

Reflections on 40 years' engagement with New Testament interpretation, 1967-2007

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The opening of this new academic year at Australian Lutheran College finds the Lutheran Church of Australia in the middle of two 'ruby weddings'. The first wedding—the union of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (UELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA)—took place in 1966 and was commemorated at last year's general synod in Toowoomba, Queensland. The second marriage took place in 1968, when Concordia and Immanuel seminaries became one body as Luther Seminary. In the preceding year, 1967, we saw the construction on this campus of the boarding house Graebner Hall and the Refectory. That year marked the beginning of my theological studies together with eleven others.

So Immanuel and Concordia sang their swan-songs in 1967. For twelve of us first-year students at Immanuel, however, 1967 stands out as our introduction to tertiary studies in theology.

In this inaugural lecture I will show some snapshots of our New Testament studies as we experienced them at Immanuel and Luther from 1967 to 1970. Then I will ask you to follow me as we fly north and see more snapshots of my engagement with the New Testament in Papua New Guinea and further afield. Please don't expect a comprehensive survey of New Testament studies over the last 40 years in the manner of Stephen Neill and Tom Wright.¹ I am not capable of that, nor would it be possible in 45 minutes, particularly given the complex state of New Testament studies internationally. What Meilaender and others have written about the diversity and relativism in the contemporary teaching of ethics applies equally to NT studies:

In the colleges and universities ethics is often taught cafeteria style, with multiple theories and viewpoints, seemingly equal, offered up for the picking. But this apparently neutral approach often coexists with ideologically intolerant teaching. Students are taught that traditional views must give way to the 'enlightened' view that all views—except, of course, the 'enlightened' one—are culture-bound, parochial, and absolutely dependent on your *point-of-viewing*.²

¹ Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.

² Gilbert C Meilaender, editor, *Working: its meaning and its limits*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, vii.

To round out the picture, I must add immediately that the vast cafeteria of modern NT studies does have many delights on offer. Outstanding new commentaries, monographs and articles constantly make their appearance. I need only mention Larry Hurtado's *Lord Jesus Christ: devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity*.³

This morning I hope to give you a window into some issues in NT studies that have had great significance for me these 40 years, but more importantly, I believe, remain significant for all students of the NT. Maintaining a common mind on these matters remains vital for the church.

First, we will peak through the windows of Immanuel Seminary in 1967 and observe Dr Siegfried Hebart's lectures on Mark's Gospel. That will lead us to the topic of the apostolicity of the NT writings. Second, we will take a look inside Luther Seminary in its first year of operation, 1968, when Dr Henry Hamann gave his lectures on NT Introduction. That will trigger a discussion of the relationship between apostolicity and the dating of the NT writings. Our third view takes us north to Nobonob mission station near Madang in Papua New Guinea, where Dr Peter Beyerhaus led a retreat for missionaries in 1971. That retreat will spark some comments on the apostolic gospel and its implications for missions. Our fourth and final view takes us into a bookstore in the Box Hill railway station in Melbourne, where I found the autobiography of the Reverend Tim Costello, chief executive of World Vision Australia. Costello's reflections on his own seminary training will serve as a springboard for speaking of the NT as reliable apostolic *scripture*.

I. The New Testament as apostolic testimony: Immanuel and Luther seminaries, 1967-70

First to Dr Hebart's Mark class at Immanuel in '67. Hebart had chosen two text-books by an English scholar, Vincent Taylor: a commentary entitled *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (1966), and a book entitled *The formation of the Gospel tradition* (1964). Now my colleagues and some of you students may be familiar with the saying, 'Theology is made in Germany and corrected in England'. There is also a longer version that adds 'corrupted in America and lost in Australia'. Typically of Hebart, he wanted his students to be aware of the latest theological developments in Germany, but he also wanted to familiarise us with English responses to any German excesses. The books by Taylor were admirably suited to that purpose. On the one hand, they introduced the English-speaking world to the great German form-critics, Martin Dibelius, Rudolf Bultmann and K L Schmidt. Taylor surveyed their depiction of a dynamic period from 30 to 50AD when the gospel stories circulated orally. He described their classification of these stories according to their form as 'passion-narratives', 'pronouncement stories', 'sayings and parables', 'miracle-stories', 'stories about Jesus', and, yes, 'myths and legends'. On the other hand, Taylor expressed concern about a number of aspects, like the categories 'myths' and 'legends', terms which, 'do not define any particular structural forms' (1964: 32) but express 'a historical judgment, and an unfavourable judgment'. Taylor also cautioned:

On [the] question of eyewitnesses ... Form-Criticism presents a very vulnerable front. If the Form-Critics are right, the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection...By the very nature of his studies the Form-Critic is not predisposed in favour of eyewitnesses. (Gospel tradition: 41)

³ Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003.

Taylor himself could say of Mark:

It does not sound to me like *Gemeindetheologie*, the unconscious secretion of a community of believers. Nothing but a strong element of personal reminiscence could have produced it. And therefore I still hold to the belief that it embodies the private reminiscences of Peter. (Gospel tradition: ix)

Another of our teachers with a strong sense for the theme of apostolicity was Dr Vic Pfitzner, a distinguished scholar whose teaching career on this campus spanned most of the past 40 years. Vic joined the teaching staff of Luther Seminary in 1968 after some years at Concordia. His *Doktor-Vater* at the University of Münster was Karl Rengstorf. Rengstorf (as many of you are aware) authored the article on *apostolos* (among many other articles) in Kittel.⁴ This scholar of the New Testament and Judaica also made an impression on another of our lecturers, Dr David Pahl. Pahl, a fine linguist, translated Rengstorf's *Apostolate and ministry: the New Testament doctrine of the office of the ministry*, published during my student years.⁵ It would be remiss not to mention another of our teachers, Dr Hermann Sasse. We knew Sasse as a dogmatician and church historian, but we should not forget that he gained his Licentiate (doctorate) in NT studies, and contributed the Kittel articles on *aiōn*, *kosmos*, and *katachthōnios* ('aeon', 'world', 'under the earth'). We remember him as a theologian deeply grounded in scripture. Sasse shared his colleagues' keen awareness of the NT as 'apostolic'. He was strongly anti-Bultmann.

II. New Testament interpretation and 'isagogics'

From 'NTX' with Dr Hebart we move on to our second snapshot: Dr Henry Hamann's lectures in New Testament Introduction in 1968. Hamann let us choose among three textbooks, authored respectively by Donald Guthrie, Werner Georg Kümmel and Alfred Wikenhauser.⁶ Since then, of course, many NT introductions have been published, notably those by Raymond Brown and Carson/Moo,⁷ but that lies outside the scope of this paper. Back in the late sixties many of us former Immanuel students—the *alte Immanuele Schule*, as we called ourselves—favoured the German scholars even over the British, not to mention the Americans. So it was natural for me to choose Kümmel's *Introduction to the New Testament*. In many respects Kümmel (more precisely, Feine-Behm-Kuemmell) is thorough scholarship and a good introduction to the subject. Let me give you, though, some samples of his critical attitude to authorship and dating questions, critical, that is, in the sense that he shows a generally sceptical attitude to positions generally accepted in the early church.

First, the gospels. While Kümmel considered it 'thoroughly possible' that John Mark wrote Mark (70), he held it to be 'completely impossible' that the Gospel of Matthew stemmed from an eyewitness, the apostle Matthew, former tax collector of Capernaum (104).

⁴ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, editors, *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 volumes, translated by Geoffrey W Bromiley, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1964.

⁵ Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 1969.

⁶ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament introduction*, 3rd edn, The Tyndale Press, London, 1970; W G Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, translated by A J Mattill Jr, SCM, London, 1966; A Wikenhauser, *New Testament introduction*, translated by Joseph Cunningham, Herder and Herder, New York, 1958.

⁷ Raymond E Brown, *An introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Reference Library, Doubleday, New York, 1997, and D A Carson and D J Moo, *An introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edn, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2005.

Regarding Luke he says 'the tradition of Luke as the author of the third Gospel can only be questioned' (104). He believed (71) Mark was written around 70, while Matthew must be dated 80–100 AD and Luke 70-90 AD (84,106). According to Kümmel, the author of John's Gospel could not possibly have been an eyewitness; 'composition of John by the son of Zebedee [was...] excluded' (174).

Kümmel's approach to the Pauline letters was by no means as radical as F C Baur of Tübingen, who accepted only Romans, I and II Corinthians and Galatians as stemming from the apostle. Kümmel accepts nine of the epistles as authentically Pauline. But this is his judgment on Ephesians: 'In view of [the] linguistic, literary, and theological facts of the case, we cannot seriously doubt that Ephesians does not derive from Paul and is, therefore, a pseudonymous writing' (255). As for the Pastoral epistles, Kümmel claimed 'the language and style of the Pastorals do not allow the possibility that Paul wrote them' (263).

On re-reading Kümmel in preparation for this lecture I found I'd placed an occasional question mark in the margin. But by and large I swallowed his arguments hook, line and sinker. His views must have troubled me to some extent during my student days, because I remember raising the question of Johannine authorship with fellow student John Kleinig. John responded: 'Greg, you cannot simply set aside the testimony of the early church'. This gave me an easier mind with respect to the Johannine writings. But with respect to the other writings I remained captive to Kümmel's scepticism during my early years in Papua New Guinea.

It is often claimed these introductory questions of authorship and dating don't really matter as long as you believe (say) Ephesians and the Pastorals are the Word of God. No doubt this is true up to a point. But I regard this, at best, as a half-truth. It fails to take into account the spiritual effect on a Christian who can no longer regard these writings as apostolic teaching. No matter how scholars dress up their views with coinages like 'pseudonymous writings', the impressionable reader at a subconscious level will start approaching these writings with mental reservations: 'Oh, this letter wasn't written by the apostle Paul but by an anonymous person some time later. This is a 'secondary' piece of writing, a letter 'added by the later church', crafted by an impostor pretending to be the apostle'. That was certainly the effect on me; for some years my reservations diminished my regard and reverence for these allegedly 'pseudonymous' writings. I suspect thousands of theological students around the world have had a similar experience.

This story in my case had a happy sequel. In 1974 Rev Ernst Jaeschke, director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea's vernacular schools, asked me to revise the New Testament section of a Bible introduction text-book used in the Pidgin high schools and seminaries. Walter Eidam, the author of this little book, *Baibel Bilong Yumi (Our Bible)* had returned to Germany some years earlier, and the book needed some updating. To equip myself for the assignment, I bought another of the books recommended by Hamann, Donald Guthrie's *New Testament Introduction*. This 1054-page work by a British evangelical cured me of the scepticism I had imbibed from Kümmel. Again theology had been made in Germany and well corrected in England. Guthrie's strength lies in his careful and thorough presentation of views opposed to his own, like the form-critics. He never stoops to caricature. Then he lays out both the external and internal evidence relating to each issue. Among the many gems we find 'Appendix C—Epistolary Pseudepigraphy' (671–84) which shows the early church's vigilance against any intrusion of forged documents into the canon.

We cannot leave the topic of NT Introduction without saluting Bishop John A T Robinson's contribution. A number of you will recall Robinson's paperback, *Honest to God*, which appeared in 1963 and caused a buzz especially among university and seminary students.⁸ Thirteen years later this Church of England bishop shocked the theological world again, but this time with a substantial work of New Testament scholarship entitled *Redating the New Testament*.⁹ Robinson proposed a simple thesis:

One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period – the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and with it the collapse of institutional Judaism based on the temple – is never once mentioned as a past fact. It is, of course, predicted; and these predictions are, in some cases at least, assumed to be written (or written up) after the event. But the silence is nevertheless as significant as the silence for Sherlock Holmes of the dog that did not bark. (Redating: 13)

The simplest explanation for this silence, Robinson suggested, citing C F D Moule, was that 'perhaps ... there is extremely little in the New Testament later than AD 70' (14).

One of the gems in this book comes in a postscript prompted by a note Robinson had received from an elderly New Testament scholar, C H Dodd. Let me quote part of Robinson's introduction to Dodd's letter:

Since completing this manuscript I have found a letter from Dodd, whose contents I had entirely forgotten.... I thought it would be fair ... to reproduce a letter which reveals what, at the age of eighty-eight, openness of mind in a very great scholar can mean. Could any author ask for more? (Redating: 359)

Dodd's letter begins in the manner of the time, 'My dear Robinson' and goes on to say:

You are certainly justified in questioning the whole structure of the accepted 'critical' chronology of the NT writings, which avoids putting anything earlier than 70, so that none of them are available for anything like first-generation testimony. I should agree with you that much of this late dating is quite arbitrary, even wanton, the offspring not of any argument that can be presented, but rather of the critic's prejudice that if he appears to assent to the traditional position of the early church he will be thought no better than a stick-in-the-mud. (Redating: 359–60)

Ten years later, N T Wright noted: 'The reaction to [Robinson's] book has been polite but largely unsympathetic, though relatively few *arguments* have been put up to contest it.' Nothing much has changed today; many New Testament scholars ignore Robinson's thesis. So it is refreshing to read Jeff Gibbs's new commentary on Matthew, where he describes *Redating the New Testament* as a 'tour de force' and dates Matthew in the fifties.¹⁰

III. New Testament interpretation and missions

We come to my third theme, the relationship between biblical exegesis and missions. One person who sparked my interest in this area was Rev Bill Stoll, long-time teacher at

⁸ SCM Press, London, 1963.

⁹ The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976.

¹⁰ *Matthew 1:1-11:1*, Concordia Commentary, CPH, St Louis, MO, 2006, 66.

Lutheran Teachers College (LTC) and Luther Seminary, and director of the annual orientation school for new missionaries. My wife Christine and I attended that school at LTC over the 1970-71 summer. It was Rev Stoll who first drew our attention to the Frankfurt Declaration on Missions that was published in *Christianity Today* and other places in 1970. The following year, my first in PNG, we were invited to attend a retreat led by Dr Peter Beyerhaus, a former missionary in South Africa and professor of missions at the University of Tübingen. Beyerhaus had been one of the authors of the Frankfurt Declaration.

Beyerhaus had attended the fourth general assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968. Some powerful currents in missiology evident at Uppsala led him and others to prepare their responses. Beyerhaus saw Christian missions standing at a crossroads. In his book, *Missions: which way?—humanisation or redemption*,¹¹ he lays out the alternatives: either an approach to missions in keeping with the great commission, with the redemption of lost sinners as its central concern; or an approach which sees missionaries primarily as agents for social and political change, a mission approach focusing on all kinds of human need but reluctant to speak of sin and the need for reconciliation to God through faith in Christ. According to this view of missions, the local government council and the hospital are described as ‘salvation-agencies’.

The missiology in full swing at Uppsala saw God as a ‘missionary’ God leading the world toward his kingdom by a series of revolutionary acts. His kingdom is understood in thoroughly worldly terms as a state of perfect peace and prosperity. Beyerhaus refers to Hans Hoekendijk, a leading exponent of this missiology:

J C Hoekendijk...characterises salvation as *shalom* (peace)—in a conscious but certainly undifferentiated reference to the Old Testament expectation. (Note: the New Testament concept of peace [*eirēnē*] is deliberately avoided because *shalom* more adequately expresses the fuller, ie, the this-world-oriented view. *Eirēnē*, however, characterises man’s new relationship to God which is based on a reconciliation in Christ. This reconciliation can be received only by faith. (Missions: 35,36)

That stimulating retreat with Beyerhaus during my first year in PNG helped to shape my attitude to missiological issues throughout my service in PNG and beyond. Moreover, it was his brief paragraph on how the word *shalom* had been used in missiological literature (*shalom* = social justice) that sparked my interest in exploring more thoroughly how the scriptures use *shalom* and *eirēnē* and the implications for Christian missions. My postgraduate studies in St Louis provided that opportunity.

The OT word *shalom* is indeed a many-splendoured expression. We shall explore some of its facets. As one of the blessings God poured out on his faithful people in the Israelite theocracy, the term certainly did encompass peace and prosperity, a peaceful relationship with God himself plus physical benefits like good crops, productive flocks and herds and freedom from foreign invasion and wild animals. OT Israel could even speak of the *shalom* of a war (2 Sam 11:7). It is, as many commentators note, a holistic expression for the restoration of healthy and harmonious relationships and the benefits that ensue. For example, the OT uses *shalam/shilem* for paying a debt (2 Kgs 4:7) or compensating people for their losses (Exod 21:30 – 22:14). The payment restores wholeness to the relationship. This OT theme reaches its happy climax in the Good Friday reading from Isa

¹¹ Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1971.

52:13 – 53:12, where we hear that ‘the chastisement of our peace was upon him’ (Isa 53:5).

While biblical scholars rightly point to the holistic nature of OT terms like *shalom* and salvation, their analysis sometimes seems deficient in certain respects. For example, they often apply their OT analysis to the NT equivalents in an undifferentiated way, as if the NT church were still a theocracy. They fail to recognize that Jesus’ gift of peace is ‘not as this world gives’ (John 14:27), but a peace which passes human understanding (Phil 4:7). Secondly, and not surprisingly in our universalistic age, they have trouble with texts like those in Isaiah where the Lord says there is no peace for the wicked (Isa 48:22; 57:21). Thirdly—and I would like to dwell on this for a moment—they sometimes rule out any suggestion that the OT gift of *shalom* could include peace of heart and mind. *Shalom* becomes a purely social concept. So while some scholars have insisted *shalom* is a holistic term, they have been equally insistent that one piece of the pie is nowhere to be found—*shalom* as personal spiritual peace. To seek such a connotation in the OT term would be, in Paul Hanson’s words, to look for something the OT does not provide—‘solace for a selfish soul’.¹²

Of course, the Reformation rediscovery of how God’s justification of sinners brings peace to troubled consciences rests on a far broader biblical basis than the OT word *shalom*. You may have noticed how this theme appears in Article IV of the Apology, on justification, where two pages in every three refer to the peace the gospel brings to terrified hearts. Nonetheless, it is, I believe, significant and symptomatic when scholars come down hard on any suggestion that *shalom* could bear this personal connotation. Moreover, it is simply false. We think of the Lord calming Gideon with the words, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die’ (Judg 6:23). We think of Eli comforting Hannah and bidding her, ‘Go in peace!’ (1 Sam 1:15–17). We think of Elisha calming Naaman’s troubled conscience and telling him he could go ‘in peace’ (2 Kgs 5:19). We think of the many passages in Isaiah where peace, quietness and tranquility are contrasted with restless, anxious activity (Isa 32:17,18; 26:3; 7:4; 30:15). We could go on.

I see this blind-spot in some modern exegesis as a symptom of what Beyerhaus identifies as a secularising tendency, a tendency to focus on the horizontal, on our need to be more human and be reconciled with each other, which comes at the expense of recognising our prior and greater need for reconciliation with God. So NT terms are sometimes filled with new meaning. For example, it is claimed that the peace Christ brings according to the letter to the Ephesians is primarily ‘a social and political event’;¹³ the word *eirēnē* in the NT ‘only rarely’ refers to peace with God;¹⁴ the biblical teaching on human sin and guilt is minimized; Paul’s intention in Romans was not primarily to provide sinful people with assurance of their salvation in Christ, but to answer a social problem: how to integrate Gentiles into the messianic community.¹⁵ Our need for redemption is sidelined. No wonder many turn away from Christianity to other religions in their quest for peace of heart and soul.

Beyerhaus has stimulated us to steer a middle course in Christian mission between a rock and a hard place, between ‘spiritualising’ and secularizing. On the one hand, we must avoid a spiritualising approach preoccupied solely with religious concerns, like the priest

¹² ‘Isaiah 52:7-10’, in *Interpretation* 33 (1979), 371.

¹³ M Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, New York, 262.

¹⁴ W Foerster, ‘*eirēnē* in the NT’, TDNT 2:415.

¹⁵ Krister Stendahl, ‘The apostle Paul and the introspective conscience of the West’, *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963), 206.

and the Levite who, in Carl Braaten's words, 'pass by on the other side, while modern man lies in the ditch bleeding to death'.¹⁶ On the other hand, we must steer clear of a trap which I believe is an even greater temptation to Lutheran churches and missions, the trap of 'secularising'. Braaten has also expressed concern that for many Lutheran theologians justice rather than justification had become the *cantus firmus* of Scripture. 'One gets the impression that Lutherans feel the necessity to soft pedal justification to commend it to our times'.¹⁷

Our core business as a church, we must remember, is bringing the gospel of salvation to other sinful beggars like ourselves. If the church doesn't attend to that, who will? But as we recognise that people can only find justification and peace with God through faith in the gospel, we also recognise that this saving faith is never alone. Luther wrote: 'It is faith alone that lays hold of the blessing, apart from works, and yet it is never, ever alone'.¹⁸ Faith is always active in love. So Lutheran missions in PNG were always accompanied and facilitated by medical work and other activities to promote people's well-being. Luther himself practised what he preached: the great preacher of God's reconciling sinners to himself through Christ spent his last days trying to reconcile the counts of Mansfeld.

IV. The New Testament as reliable scripture

We turn to our fourth and final theme, the apostolic writings as sacred scripture. We begin with a relatively insignificant incident, my coming across Rev Tim Costello's autobiography, *Streets of hope*,¹⁹ at the Box Hill railway station. Having heard Costello give an after-dinner speech at a Lutheran teachers conference in Bendigo, Victoria, I was impressed with him as a person. His autobiography describes his Sunday School days at Blackburn Baptist Church, Melbourne, where he gained 'a good knowledge of the Bible'. 'Most importantly', he writes, 'its stories ... fired my imagination and imparted a deeply personal faith'. In his youth he dreamt of becoming an evangelist. At university he became president of the Evangelical Union. Then he and his wife spent some years studying at a Baptist seminary outside Zurich, Switzerland. Looking back on his years in Switzerland, he writes:

My theological education, though I was immensely grateful for it, had relativised my faith. Its disciplines approached the biblical text with critical tools that seemed to deconstruct rather than reconstruct the intended meaning. This stretched faith to the point of snapping as old, loved biblical interpretations were crudely dispatched. ... In hindsight, we see how depressed we were with the post-modern disease of not quite believing anything with passionate assurance (149).

You can hear Costello's sense of disappointment, sadness and loss. He speaks of 'the suffocating religion of secularity that has provoked a near-total loss of spiritual transcendence'. Through our critical approaches to the historicity and reliability of the scriptures we westerners have, in Costello's words, lost our 'grand narrative'; 'we have experienced a wholesale cultural 'unplugging' from a meaning time-frame, and we compute life without any sense of direction or destiny' (147).

¹⁶ *The flaming center: a theology of the Christian world mission*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1977, 3,4.

¹⁷ 'Building a theological agenda for Lutherans', *Lutheran Forum* (Lent 1992), 22.

¹⁸ Solid Declaration III:41; Kolb-Wengert, 569.

¹⁹ Allen & Unwin and Albatross Books, Sydney, 1998.

Thank God, students on this campus have been spared the all-out assaults on the Bible that Costello experienced in Switzerland. For example, while scholars like Bultmann were questioning the historicity of all the biblical miracles, even our Lord's resurrection, our lecturers in the late 1960s were recommending books like Alan Richardson's excellent study, *The miracle stories of the gospels*.²⁰ From its outset the LCA has tried to steer its way, not without many struggles, a third way driven neither by a fundamentalist approach to the Bible nor by secular philosophies and psychologies. Henry Hamann reflected on this struggle in his (somewhat controversial) lectures at Valparaiso University, *The Bible between fundamentalism and philosophy*.²¹

It may be helpful to reflect for a moment on the words 'fundamentalism' and 'biblicism', words which have been bandied about in Lutheran and other churches for as long as I can remember. These expressions have been used in various ways: (1) to designate a wooden, literalistic or legalistic interpretation of the Bible that fails to do justice to the author's intention or the literary genre or the relevant hermeneutical principles; (2) as a way of abusing—'sledging' in cricket parlance—someone with a more conservative view of the Bible than one's own; (3) as a tendentious way of totting up Bible passages without giving them due significance. For example, Gilbert Meilaender takes issue with a theologian who claims the homosexuality issue is not a 'major theological concern; we have to hunt for relevant passages'. G Meilaender calls this 'a form of biblicism that one does not expect to find in a distinguished critical scholar'.²² Another form of fundamentalism occurs when Christians elevate the doctrine and high attributes of scripture to the point where they give the impression that the Bible, rather than the gospel, forms the heart of our faith. This aberration can be just as serious as its opposite, the so-called gospel-reductionism, where (to put it in simple terms) what God says to the churches through the Bible is reduced to what he says in the gospel. So Lutheran theology follows that third way, a way that is neither fundamentalist nor reductionist and philosophically-driven. We should never forget that what makes us Christians is faith in the Lamb of God over and above a developed doctrine of scripture. Christ is the one we proclaim, first and foremost. Jesus is our priceless treasure. And in coming to him we come to treasure the scriptures, the swaddling cloths of the Christ-child, and all the scriptures have to teach us.

Let me illustrate. The Evangelical Theological Society (of which I am a member) requires its members to sign this statement annually: 'The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.' Now I don't have a problem with this statement in itself; we make a similar affirmation about the holy scriptures at every synodical convention. As a Lutheran, though, I miss a similar confession of the gospel, not to mention the sacraments.

So we treasure the gospel as the central message of the scriptures, and we also treasure the scriptures as a whole and in all their parts as the source of the gospel. With our Lutheran forebears we gladly 'confess our adherence to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, as to the pure, clear fountain of Israel'.²³

²⁰ SCM Press, London, 1941; seventh reprinting, 1966.

²¹ Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1980.

²² *Things that count: essays moral and theological*, ISI Books, Wilmington, Delaware, 2000, 64.

²³ Solid Declaration, Introduction 3; Kolb-Wengert, 527.

Conclusion: a hermeneutics of appreciation

Let me conclude with an appeal for an approach to the Bible that is aptly called a hermeneutics of appreciation. The word 'appreciation' is related to the word 'precious'; it means placing a high value on something. Now, just as we value Jesus as the eternal Word-made-flesh, the Christ, the Son of God, the pearl of great price and the hidden treasure (Matt 13), so we follow the psalmists in singing the words of scripture: 'They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey and drippings from the honeycomb' (Ps 19:10). Humble students of theology devour the scriptures as Jeremiah did: 'Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts' (Jer 15:16).

I am sure many of you could say with me that, however long or short, our association with Luther Seminary, Lutheran Teachers College, and Australian Lutheran College has enriched us immeasurably. I have expressed special appreciation for the teaching I have received through this place in terms of the emphasis on the NT's apostolicity, its high value as first-generation testimony, its gospel of redemption with its implications for missions, and the nature of apostolic scripture as 'the pure, clear fountain of Israel'. As we celebrate ruby weddings and look forward hopefully to golden and diamond weddings, our marriage will be enriched and strengthened insofar as we continue to treasure this legacy.