of the inerrancy of Scripture at the time of the union. (54).

(50) See Minutes Qld ELCA Past. Conf. 5-6th Oct. 1966 par.3.

(51) See official minutes of the Qld Past. Conference E.L.C.A. Toowoomba 15-17th Aug 1966 pp.1-2.

(52) See the very interesting detailed account of this meeting in the official minutes by F.J.H. Blaess.

(53) See Minutes of the meeting 19th Sept 1966 at Flinders Street, being a continuation of the meeting at the Seminary on 18th Sept. 1966. Members of the faculties were not present at this meeting, but the statement was subsequently agreed to by the Joint faculties with the understanding that this does not preclude further study of the nature of the Word and the investigation of present day Biblical theories and the presentation of the results of such study to Pastoral Conferences...

(54) See also Confidential Memorandum re: District resolution to seek agreement to tie Concordia Memorial College to Declaration and Plea.

After the Union the question of the inerrancy of Scripture became a matter for the Commission on Theology to grapple with and it was difficult to have further open and frank discussions on this matter because it would upset the much-cherished assumption of “complete doctrinal agreement” at the time of union. In private discussion, however, some pastors still declared quite frankly that the Bible is full of ERRORS and CONTRADICTIONS (55).

In 1968 the Commission on Theology proposed, and the Albury Convention adopted, a testament on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture which should have resolved the issue, for it declared:

1. “In the exercise of their teaching function... pastors of the L.C.A. should not run counter to the letter and the spirit of the Theses of Agreement.
2. The Theses of Agreement use the term ‘inerrancy’ in its normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction, ‘factual’ as well as ‘theological’...” (56)

This can only be seen as the Church’s official declaration that the kind of theology forced to surface by the Declaration and Plea in both faculties prior to the union at the Adelaide meetings was indeed contrary to the Theses of Agreement.

It was to be expected, however, that this statement on the true meaning of the Theses of Agreement would prove uncomfortably narrow and restrictive for those who obviously did not wish to give up the ideas for which they had contended. We were not surprised, therefore, when the Commission on Theology, early in 1969 received a request from several quarters to reconsider the Albury statement on “Inspiration and Inerrancy” (57).

The subsequent report of the Commission revealed the situation that was evident to us in 1966, namely: that there are in the Church two different understandings of the Theses of Agreement VIII,10. in the matter of inerrancy: The one side holds that all biblical statements are authoritative in their intended sense, also those which specifically deal with matters of history, geography or science etc., and that the limitations of the human writers of Scripture did not find expression in any statement of God’s written Word in such a way as to result in error. The other side however holds that the writers of Scripture were actually permitted by the Spirit of God to give expression to their limitations of knowledge in the human side of Scripture in matters of history, geography and science etc. so that such statements of Scripture may not be factual in the light of more certain human knowledge. Nevertheless they hold that this in no way invalidates the truth or inerrancy or authority of God’s written Word. (58). However sincerely it may be meant it appears to me that when it is asserted that Scripture statements may not conform to fact in the light of more certain human knowledge and yet are truthful and inerrant this is simply double-talk, a deceptive use of words that should not be tolerated in theology.

(55) See V.S. Grieger: “Historical Introduction” to The Inerrancy of Scripture – The Struggle...etc. as in Note (49)

(56) Convention Report 1968 Albury N.S.W. p. 260.

(57) Official Report of Third General Convention – Indooroopilly Aug. 1970 p. 244.

(58) Ibid. pp. 224-225.

The Commission on Theology discussed this matter at great length and finally came up with a statement which was presented to and adopted by the Church at the Horsham convention in 1972. In this statement the authority of Scripture is linked with its inerrancy in its very first sentence.

"The Theses of Agreement in applying the term 'inerrancy' to Scripture mean to stress its fully authority..."

The membership of our Church should see very clearly that the present assertions that the authority of Scripture is not affected by errors or "peripheral inexactitudes" are contrary to the Church's declared position.

The Horsham Statement also clearly affirms that the term 'inerrancy' is used in the Theses of Agreement "in the normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction, 'factual' as well as 'theological'", and that "although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures it is not really so." (59).

The Statement specifically rejects as contrary to sound doctrine:

1. To speak of errors in the Holy Scriptures.
2. To hold that what according to clear biblical statements "actually is or actually happened" may be regarded as what actually is not or actually did not happen. (60).

Apart from a few rumblings there was no further open conflict on the Scripture Inspiration and Inerrancy issue in our church between 1972 and 1979. It was then that Dr. H. Hamann, at that time Vice-Principal of Luther Seminary, gave his lectures at Valparaiso University on The Bible Between Fundamentalism and Philosophy. In his first lecture he chastises what he regards as the fundamentalist view that the Scriptures are inerrant because they are God's Word, since God cannot err. (61). But here he either knowingly or unknowingly opposes the Theses of Agreement where our church confesses:

"We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant." (62).

Dr. Hamann there also rejects the idea that errors in the Scriptures on peripheral matters in any way affect the authority of Scripture (63). But that is precisely what our Church asserts in the very first sentence of its Horsham Statement: "The Theses of Agreement in applying the term 'inerrancy' to Scripture mean to stress its full authority." (64).

In the last chapter of his book which grew out of his Valparaiso lectures Dr. Hamann made some more very misleading and offensive statements on Scripture. This called forth the criticism of conservative pastors and finally required a retraction and public apology to the Church for misleading statements which was published in the LUTHERAN. (65). We must respect sincere and frank apologies and retractions for error.

(59) Official Report of Fourth General Synod Horsham 1972 p.360.

(60) Ibid.

(61) See The Cresset Nov. 1979 p.24, 2nd column par. 2.

(62) Theses of Agreement VIII, 10.

(63) See the Cresset Nov. 1979 p.25, first Column, par. 2.

(64) See Horsham General Synod Report Book 1972 p.360 or Doct. Statements of the Church on the Theses and Inerrancy.

(65) See The Lutheran Feb. 23rd 1982 p.27.

During 1981 the conflict in our Church on Scripture broadened to the very much wider issue of the nature of Biblical authority. The issue of inspiration and inerrancy was now only a small part of the total area of conflict. All the while, however, we were never lacking in official assurances that it was all a matter of misunderstanding and various over-emphases but that in reality we are all agreed. President C.I. Koch produced the paper, which later grew into the booklet: INSPIRATION, INERRANCY, and AUTHORITY of SCRIPTURE. This paper faced the many questions which were now in debate and attempted to answer them on the basis of Scripture, the Confessions, and our L.C.A. Statements. This was presented to the General Pastor's Conference in Toowoomba in Sept. 1981.

In order to conclude our survey of the narrower issue of biblical inerrancy, however, we must refer to a series of lectures given to the South Australian pastors of our Church at Tatachilla Youth Camp Nov. 2-4th 1982. By Dr. H. Hamann president of Luther Seminary. While I hesitate to criticise Dr. Hamann in these lectures for he has very clearly and properly made very many important statements in these lectures on many issues concerning the Scriptures and Scriptural authority which are in debate among us at this time, and with which I whole-heartedly agree, yet I have to say quite frankly that I find many statements in his last lecture to be confused, confusing and objectionable. Consider the following:

We can make a legitimate distinction between basic truth and peripheral inexactitudes in historical matters... inspiration and authority may still be legitimately claimed in spite of leves errores (Latin for slight errors, M.G.) for that is how the Bible is. (66)

This drawing of a distinction between the central thing talked about, asserting its basic truth, facticity or what have you, and matters on the periphery where inexactitude or mistakes of various kinds may be found, it seems to me, does not undermine the authority nor the basic reliability of the Scripture... I do say that if there is error on the periphery this is not an attack on the truthfulness of the Scripture, so that we can still speak meaningfully and without prevarication of authority. Inspiration is not, I hold, involved. (67)

I know that the Constitution of the LCA, the Theses of Agreement and the Document of Union all solemnly commit themselves to the inerrancy of Scripture. But the vocable is not the sacrosanct thing... I am concerned about the vocable in VIII, 10. And not about what the vocable is said to mean... (68)

Then follows a statement which, coming from the chief teacher of our Church, the principal of Luther Seminary, would appear to me to be an open proposal for Fabian-type mutiny and treason against the unalterable constitutional position of our Church.

(66) Lecture 5: "The Scriptures and the Theses of Agreement" by Dr. H.P. Hamann. given at Tatachilla S.Aust. in November 1982 p.6.

(67) Ibid. p.7.

(68) Ibid.

...I don't propose excision of the term from the venerable documents but simply neglect of the term in future preaching and teaching in the Church. As a term it is a nuisance and causes endless trouble... (69)

It would appear that the vocable, the term "inerrant" can be a nuisance and an embarrassment only to those who wish to make room for real errors in the Scriptures in peripheral matters or elsewhere. That the Church has rejected even this possibility is precisely the substance confessed in our venerable documents by the use of the term "inerrant".

While thus spelling out his reservations about the term "inerrant" it is difficult to see how anyone can still sincerely confess the very doctrinal basis of our Church where we declare:

"We...accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant Word of God... (my underlining) (70).

The great tragedy of this case is that Dr. H. Hamann comes to his anti-constitutional conclusions by a fundamentally false and dangerous method which, he does not seem to realise, is also specifically rejected by our Theses of Agreement, namely, that he bases his doctrine of Scripture NOT ONLY upon what the Scriptures teach about themselves (the gold), BUT ALSO upon human observation and study (the clay). Dr. Hamann says quite candidly:

We have the Scripture claim to be inspired, and this claim must stand; but we also have the actual state of the Scriptures as we recognise it by study (71), and this must stand also. (72)

To compound a doctrine on the Holy Scriptures in this way mixing the gold of divine revelation about itself with the clay (Dan. 2,33) of human empirical observation and research is expressly rejected in our Theses of Agreement:

We therefore accept the Scriptures, i.e., 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 THE HOLY SCRIPTURES AND ON INSPIRATION. In doing so WE REJECT all attempts which have been made even since the Reformation, or may still be made, to introduce into the Church under whatever name OTHER SOURCES OF DOCTRINE BESIDES HOLY SCRIPTURE. (my emphasis) (73)

In a similar way Zwingli and the Reformed tempered the difficult teaching of the Scripture on the Real Presence with human empirical observation. This must be rejected in our Church.

(69) Ibid.

(70) Constitution of LCA in its unalterable clause II. c.f.1968 Convention Report Albury N.S.W..p.271. Also Document of Union, see Doctrinal Statements LCA p. A27.

(71) Dr.Hamann recognises that there are errors (leves errores) in Scripture for he says: "... in spite of leves errores, for that is how the Bible is." Tatachilla Lecture 5.p.6

(72) Tatachilla Lecture 5 page 7 par 3.

(73) Theses of Agreement VIII, 1. We observe in Scripture problems which may appear to be errors and contradictions. To conclude that they are errors is a human judgement based on human observation, not on Scripture teaching.

Having brought the inerrancy issue up to date, we must return to the wider issues that surfaced in the controversies on Holy Scripture around 1981. Most of these relate in some way to the authority of Scripture. By authority we understand the right and power to say what is binding in all teaching and practice. (74) Some of the questions being debated are: Is the normative authority of Scripture established by God who is its ultimate author, or by its Gospel content, or by the declared teachings of the Church? Is the Christian to accept and believe all that the Scripture teaches as having divine authority, also in those matters which do not appear to relate directly to the Gospel? Is it a form of legalism to insist that the Law remains God's normative Word also for the person who believes in Jesus Christ? Is the formal principle (Scripture alone) given authority by the material principle (Faith Alone, Christ alone)? (75).

President C.I. Koch's paper on Inspiration, Inerrancy and Authority of Scripture received further discussion at the Qld. District Pastor's Conference held at Mooroochydore in April 1982. There it was stated by some pastors that they couldn't see why this whole matter of the Scriptures should be raised again because there is no problem amongst us on this issue. And yet, after the discussion on Pastor Koch's material there was an obvious attempt to have "the other side" presented to the conference when it was resolved that Dr. F. Hebart be asked to present a paper on the Theology of the Word and the Canon of Scripture at our next Conference.

As a result of this resolution we were later alarmed to see that four hours of conference time was now to be devoted to lectures given by Dr. S.P. Hebart on THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD, three lectures of over one hour each, and fifteen minutes for discussion. This obviously disproportionate allotting of time (C.I. Koch's presentation was given only about 20 mins of time plus discussion) generously favouring Dr Hebart's theology of the Word showed an unfairness of opportunity which we, by now, have come to expect.

Dr. Hebart's lectures were presented in June 1982 at Coolum Luther Hights Youth Camp. I believe that these lectures, more than anything else that I have seen, "let the cat out of the bag" and made it clear to us why it had proved so futile to discuss the other theological issues any further. A radically different, and, as far as we are concerned, an entirely unacceptable attitude and approach to the Scriptures was presented in those lectures such as we had not heard in our church before, and which betrayed a kinship with the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth.

In the face of our opposition Dr. Hebart asserted that his position expressed in those lectures was the position of the Theses of Agreement. To me this appeared to be obviously false. Either we had been betrayed and deceived all along by our leaders, or else Dr Hebart was lying by that statement. He had been on the committee that drew up the Theses of Agreement. But never had we been given that kind of an interpretation of the Theses of Agreement before. The whole approach of Dr. Hebart to Scripture was so radically contrary to our theological training that it was immediately apparent that we had now been plunged into a conflict in the Doctrine of the Scriptures that would

(74) c.f. C.I. Koch Inspiration, Inerrancy and Authority of Scripture p.2.

(75) Ibid.pp.2-3.

make all the previous battles on the inerrancy of Scripture pale into insignificance.

Dr Hebart's papers raised dozens of issues that needed to be answered. I moved that similar time be given at our next conference to hear and discuss the other side of these matters. The pastors' conference rejected that motion, some declaring that we have had enough of this and that Dr Hebart's presentation should end the matter. Many did not seem to realise that that vote was a suicidal plunge into irrelevance and extinction as a responsible pastors' conference. The Church Council, however, was asked to set up another forum for discussion on these matters with attendance by pastors optional. The pastors' conference was apparently so happy with Dr. Hebart's papers as to request the Board of Publications to make available in a published form this series of three lectures. (76)

The Qld. District Church Council arranged for a seminar on the Word of God to be held at Toowoomba 26-27th Oct. 1982. Attendance of pastors was optional. Pastor P. Wiebusch was asked to be the chairman. At short notice I was asked to prepare papers for this seminar. I did so presenting a Critique of Dr. Hebart's lectures in 27 pages of which a little over half was read at the seminar, and a paper of Positive and Negative Statements defining the issues raised in Hebart's Theology of the Word. This latter paper was prepared especially because we understood that the objective of the seminar was clearly to define where we agree and where we disagree. Nothing of that nature, however, was even attempted at the seminar though some useful discussions were held.

My Critique showed conclusively, I believe, that Dr. Hebart in many points is in direct conflict with the Theses of Agreement. And yet at the close of the seminar the President, in defending Hebart emphasised the wonderful unity among us. But in a subsequent letter to all the Qld Pastors President Mayer stated that my paper claimed in many instances that Dr Hebart's views either bordered on, or directly constituted heresy. (77). While that was not my choice of words yet the intended substance, I suppose, would be correct. However, in his following Personal letter the President again asserted the unity among us.

We are left in an intolerable situation. After the great theologian and ex-president of Luther Seminary with months of notice had prepared and given in writing the fruits of many years of specialised study and teaching experience, an insignificant bush pastor, in a hastily prepared document presented a case exposing many of the positions taken up to be contrary to the Theses of Agreement and the official position of our church. The president became very vocal in trying to contain Hebart's papers to as small an audience as possible, certainly preventing it from coming into the hands of the laymen. But why should efforts be made to prevent wide distribution of those lectures which "let the cat out of the bag" allegedly because they might be misunderstood? Is the author somehow threatened by a public exposure of the theology which for many years was his position as he taught in the Church's name at Luther Seminary? One suspects red-faced embarrassment if the big strategically advantaged theological "cat" needs to be protected against the tiny vulnerable theological "mouse".

(78) Minutes, Coolum Past. Conf. 21-24th June 1982 p.5.

(77) President's Personal Letter 2/11/82 p.1.

IV. DR HEBART'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD

The three lectures entitled Theology of the Word given by Dr S.P. Hebart to the Pastors' Conference of the Qld. District of the LCA at Coolum on 22nd and 23rd June 1982 will be seen as important documents in the history of the Lutheran Church of Australia because they set forth the theological beliefs of a man who was in a position to influence, perhaps more than any other man, the doctrinal thinking, attitude and position of the pastors trained in the Lutheran Church of Australia.

Dr. Hebart, already prior to Lutheran Union in Australian was for years the Principal of Emmanuel Seminary and also lecturer in Dogmatics. After the union he became the Principal of Luther Seminary, the only seminary of the LCA. He held that position until his retirement a couple of years ago. The majority of ministers in the LCA therefore, would have come under the influence of Dr Hebart and, generally, they still hold him in great respect. Dr. Hebart was also prominent on the Intersynodical Committee which drew up the Theses of Agreement which have become part of the doctrinal basis of the LCA.

The importance of these three written lectures arises not only from the eminence of their author, but also from his firm assertion, in the face of our opposition, that the position he had taken up in these lectures is the position of our Theses of Agreement.

We have in Dr. Hebart's Theology of the Word, therefore, the mature fruit of a mature theologian of our Church whose thinking has had a profound influence upon the ministry of our Lutheran Church of Australia.

We are fully aware that the brevity of this summary presenting the crucial controversial substance of Dr. Hebart's lectures makes it very easy to plead that it is inaccurate. It is certainly not our intention, however, to misrepresent the venerable Doctor in any way but merely to summarise simply, for the laymen of our church, what we believe would be the strange and un-accustomed thrusts of Dr Hebart's lectures. If anyone is able to do this more simply and more faithfully, let him do so.

1. LECTURE I. THEOLOGY OF THE WORD

Dr Hebart shows that the "Word of God" is a wider expression than "Holy Scripture". He maintains that the written word of the Old and the New Testaments "is the authentic record of the various forms of God's self-disclosure in his mighty acts." (78) Already we are uncomfortable with this similarity to the Neo-Orthodox theology of Karl Barth where Scripture is held not to be God's inspired revelation in sentences but rather an authentic record of how God has revealed Himself in His mighty acts.

"It is not easy to say", declares Dr. Hebart, "why this written word is Word of God". (79). We believe, on the contrary, that it is very easy to say why the written word is God's Word, namely because it was given by inspiration of God. God is the author. The two passages, however, which are repeatedly used

(78) Dr. S.P. Hebart, Theology of the Word lecture I p.1 bottom c.f. also Hebart's aversion to Scripture presenting propositional truth (truth in sentences) p.6 par.4.

(79) Ibid. p.2, par.2.

in our Theses of Agreement to prove that God gave His Word by inspiration (2 Tim. 3,16. and 2 Peter 1,19-21) are then set aside as not proving that Scripture is God's inspired Word: Dr. Hebart asserts that 2 Tim. 3,16. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God", says nothing about the nature and origin of Scripture, but simply that God's Spirit (pneuma) is present in the Old Testament. Contrary to the Theses of Agreement Dr Hebart takes the words "given by inspiration" (theopneustos – Greek) to mean rather something like "giving inspiration" or "breathing God". (80) The second passage 2 Pet. 1,19-21 "... holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost", is not regarded by Dr Hebart as proving the inspired origin of Scripture because it occurs in the Book of Second Peter which he says is at the very edge of the canon of Scripture. (81)

Dr. Hebart admits, however, that Christ and the apostles agree with the Jewish rabbis and theologians of their day in understanding inspiration in the sense that God's Holy Spirit spoke through men to us in the Word. (82). But then, strangely, he shows his disapproval of this "Jewish doctrine" of inspiration on the following page (83), and finally in Lecture III he states: "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." (84) We are sorry to see this degenerating set of statements from Dr. Hebart's pen because it appears to us to assume that Christ and the apostles held a defective view of the Scriptures, which, according to the Church's own official Statement (85) is an attack upon the very Lordship of Christ.

To Dr Hebart 1Corinthians 12,3 "...no man can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" teaches divine inspiration. That which says: "Jesus is Lord", is inspired. But that is certainly not inspiration in the sense of the Theses of Agreement where it is defined as "the unique action by which God the Holy Ghost gave His Word of Revelation to men." (86)

This brings us to the central thrust of the whole lecture namely that Scripture is the Word of God because it presents Christ: "If the written word of the Old Testament and the New Testament is Word of God then it is because Christ is the thrust and centre and ultimate concern of God's self-disclosure in the Old and in the New Testament." (87) Here it is apparent that NOT divine inspiration BUT the Christ content of Scripture makes it the Word of God. (88) The Negative side of this: "NOT inspiration" is shown particularly in Dr Hebart's rejection of this aspect of the Orthodox Lutheran teaching.

Dr. Hebart emphasises the fallibility and imperfection of the human authors of Scripture (89). He questions, then, what, in the light of such obvious human features such words as "perfection"

(80) Ibid., compare pars: 6 & 7 of p.2 and Theses of Agreement VIII, 6.

(81) Ibid, p.2-3 par.1.

(82) Ibid. p.2 par. 7.

(83) Ibid. p.3 par.2

(84) Theology of the Word III, The Word and the Church p.7 par.2.

(85) c.f. Genesis 1-3 A Doctrinal Statement, LCA Statements B2.

(86) Theses of Agreement VIII, 6.

(87) Theology of the Word Lect. I. p.3,par.2.

(88) Ibid. c.f. also later paragraphs.

(89) Ibid p.4 par.3

"truth", and "inerrancy" must mean when applied to Scripture (90). He rejects the argument that because God is the author of Scripture, and God does not lie, therefore every detail and every statement in the Bible is true and therefore authoritative (91). Dr Hebart appears to hold in contempt the view that "inerrancy is absolute and truth is propositional (meaning that it can be expressed in verbal statements M.G.) the presentation of cold facts and statements which are without exception literally 'true: no matter what they are concerned whether with salvation or with history or a Weldbild, or a chronology or a genealogy..." (92). Then, he says, "...harmonisation of differences had to be undertaken for the sake of 'inerrancy'... so the work of the Holy Spirit is made presentable to fit in with the requirements of 'inerrancy'. So the human side is wiped out." (93). It is evident from this that to show harmony between seeming contradictions and errors in the Scriptures appears to Dr. Hebart to wipe out the human side of Scripture. Apparently, therefore, real errors and contradictions are, for Dr. Hebart, a necessary aspect of the Human Side of Scripture.

2. LECTURE II. THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

This lecture focused upon the formation of the NT canon, that is, upon the principles which determined which books should be accepted as Scripture. If a book was to be accepted as canonical Scripture then it must show apostolic witness to Jesus. It is sad to see Dr Hebart in his understanding of "apostolicity" concentrate merely upon "historical closeness" to Jesus (94) and omit the all-important apostolic authority given to the apostles by our Lord Himself. (Eph. 2,20. Jhn 14,26. 15,20. 20,21. etc.) Dr Hebart then teaches: "'Apostolic' refers to the content of that witness, that is Jesus Christ."(95). For Hebart the emphasis is always upon the Christ content of Scripture rather than upon any divine authority given by Christ. He says: "The name of the author of a writing in the Church is not decisive; it is the content which determines canonicity." (96)

Dr Hebart applies his "gospel test" to the Anti-legomena, that is to those writings which were not universally accepted as Scripture for a couple of hundred years (Hebrews, 2Peter, James, 2 & 3 John, Jude and Revelation). He says: "The Gospel is not equally original and clear in those writings. We would say the more the aspect of originality is present historically, and the more Christ is proclaimed, the greater is the authority of a writing." (97).

Dr. Hebart holds that some of the Anti-legomena contain teachings that would conflict with the rest of Scripture. He says: "Hebrews denies the possibility of a second repentance; Jude has a different concept of faith; Revelation expects a messianic

(90) Ibid.p.5, par.3.

(91) Ibid.p.5 pars.4,5 and 6.

(92) Ibid.p.6, par.4.

(93) Ibid.p.6, par.5.

(94) The Theology of the Word, Lecture II, p.2.par.1.

(95) Ibid.p.4, par.5.

(96) Ibid p.5, par.1.

(97) Ibid.p.5, par.4.

millennium; 2 Peter has a hellenistic teaching on salvation... However, this does not invalidate their canonical status." (98) Hebart sees even in books whose canonicity was never in question elements that do not present the central message of Christ. (99) Hebart's "Gospel test" for canonicity, therefore, seems to yield the wrong conclusions. It suggests that the Anti-legomena should not have been accepted as canonical Scripture and that some of the unquestioned books too should not have been accepted as Scripture. So, instead of rejecting his "gospel test" as useless he says that it must be used "in a dialectical way" (100). This is just nonsense and double talk and should be called by its proper name.

All this leaves a great deal of uncertainty in our minds which Dr Hebart acknowledges his conclusion that "the border-line of the canon runs right through its very middle." (101) This tragic, twice-repeated statement, if it means anything at all, implies that we have no sure authoritative canon of Scripture at all. But such uncertainty is a real advantage from Dr Hebart's point of view, "because then we are not in danger of thinking that every word of the NT is normative and authoritative simply because it was included by the church in the collection of apostolic writings." (102)

To illustrate the kind of thinking that we have here we refer to Dr Hebart's statement that 2 Peter, Hebrews, James, and Jude were all post apostolic writings (103). 2 Peter, he holds, was written in the second century A.D. long after the apostle Peter was dead. But the author of 2 Peter claims to be Simon Peter the apostle himself (2Pet. 1,1.). He says that this is his second epistle (3,1.), and he claims to have been with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration and to have heard the voice from heaven (2Pet. 1,17-18.) If we deny, with Hebart, that the writer of this letter was Peter the Apostle, then, clearly, we are saying that it is not true what he says here. If we believe that 2 Peter belongs to canonical Scripture, as Hebart does, and yet hold such views about the author and content of this book, then we are in serious trouble, for our Church has specifically stated that it is contrary to the sound doctrine of the Scriptures "to hold that what according to clear Biblical statements 'actually is or actually happened' may be regarded as what actually is not or actually did not happen." (104)

I find it hard to escape the conclusion that the position taken up in these lectures, far from being the position of the Theses of Agreement (as Dr Hebart asserted) is actually in direct conflict with the officially adopted position of our Church.

(98) Ibid.p.8, par.1.

(99) Ibid.p.8. par.1.

(100) Ibid.p.8. par.2.

(101) Ibid.p.8, par.1 and par.5.

(102) Ibid.p.9, par.1.

(103) Ibid.p.5 par.4.

(104) The Theses of Agreement and Inerrancy – Doctrinal Statements of LCA. p.B1.

3. LECTURE III. THE WORD AND THE CHURCH

The central thrust of Dr Hebart's lecture III is that the authority of the New Testament is NOT the authority of a book (Scripture), BUT the authority based upon the Gospel content. (105) He says: "We should likewise refrain from basing the authority of the NT on the fact that the apostles were inspired." (106) Ultimately, Dr Hebart says, it is the "content that was decisive, not necessarily authorship."(107) We see in this whole major thrust of Dr Hebart's lecture (not inspiration but gospel content gives Scripture authority) the seeds of the dangerous error of Gospel-Reductionism, the idea that all theology is judged only by the Gospel so that "considerable freedom should be allowed within the church in matters which are not an explicit part of the Gospel." (108)

We do not find in the Scriptures any gospel as such, asserts Dr. Hebart, but "wherever it is and was proclaimed it is expressed in a theology... The theology of Mark is different from that of Luke from that of John from that of Hebrews..." (109) While the Gospel itself has binding authority upon us we are nevertheless free from the theologies in the NT in which the Gospel is couched. (110). To insist upon the original theology of the NT is to make it into a book of "doctrinal law" (111). It is the on-going task of theologians, then, to contextualise the Gospel (112) that means to shape it to fit our situations today. In this task the theologians will disagree and have indeed often made frightful mistakes. Even in the NT itself, apparently, Dr Hebart finds theological "elements which are not in accord with the gospel, e.g. Paul's negative assessment of marriage in 1 Cor. 7." (113) In this way, it would appear to me, Dr Hebart uses the Gospel against the Scriptures. Because of this uncertainty which he has created Dr Hebart says that we cannot, therefore, simply appeal to the Scriptures saying "it is written". (114)

To assess the authority of the OT Scriptures our Doctor alleges that we have to examine the writings using the Gospel as our criterion (115). He teaches that the OT is caught up in several kinds of bondage: the bondage to nationalistic aspirations, the bondage to empiricism (the expectation that God should give earthly rewards to His people), and the bondage of legalism. OT passages which show such bondage under the light of the Gospel have no authority for us (116). Hence the authority of the OT for us is limited.

Dr. Hebart repeatedly and sarcastically criticises the Lutheran Orthodox theologians who see the Scriptures as a "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" (117).

(105) Theology of the Word Lect. III p.1, pars.3&4 p.6, par.8.

(106) Ibid.p.2, par.2.

(107) Ibid. p.2, par.2.

(108) c.f. "The Gospel and Scripture – The Inter-relationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology - Preface p.4, par.4.

(109) The Theology of the Word Lect 111, pp.2-3.

(110) c.f. Ibid. p.3, par1.

(111) c.f. Ibid. p.3 par.2.

(112) Ibid. c.f. p.2, par.5.

(113) & (114) Ibid. p.3,par.4.

(115) Ibid p.4 par.1

(116) Ibid. p.5 par.2 & p.6,par2 (117) Ibid.p.7, par.1.

But it should be noted that precisely what Dr. Hebart finds so intolerable in the Orthodox Lutheran theologians is the declared position of our church (118).

"We have noted in a previous lecture", he says, "that at the back of all this is an unbiblical, Jewish, medieval concept of inspiration" (119). By this time apparently Dr Hebart has forgotten that earlier he admitted that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and His apostles agreed with the Jews on this matter (120) How embarrassing now to imply that Jesus had an unbiblical concept of inspiration.

"Certainly we must speak of inspiration" he concedes, "But in the sense that through the writers there is witness to Christ." (121). Nowhere do the Theses of Agreement use the term 'inspiration' in Hebart's sense. On the contrary, they define inspiration as: "the unique action by which God.... gave His Word of revelation to men...so that ...it must be said without limitation that it is God's own Word." (122). Dr. Hebart then rejects the claim that "the book has absolute authority in the totality of its statements" (123), saying "in this way the real meaning of the work of the Holy Spirit to create faith in the offer of the Gospel is darkened".

Just as Dr. Hebart supplies a novel definition of inspiration that does not agree with our Theses of Agreement, so also he gives us a new definition of 'inerrancy' that does not fit with our Church's adopted definition. (124). He says,: "it is this oneness of thrust which constitutes what we may call the infallibility, the inerrancy of the NT writings." (125) Is this the clear confession of the inerrancy of Scripture "without reservation" that is required of us in the doctrinal basis of our Church?

Again we find it intolerable that just those who, above all others, have been entrusted to pass on the Church's confessional position are so weak in, if not rebellious against, genuine Biblical inerrancy enshrined in the unalterable clause of our Constitution.

CONCLUSION

We found it very disconcerting that while Dr Hebart frequently asserts that he is following Luther in his ideas, yet nowhere in these lectures does he substantiate his claims with quotations from Luther. Other scholars, however, have stated quite categorically that these claims of Dr. Hebart are simply false, as are also his negative caricatures of the Lutheran Orthodox Theologians.

We must acknowledge, finally, that we found Dr. Hebart's three lectures somewhat confused and inconsistent within themselves, so that it has been very difficult to present this summary. Nevertheless we believe that we have been successful in our effort not to misrepresent our venerable theologian on any issue.

(118) 1972 Statement on Inerrancy par.1 & 2.

(119) Theology of the Word III. P.7 par.2

(120) Ibid.Lecture I, p.2.par 7. (121) Ibid. Lecture III p.7 par 3.

(121) Ibid. Lecture III p.7, par.3.

(122) Theses of Agreement VIII, 6.

(123) Theology of the Word Lecture III p.7, par.5.

(124) 1972 Statement on the Theses and Inerrancy par.1 "freedom from all error and contradiction 'factual' as well as 'theological'".

(125) Theology of the Word Lecture III p.1, par.4.

V. THE END OF THIS ROAD.

Our seminary lecturers taught – and we still believe it – that once we abandon the words of Scripture as being the very Spirit-given words of God Himself, and therefore inerrant, authoritative and normative for His Church for all time in all matters of doctrine faith and life, then we are on the “inclined plane” (as Dr. Hamann Senior used to say) or slippery dip, and there is in principle, nothing in our theology that can keep us from sliding all the way down into the bottomless pit of doubt, uncertainty, confusion and unbelief. Indeed, by the gracious intervention of God, some may not go to the bottom, but others, simply by the gravitational pull of their position, sink very quickly into doubt, confusion and unbelief. If theologians of the church instruct their students with teachings that in principle would lead to doubt and uncertainty, even if they themselves do not succumb to this, they will nevertheless have to accept the blame, before the judge of all the earth, if their students and hearers are more consistent and draw the logical conclusions from their teachings.

We were surprised and alarmed to see that Dr Hebart’s Theology of the Word leads to uncertainty and insecurity not merely inadvertently and unconsciously, but that it does this deliberately and knowingly. Neo-Orthodox theology, to which Dr Hebart’s theology of the Word has many close parallels, rejects in principle all doctrinal certainty. It holds that the Bible was not meant, and therefore should not be taken, as a real God-given revelation of doctrine about God. So that absolute, objective, final truth – as distinguished from human opinions – is therefore not available here on earth. All doctrinal certainty therefore, is illusion and presumption. The real truth continues to hover inaccessibly beyond and behind all verbal formulations for the Christian faith is only a trust IN God and not also a belief ABOUT Him. (126). In his Theology of the Word both in Lecture I and in Lecture III Dr. Hebart shows that he despises the certainty and security that flows from faith in the Scriptures as the authoritative and inerrant Word of God. He criticises those who believe “that the Bible’s authority is...linked with what that book is assumed to be”, (127) and taunts them for having “certainty and security”.

We believe, however, that our Lord has given us the Holy Scriptures as His own Word precisely so that we might have both certainty and security. Jesus said: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, (certainty) and the truth shall make you free (security)”. John 8,31-32.

To preach doubt and uncertainty, therefore, is to reject not only the authority of Scripture but also the authority of Christ Jesus Himself, whose teaching, life, death, and resurrection guarantee the Scripture. Doctrinal uncertainty and confusion are marks, not of humility – as many seem to suppose – but of the unbelief of Pilate (“What is truth?” John 18,38.) and of Satan (“Yea hath God said?” Gen.3,1.). Our Lutheran Confessions

(126) c.f. Declaration and Plea Synodical report of the Qld. District Special Convention Toowoomba May 1966 p.36 error 2.

(127) Theology of the Word Lecture I, p.5 par.4; c.f. also Lecture III p.7, par.1; “a divinely guaranteed sacred codex is necessary. Not simply certainty but security is desired.”

teach that Christians need certainty; "Good consciences cry out for the truth and correct instruction from God's Word, and for them death is not as bitter as is doubt on any point of doctrine." (128).

In charity one naturally hears the adverse complaints of seminary students about their Church's institution with some reservation, but with the kind of theology of doubt and confusion that we ourselves have witnessed emanating from seminary professors one may be excused for according some credit to the report that it was not an uncommon sight at our seminary to see a student sitting on his bed weeping because he was so confused and felt that his lecturers had robbed him of all certainty and assurance. (129).

Do we want certainty? Has our Lord really consigned his church to insecurity? We believe that it will be inevitable that our Church shall flounder in uncertainty and insecurity, in doubt and confusion unless, with the help of God, it drives out the theology of doubt that has already deeply infiltrated its ranks and returns to continue seriously and sincerely in the very inerrant Words of God in Scripture (Jhn. 8,31-32).

Once the theology of doubt has taken over in a Church no one can really know right from wrong and no one can confidently assert with Jesus, the "Biblicist": "It is written!" (130). Everything, then, must be left in the hands of the specialist theologians to decide the course of wisdom in any particular place at any particular time under such and such specific circumstances. Is that indeed what our learned Doctor alludes to when he says: "this drawing of the line is, above all, the task of the theologians"? (131). He then proceeds to tell us how the learned theologians disagree among themselves and make frightful mistakes, but nevertheless that is acknowledged to be the inescapable consequences of that theology.

The Christian faith as I understand it is essentially simple. I treasure precisely that certainty and security which the Lord Jesus promises to those who continue in His Word with child-like humility and acceptance, and I am not terrified when learned Doctors of theology regard such certainty and security as naïve and untutored. I am rather encouraged by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matt. 11,25).

The theology of doubt and uncertainty must logically and inevitably take our Church into the broad ecumenical stream where uncertainty and doubt is the way of life. Once it is assumed that we do not, and perhaps even cannot, know the truth, and once it is held that truth is not propositional, or expressed verbally, but it is rather a person, or personal, (132)

(128) Apology XII 129. quoted also in Declaration and Plea Synodical Report May 1966 Toowoomba
p.36 c.f. also Luther's Bondage of the Will quoted in Crossroads p.15.

(129) Personal files.

(130) Theology of the Word Lecture III p.3, par.4.

(131) Ibid.p.3. par.2.

(132) Ibid Lecture I p.6, par.4. also Lecture III, p.2. par.1.

then there is no longer any reason why we should remain separate from the broad ecumenical stream. If we are all simply still looking for the truth then why not look for it together? Why not join the society of ever churning discussion and dialogue, in which all views are equally tenable as new insights or different aspects of the same “truth”, where the only heresy is to claim to have absolute truth and the unpardonable sin is to enjoy certainty and security. There one man milks the billy goat while the other holds the sieve. Once our church has aligned itself with the broad ecumenical movement as we see it in the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation (most LWF churches are also members of the WCC. They are concentric circles) then we have sold our birthright as a confessional Lutheran church for a miserable mess of pottage, to hobnob with the big brass on the international scene. May-be our much lamented “isolation” will then be a thing of the past, but so will our integrity as a confessional church. And with that will go our God-given mission to the world. To maintain and proclaim a clear and precise message is the reason for our existence as a church, for Jesus did not found some debating society, but He gave His Church the instruction to proclaim, to teach and to baptise (Matt. 28,19).

VI. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It has always been the confident belief and trust of the present writer that the Pastors Conference is the proper place to discuss doctrinal problems in the church openly and frankly, and finally to resolve them by humble obedience to the word of God. It is now our sad experience that this is impossible and that the Qld. District Pastors Conference has tragically eliminated itself as a valid forum of discussion for these doctrinal concerns on the all-important Theology of the Word. The final suicidal thrust came at Coolum when on June 23rd 1982 the Pastors Conference by its vote refused to hear and discuss the other side of the many issues which had been raised in Dr. Hebart's lectures presented to that conference, namely, The Theology of the Word. At the Coolum conference we took the opportunity to discuss issues with Dr. Hebart Himself, between sessions, and we made use of every opportunity to speak in the very limited time allotted for discussion after his presentation. But now that further presentation, discussion and debate has been denied us in the Pastors Conference, as the body constitutionally responsible to advise the church in such matters, where do we go from here?

Clearly it is now time to inform the membership of the Church of what is going on and how we see the present problems and the directions that our church is taking.

Where the membership of the Church shall go from here will depend upon its convictions on the crucial issues before it.

1. If it loves peace more than truth it will be guided by a don't rock-the-boat attitude and will gladly embrace the repeated assurance that all is well. It will acknowledge that there may be a few minor problems – as there always is in a church the size of ours – but these are safely in hand and there is no threat to unity of the church other from the unfounded stirrings of a few 'ultra-conservative radicals'!
2. If the membership of the church goes along with the position that there may be real errors and contradictions in the Scriptures, but that these could in no way affect the authority of the Word of God, or indeed, if it believes that it is not really the words of Scripture itself, but merely the Gospel content of Scripture that is authoritative for the church, then too, it will know that there is nothing further that needs to be done in the present situation, since the mere passing of time itself will ensure the victory for this position when the reproductive departments of the Church are safely in hand. Again the only real threat to the unity of the Church is the few radicals and old fogies who could cause undue excitement and so disrupt the progress before the Church is fully united in the new theology of the Word.
3. If, on the other hand, the membership of the Church sincerely believes, with our fathers, that God's Word firmly upholds the doctrine of real meaningful inerrancy of Holy Scripture in all matters on which it speaks, and that every word of the Holy Scripture, and not merely its Gospel content, is authoritative for us in all matters of doctrine, faith and life, then indeed it will have reason to be gravely concerned in the light of what is happening in our church today. Where, then, shall we go from here? To whom shall we turn? These will be momentous questions that will be in the fervent and earnest prayers of every concerned layman of our Church.

Unfortunately it is the sad, but realistic, conclusion that emerges from our present assessment that we must look largely, (not only, but largely) to the initiative of the laymen of our church to bring it back on the straight and narrow way prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 7,13-14.) and which we had sincerely believed was charted for us in the Theses of Agreement. It would seem that the laymen of the Church have not yet, to any great extent, at least, imbibed the new “theology of doubt”. They may still, therefore, act as an effective force to prevent the complete take-over of our Church by this theology. Indeed it would appear to us that the recent desperate attempts to keep the Theology of Word lecturers by Hebart away from the eyes of laymen of the Church – even when it was claimed that this is the position of the Theses of Agreement – make sense only if it is understood that this theology of the Word will not be generally acceptable to the laymen of the Church and may call forth embarrassing reactions.

It appears to the present writer that in view of the present situation we will have to look to the laymen of our Church to take the initiative, under God, to preserve the true biblical and confessional character of our Church.

It is with this understanding and conviction, shared by other conservative pastors in the Church, that I have finally heeded the repeated requests of many concerned laymen to undertake the burdensome, risky and unpleasant task of putting in writing the information contained in this document. I know that I am hereby opening myself to attack and abuse, and I am fully aware of the smear tactics that have been employed in similar situations elsewhere against those who have revealed the truth even with careful documentation to the best of their ability. Efforts are often made to blacken the name of the author in order to deflect attention away from the issue themselves. But what alternative does one have, other [than] to accept that risk, when one is genuinely convinced that the very Biblical foundation of our church is being undermined.

As an effective counter to the many facts presented in this assessment it will not suffice merely to say that “there is another side” – that “there are many good things being said and written in our church”. This we happily acknowledge. Indeed we rejoice in the many excellent things that have been said and written by the very ones whom we have had to criticise most severely. The only effective counter will be to demonstrate that the doctrinal position of the writer is false. (When it is alleged that the food contains poison it will be irrelevant for the cook in self-defense to point to “the other side”, that it also contains much nourishment).

We have written these unpleasant facts and opinions in an attitude of love towards our opponents and of deep regard for our beloved Church. We are very conscious of our own weaknesses and failings as well as our inadequacy in research and presentation. But because no other more capable men have filled this need we have attempted the task, inviting anyone more skilled to improve upon our work. May the Lord bless this our humble effort so that we may be able to devote ourselves wholly and faithfully to the work of His kingdom so that His Church may be built up in faith and love.

With this prayer we offer the material herein contained to the many men of sound faith and judgement who, with love for their Lord and their Church, shall use it as the Lord leads them.

Pastor M.J. Griege. Wondai, Qld. 1/2/83.