

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2007

EDITORIAL

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED

As far back as 70 years ago, and perhaps even before that, Lutherans in Australia were receiving American literature and promotional material from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. An item clearly remembered was a stamp-like sticker that Pastors used to stick on the back of envelopes in which they posted their correspondence. These stickers read, "We Preach Christ Crucified."

This cryptic sentence carried an important message. The church proclaimed that it taught and preached the hard-core facts of Christian faith. It told the story of the Christ Jesus, the Saviour of mankind, and particularly His arrest, the trial before the Council of Jewish rulers, His sentence of death by crucifixion, His death, and then the glorious news of His resurrection.

Today we often see this watered down to a symbolic status. We don't have to believe in miracles, but the Easter story is a wonderful story, which tells mankind that we can always rise again after disaster and that it should never give up hope. The spirit of Jesus and his great works still lives on. This line is often peddled by the very church leaders who in fact are destroying the cause they are supposed to represent.

But there are other forces that have the potential to be far more dangerous to the Easter story, and hinder the spread of the Gospel.

The United Nations has persuaded and coerced member nations into enacting "anti-discrimination" laws concerning race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or **religion**. In 1975 the Fraser Government passed legislation that set up the Human Rights Commission. A citizen can be called before a Human Rights Tribunal where he is denied the right to identify his accusers, he must appear at his own expense, is denied legal representation, and procedures at such hearings can later be used as evidence in legal trials that may follow.

Readers are familiar with a recent trial in Victoria when two Christian pastors were hauled before a court for criticising Islam and parts of the Koran in a seminar they conducted.

The USA already has a Global Anti-Semitism Review Act, establishing within the US State Department a special unit to monitor "global anti-Semitism." Among a very long list of definitions of acts of anti-Semitism is that, "*Criticism of the Jewish religion or its religious leaders or literature (especially the Talmud and Kabbalah) is anti-Semitic, and "Blaming Jewish leaders and their followers*

for inciting the Roman crucifixion of Christ is anti-Semitic."

A prominent commentator on world affairs, Jeremy Lee writes, "What is to be done about the many Christian faithful who believe the New Testament accounts of the trial and sentence of Jesus Christ are true, and that the account as portrayed in Mel Gibson's *The Passion* is accurate? Is the profession of such a belief to be regarded as 'anti-Semitic' and therefore illegal? Or will the Gospels and the Book of Acts simply be proscribed? They were in the Soviet Union at one stage. Can we anticipate the day when the 'Global Commission for World Religion' finally demands the confiscation of Bibles and the outlawing of missionary work?

"That, I believe, is what this new global legislation is all about. It is an 'outward and visible sign' of a war to the death between irreconcilable faiths. On the outcome will depend the future of the world. As Lincoln said, 'Silence, when we should protest, makes cowards of us all.'"

It is not a question of castigating or condemning Muslims or Jews, or any other religion or man-made philosophy. For Christians it is simply the right to be able to preach what we know to be the inspired Word of God. The fate of those who do not is not in our hands, and it is not the Christian's role to pass judgment.

During this Lent and Easter we are preaching "Christ Crucified." May we be granted the courage and determination to continue to preach this message to the world and to resist any power that attempts to take away that right.

As we continue to "Preach Christ Crucified" we have a firm promise that, when we do this, our efforts will not return void.

BEWARE PENTECOSTALISM

Pentecostalism is a movement that has attracted large crowds in Australia, especially the younger generations and also the "baby boomers." Some of these movements have made vast sums out of the crowds they attract, and they put on a show that keeps their audience in a state of excitement, if not wild ecstasy as their emotions take over. They have been through an uplifting experience that is not normal in their everyday lives of work and leisure. But is this really a Christian way?

In the journal "*Good News*" published by the Concordia Mission Society of St. Louis in Missouri, USA, there is an article titled 'How the Devil uses Pentecostalism to Tempt You.'

It reads, *Throughout the world the Christian*

Church is undergoing a fierce but largely un-noticed persecution. The movement the devil is using to persecute Christ's Church is known as Pentecostalism.

*The basic teaching of Pentecostalism is heresy. Why? Because Pentecostalism leaders and teachers make it a requirement of faith that, in order to be sure you are a saved child of the heavenly Father, you must have a religious "experience." But what does God say? God urges His children to trust only in His promises, **and not demand to expect signs, including those that are a result of spiritual "experience."** God says faith alone saves. Experience is not demanded (Ephesians 2:8). 'Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ' (Romans 10:17).*

Through His living Word and Spirit, God enables us to believe without the need for any visual, emotional, or experiential signs. Although He may choose to provide signs, He is offended when we demand them. 'A evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given' (Mathew 12:39).

The late Pastor Mel Grieger, in his brilliant study "Music in Worship", writes, "If we become engrossed in our emotions, we will indeed feel involved in our worship, we may indeed feel some sense of satisfaction and achievement, we may even feel that we have made some spiritual progress or have secured some spiritual merit by our activity, **but our worship has, in fact, become person centred.**

We want to be made aware of God's feelings for us and not to be totally engrossed in our own feelings. We come to surrender ourselves and our feelings at His feet, not to demonstrate, display, or exercise them."

SOME COMMENTS ON THE NEW LC-MS HYMNBOOK

The LC-Missouri Synod has published a new hymnbook, called the *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*. It has 636 hymns, and five settings of the liturgy. The first setting is almost identical with *The Service — Alternative Form* in the *Australian Supplement*. Leone Janetzki has made a careful analysis of the liturgical settings, and recommends the second one for possible use in the AELC. A copy of her review can be obtained from the editor of the Newsletter. This hymnbook includes the Small Catechism and many psalms and prayers. It is well-suited for home and corporate devotional use.

Many of the old favourite hymns remain untouched, but the wording of many older hymns has been updated, and many difficult expressions have been simplified. Members of the AELC would find about 200 hymns that are new, and about 100 new tunes. A number of recently-written hymns have been included. Older AELC members will find some hymns and melodies that they had known in the former *ALHB*, like *Toplady*.

The pew edition (\$US 28) of the *LSB* has the full musical score for roughly 90% of the hymns. For the rest, the full musical edition is required. The words of the hymns for up to five verses are printed between the treble and bass staves, and remaining verses are set underneath.

The *Australian Lutheran Hymnal and Supplement (LH+S)* offered 905 hymns. About 490 hymns in *LH+S* have not been included. AELC members will not miss some in the *Supplement* at all. However, a number of hymns in the *LH* had come from the non-sacramental Protestant orbit, which Lutherans would do well to bypass anyhow.

Theologically the *LSB* has a strong Lutheran emphasis, for example, on original sin, and it is markedly Christ-centred and cross-centred. There is a strong focus on the root of Christian life in baptism. More hymns are available than in our current hymnbooks that suit the readings on particular Sundays. There are much fewer of the repetitious, trendy, "ditty" kind, in comparison with the *Supplement*.

Many of the tunes in *LH* had come from the German *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch (EKG)*. In the *LH* about 100 tunes had been used which J S Bach had harmonised as chorales. In the *LSB* there are about 80. The *LSB* prints the full Bach chorale harmonisation for one hymn, and uses the tune "Gottlob, es geht," which Bach lovers would know.

The expression "full of grace" is acceptable for Jesus Christ, but it is used twice for Mary in the *LSB* (# 384; 855, v.8). Although it is a traditional expression, based on the *Vulgate*, grace is strictly God's favour, which remains in Him, and is not a gift infused into human beings. The expression "gift of grace" (# 636 v.7) confuses God's grace with a charismatic gift.

A surprising number of double negatives involving the word "nor" occur, and also a frequent unidiomatic "will" or "shall" in temporal clauses occurs when they are connected with a future principal verb. For example, "When Christ will come..." Of course, there is American spelling in words like "Savior" and "honor."

Some advantages include the availability of a large-print edition, and a detailed *Hymn Selection Guide*.

New tunes, revised settings of older tunes, the words of new hymns and revisions of the wording of older hymns are subject to copyright. However, field-testing in a parish is possible on the payment of a fee of about \$US 25.

The organists at Oakey agreed that field testing might include the use of new hymn tunes as organ voluntaries, and the inclusion of some new words and tunes in Oakey's regular hymn-singing nights.

Leone Janetzki's comments included the following: "It is a very appropriate book for church worship, in my opinion. I can't find fault with it at all and I see no problem with it being another hymnbook for the AELC.

There are a number of tunes that I would continue to use from our present hymnbook while there are some tunes I would change across to.” “I prefer some of the key choices in this worship book, e.g., E flat major, not E major, for ‘Lord of all hopefulness,’ and lower minor keys.”

Agnes Ritter appreciated the clear print of the music, and the setting of words between the staves. “Some melodies that were altered in our present book have been altered again.” Although she questioned the expense and trouble of changing to this book, she added, “I’d be happy to play out of it.” On the settings of the liturgy, she noted, “Some parts are the same, but nicely harmonised, for example, the Lord’s Prayer, and ‘O Christ.” “The new parts are very singable and quite musical. I would be happy to use it right away.” “The music is easy to play.”
C R Priebbenow

ANOTHER EASTER HOAX

Just about every Easter some high-ranking bishop makes headlines by denying Jesus’ physical resurrection. In late February this year, Oscar-wining director James Cameron produced a new documentary, called “The Lost Tomb of Christ.” It claimed that ten caskets that had been discovered in a suburb of Jerusalem contained the bones of Jesus and His family.

In 1996 the BCC had produced a short documentary on the same subject.

Christians have to be brutally honest. If this is true, Christianity is a hoax. What our pastors preach is useless, and our faith is futile. The apostles were false witnesses, and our hope is gone. Read 1 Cor 15:15-17.

Since the Old Testament Scriptures, and Jesus also, foretold that the Christ would rise from the dead, and since witnesses saw Him after He rose, we can boldly assume that the filmmakers wanted to make money through television. Or we can assume that sceptics wanted to attack the central teaching of the Christian faith. Or we can assume both.

Indeed, Amos Kloner, the first archaeologist to examine the alleged site, said the name on the alleged “Jesus” casket was more likely to be “Hanun.” There is more on the web about this: <http://discovery.com.tomb>

A TIMELY MESSAGE

At one stage in Jesus’ ministry people were deserting Him and He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the father except through Me” (John 14:6). The holy apostles, though, did not fall into this temptation, (of deserting) nor were they led to doubt the divinity of Christ’s Word. What about us, who live at a time when so many deny the divinity of the Holy Scriptures? If the Lord lays before us the question, “Do you want to go away as well? We must answer with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of

eternal life.”

We too, are in need of truth and peace. Without them we would be the most miserable of creatures. Without truth and peace, no kingdom, no glory, no earthly desire can make us happy. God, who gave us a soul that cannot be happy and blessed without truth and peace, has also have provided us with the means of finding both. Where shall we now go to find them? Should we return to the heathen religions and philosophies? No! Even in the first century they could not provide the apostles with what they were seeking. Should we turn to the Mohammedan religion, which rose later? No! What Muslims have of the truth they have taken from our Bible. Everything else is heathen and obvious delusion. Or should we consult the philosophers of our day? Woe to us in that case! They know about God and know man must be just before Him, but they know nothing of reconciliation with God. Their philosophies are nothing but idle speculations that show man the goal and advise him, “Help yourself.” But they cannot provide the power to attain that goal. They are wells without water where the thirsty languish without comfort and help.

Away with all the deceptions of the wisdom of the world! The Bible alone has “words of eternal life,” and this is what we are seeking. It shows us reconciliation with God through Christ. It shows us the way the sinner can be justified and saved. And by this, it gives us the power to walk here on earth, in a new, holy, and blessed life.

A timely and powerful message for our modern era. Readers will be surprised to learn that this was written by C.F.W. Walther over a hundred and thirty years ago in the United States of America. It is a reminder that true and faithful Christians have always been in the forefront of a fierce battle to preserve the Word in its truth and purity.

From *GOD GRANT IT, Daily Devotions from C.W.F. Walther*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

Copies of *God Grant It* are available and can be ordered from Pastor Peter Ziebell, 140 Brookvale Park Rd., Oakey 4401, or Phone 07 46912276. Cost, postage paid \$35.

FROM THE DESK OF PASTOR ZIEBELL

Lenten services have been held weekly on a rotational basis throughout the parish. This year we have been following the Passion narrative of St John, and the sermons of Pastor Ziebell have been based on the writings of St John.

We have been using the Vespers order of service, and it is encouraging to note that our worship numbers are up on past years. This year we have regularly had 40-50 worshipping on the Wednesday nights when we meet. The

following is an article telling the history of Lent.

HISTORY OF LENT: ANCIENT OPPORTUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

For Lutherans the 40-day season of Lent is an important one. But what is Lent? Do the Scriptures mention it? Why do we observe it?

Though the Scriptures do not mention Lent, it has a longstanding tradition in the Church. It began very simply as a time of preparation for Easter. From the earliest times it was customary for Christians in most places to fast before Easter (or the Paschal Feast). At first this was a 2-day fast (Friday and Saturday). As time passed, this fast was extended here and there to a week (e.g., in Alexandria and perhaps Rome). Though we are not certain how it developed, by 350 A.D. the 40-day fast that we now have was already in vogue in most places. The earliest reference to a 40-day fast leading up to Easter that I am aware of is the Second Festal letter of Athanasius in 330 A.D. Today Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday (Sundays are excluded to preserve the number 40).

For Christians living in the Fourth Century, Lent had two major emphases: (1) It was seen as a time of repentance and denial of self. All Christians were to examine their lives according to the Ten Commandments and other Christian ethical precepts and repent where necessary. They were to remember what it cost their Saviour to save them, (2) It was a time of instruction and preparation for the catechumens who wanted to become members of the Christian Church. During Lent they learned the Christian doctrine by studying the Creed. They were led step by step through prayer and special rites toward baptism. If they "passed" they were baptised and received the Lord's Supper in a joyous service either on Easter Eve (the Easter Vigil) or Easter itself.

At the time of the Reformation, some Christians wanted to eliminate Lent since Scripture didn't command it. Luther urged that it be kept, for he saw Lent as an opportunity for the strengthening of faith. "*Lent, Palm Sunday, and Holy Week shall be retained, not to force anyone to fast, but to preserve the Passion history and the Gospels appointed for that season*" (LW 53:90). Here Luther tells us that Lent should be preserved, in part, because it reminded Christians of the Passion (Suffering and Death) of Jesus and encouraged them to meditate upon it. However, no one should be forced to participate. It should be voluntary.

So we also retain Lent to this day, because we see it as a salutary outward discipline that gives Christians a wonderful opportunity for spiritual renewal. Our observance of Lent combines many of the above features. Through our midweek and Sunday services, we come face to face with whatever sin may be hindering our walk with

Christ. But most profoundly, we come face to face with the Gospel of Jesus, which forgives and removes that sin and gives us the power to live anew.

Are you satisfied with your walk with Christ? Or do you long for more: to know Him better, to be more like Him, to experience His love more profoundly? Then we urge you to willingly submit yourself to the discipline of Lent. There is nothing like it to bring you face to face with Jesus and His Gospel. There is nothing like it to find spiritual renewal.

AELC FAMILY FELLOWSHIP CAMP

DATE: 28 - 29 April 2007

PLACE: Camp Minden, 25 Broughen's Rd., Minden (off Warrego Hwy)

ACCOMODATION: Dormitory Style. B.Y.O. Sleeping bags, sheets and or pillows.

PROGRAMME: Continuous activities for young and old. Bible studies, orienteering, BBQs, swimming, hikes.

COSTS: (including meals) Adults \$38, student and child concessions.

Camp Minden has 260 acres and is set up as a Country Style Ranch. It is fully catered and they have offered a special rate as they want to encourage Christian family camps.

Although this camp is for 28/29 April, please book early by phoning Bob or Lynne Seidel on 07 4668 2159 to reserve your place.

We appreciate receiving Letters to the Editor. If you would like to comment on anything, please let us know.

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