

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEWSLETTER MAY 2005

EDITORIAL

LITURGY AND THE DECLINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The March edition of Newsletter commented on the devastating effect evolution has had on the Christian Church.

There is also considerable interest on the effects and value of liturgy and the forms of worship adopted by the churches. The meaning and purpose of the ancient, solemn, and inspiring Scripture-based liturgies are now being looked on favourably compared with the recent trend to modernism in worship, which is held responsible for a disastrous decline in church attendance across Europe and the Western world.

Amongst the millions of words recently written about the Papacy, some perceptive commentators noted that Cardinal Ratzinger, following his elevation to and induction as Benedict XVI, focused on the need to respect and maintain the ancient rites and forms of church worship.

We should be reminded that the Vatican II Council, under Pope John XXIII, swept away the ancient liturgies in a frenzied desire to become "modern," in the belief that the modern mind would be attracted by something more entertaining. Whilst the introduction of the language of a particular country was to be applauded, the guitars, rock bands, dancing and antics around altars removed the dignity, solemnity and much of the meaning of the Mass and drove people away in their thousands upon thousands.

The Roman Catholic Church has many other problems common to all Christian churches, the sexual revolution, the pill, woman's ordination, homosexual and lesbian marriage and consumerism, yet these are not factors affecting the vast majority of those who cease to practise their faith. We cannot escape the fact that the vast exodus from the church goes hand in hand with the onslaught of liturgical "reform." It is estimated that in many countries only 20 to 25 percent of nominal Roman Catholics attend the church.

The situation in the Church of Rome is repeated in the Anglican, Lutheran and other denominations on a world-wide basis, with a sorry picture of declining membership and empty pews.

Now it should be clear that liturgy of itself does not make a Christian. However, a doctrinally sound liturgy provides a pathway, or rail on which the Christian travels safely to his destination of salvation.

The *Augsburg Confession* VII states "It is not necessary for the true unity of the church that ceremonies instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places." However, this does not mean that there is no need for a soundly based order of service to lead Christians along a safe pathway.

In a fine article titled "The Book of Concord - Its Abiding Relevance," Pastor Bruce Adams writes, "The

Apology of Augsburg XXIV elucidates that the Word and the Sacraments are proclaimed and administered within the framework of the historic liturgy, or Mass. In the Confessions there can be found no sanction whatever for either entertainment or pop worship."

Further, Article XXIV states, "It is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents." Important doctrinal changes were made to correct the errors of the past, but the Confessions make it clear that "no conspicuous changes have been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass."

The Lutheran Church was to use the historic liturgy, which dates back to the early centuries of Christianity. However, in recent times there have been many changes to Lutheran liturgy in Australia that have been imposed on congregations in an endeavour to make worship more attractive to people. These changes often appear small and harmless, but, unlike the obvious absurdities such as rock and roll bands and antics around an altar, they are dangerous because they are subtle.

In his devotion booklet Pastor Tim Pauls, under the heading "A Word about Worship and the Liturgy," writes "Worship flows in one of three directions. In a church that has forsaken the Word, it will flow from people to people and speak of meeting physical needs and justifying life styles. In a church that emphasizes feelings and behaviour, worship will be about man lifting his praises and showing his love to God in heaven. In Lutheran worship, in Divine Service, the flow is mostly from God to man. Jesus visits by His Word and Sacrament to forgive sins and strengthen faith."

Sadly, what Pastor Pauls condemns has infiltrated into many Lutheran congregations across Australia, despite denials to the contrary. What was once a Divine Service has become a worship service where "the flow" goes the wrong way, from man to God and not God to man.

We might blame many factors for the decline, but as Christopher Pearson, writing in *The Australian* some time ago says, "yet liturgy was the main point of contact between churchgoers and the churches and fewer and fewer are attending regularly."

If we are genuinely concerned about the decline of the Christian churches we must take a good hard look at how we present the doctrine of salvation to the people through our liturgies.

Do not believe that the use of autocratic power resides solely in the Vatican. The abuse of human power is common in many churches and often filtrates right down to the congregation level as Pastor Vern Grieger points out in the following timely article.

POWER AND AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

The recent death and replacement of Pope John

Paul as head of the Roman Catholic Church gives us occasion to reflect upon the whole matter of power and authority in the church. The world generally described the late pope as a humble man and there can be no doubt that he stood for much that is good in the world, especially in the area of family and morality. He stoutly resisted the popular demands to liberalise abortion and divorce laws. And yet, as head of the Roman Church, he would be regarded by many Protestants as the antichrist. How can this be so?

Protestant churches believe that the Roman Catholic Church holds to many false teachings that would undermine true faith and trust in Christ, such as the denial of salvation by grace alone without works, the veneration of the Virgin Mary, the doctrine of purgatory, the claim that the decrees of the popes and councils have equal authority with the Scriptures, the infallibility of the pope and so on. Yet the fact that the pope should be the head of such a church body does not in itself make him the antichrist. There are numerous false teachers also in the Protestant churches today, but they are not necessarily antichrist but rather false prophets. The spirit of antichrist is not simply the espousal of false teachings but rather the tendency to arrogate to oneself the power and authority that belongs to Christ alone. St. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 that he *“opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”*

The papacy still today claims that Christ gave his authority to Peter as the head of his church, and that Peter then became the bishop of Rome – the first pope. Hence all future bishops of Rome are successors of Peter and have the power and authority of Christ over the church. Because of his authority as head of the church the pope can make doctrines and rules binding on the Church which were never instituted by Christ and are not found in Scripture.

However, Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ alone is the true head of the Church with all power and authority, as He himself asserted before He ascended into heaven. *“All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18). If it is true that Christ has all power and authority in the church, then clearly there is no power left for anyone else. Earlier too He warned His disciples against such seeking after power and authority when He said, *“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matthew 23:8-12).

Nevertheless, the antichristian spirit of seeking after power and authority has been evident in the organised church from very early times as bishops of prominent cities claimed to have greater powers and authority in the church than their fellows. It was this spirit that finally gave rise to the papacy. But this same spirit is evident also in other churches where presidents openly call themselves heads of churches and claim to have power and authority

over lesser clergy and congregations.

The Lutheran churches of the world are not immune from this antichristian spirit either. Presidents, pastors, even elders and congregational chairmen are often tempted to seek after authority and exercise power over others because of their office. That is why, in his pastoral theology courses in the seminary Dr. Hamann senior warned all seminary students against this evil spirit. The first axiom of pastoral theology is the simple truth that Christ alone has all power and authority in the church. Pastors and office-bearers in the congregations have no authority of their own, but have been called or chosen only to exercise the authority of Christ on His behalf. This means that they can speak with authority only in those matters that Christ Himself has spoken in His Word. Dr. Hamann put it to his students in this way: The pastor must proclaim no more and no less that what Christ has taught and commanded in His Word. In doing this he is the servant of Christ who exercises his authority and must be obeyed as Christ Himself. *(He that heareth you heareth me and he that despiseth you despiseth me [Luke 10:16])*. In all other matters he has no authority above others at all and must be most accommodating. Therefore the first thing a pastor must ask himself in any matter is, “Does the Word of Christ speak clearly on this matter?” If it does, I must proclaim it fearlessly and demand obedience. If it does not, I have no authority to proclaim my own opinion or demand obedience. The same rule applies equally to elders and every other officer in the church. Congregations have called their pastor and chosen their officers to proclaim the Word and will of Christ, not to lord it over them and they must not allow themselves to be deprived of their Christian liberty. *(Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free [Galatians 5:1])*.

Christ has revealed his Word and will to us in the Bible, which is therefore our only guide and rule in all matters of faith and belief. In all other matters we have Christian liberty. This includes also such things as the times of services in the parish, the form of the liturgy used in their worship, the program of the youth fellowship or ladies guild and so forth. While it may well be true that the pastor, because of his special training, has a better knowledge and appreciation of some of these things than the members of his parish, yet he must ever remember that he has no specific directions from God in such matters and therefore can only advise and not demand obedience. If he believes that the wishes of his people are foolish in some matter, he may warn against them but he must know that the wisdom of men is foolishness to God and that the Lord often works to accomplish his purpose through the foolishness of men. It is more important that a servant of Christ be faithful to his calling than that he impose his supposed wisdom on others and curtail their Christian liberty.

By the same token, members of congregations should not only heed and obey their pastors in all things that God has revealed and required of us in his Word, but they should also respect their pastors and elders as servants of Christ who are experienced and competent to give good advice in spiritual matters. The writer to the Hebrews admonishes *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls, as men who must give an*

account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would not be to your advantage,” (Hebrews 13:17 GEW). The Christian who knows that he is but a child in spiritual matters is always ready to listen and receive advice and to evaluate it. While he will not allow himself to be robbed of his Christian liberty, he will not use his liberty to offend and harm others or to destroy the peace of the church.

Many of the problems arising in the church are in the area of *adiaphora*, (matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God) and spring from a failure to recognise Christian liberty or to use it responsibly. True Christian love and humility will save the church from much strife and trouble.

The “Law and Gospel” was re-printed last year and readers can purchase this fine work. Tim Stiller has submitted this excellent review of a work which will never date.

**A Review of the Book Titled:
“LAW AND GOSPEL or THE WAY OF LIFE”
Written by G.C. KOCH**

PART I: LAW

From the foreword of the above mentioned book come these words. *“The age in which we are living undoubtedly bears the stamp of materialism and rationalism. The great strides made by man in the field of science and the wonderful inventions in connection therewith have the tendency to render the human mind increasingly self-satisfied, glorying in its achievements, and spurning any attempts to draw it from the material temporal things to something nobler and higher. The carnal mind is thus more firmly enthroned than ever, and spiritual, eternal truths are not considered as worthy of acceptance, because they do not appeal to the pride of man.*

This is not surprising to us, as we know from Holy Writ that natural man is unwilling and unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God. But what fills us with alarm and sadness is the fact that even the visible church is becoming more and more the home of rationalistic teachers, who subvert the everlasting truths and seek to establish human wisdom in its stead...”

Knowing all too well the current state of many visible churches today, it is not at all difficult to see that one of the greatest problems for the church, individual faith, and spiritual well-being, is human pride.

People who desire to warn others in these churches of the very real dangers to their souls’ eternal destination, being compelled by sincere thankfulness and gratitude for all that God has done for them, know all too well of the spurning given to that, “...nobler and higher...” thing. (Eternal Truth)

The foreword continues: *“...In this deplorable state of affairs it devolves upon the Church, and her true and faithful ministers, to reaffirm the old, but ever valid, message given by God Himself, to warn all her members against the pernicious errors of the day, and to offer them the only safeguard against the deadly poison-gas of heretical teaching that permeates the very atmosphere of the so-called Christian countries. And is it not also the*

sacred duty of the church of pure doctrine to lift up her voice and to proclaim to the world at large the unalterable truth of God, the fundamentals of the Christian religion?”

The phrase “...the unalterable truth of God...” is what under-pins this entire book. It brings to the forefront of the reader’s mind that in this modern age, God has not dispensed with any part of His Word, - Old or New Testament, Law or Gospel. Even as it was written a long time ago, His Word never changes and is relevant for all time!

The writer of this book wonderfully reminds us of the importance not only of the need for God’s Holy Law, but also to rightfully divide it from His Holy, life giving Gospel, so that both Law and Gospel are correctly used for God’s intended purpose. The *Formula of Concord (Triglotta*, p. 801, 1) states: *“We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the church with great diligence as an especial brilliant light by which, according to the admonition of St. Paul, 2. Tim. 2, 15, the Word of God is rightly divided.”*

Not only is it made clear that we are to rightly divide Law and Gospel, but also to distinguish between the judicial and ceremonial Law (the O.T. Law which God has abrogated) on the one hand, and the moral Law on the other, which God has not abolished. This helps the reader to understand what is being referred to when the ‘Law’ (of the Law and Gospel) is mentioned.

The writer presents very clearly the twofold manner by which the moral law was given by God, consisting in the ‘Natural Law’ and the ‘Revealed Law’. In the case of the natural moral law which has been written into the heart of man, he has stated that the effect of sin has obscured and blurred that natural knowledge, and has made it more or less illegible. As a result of this, the writer points out what plagues many churches by stating: *“Hence it is that we find among men a very great variety of opinions as to what is right and what is wrong.”*

He then points out that it is God’s most holy will that people should hear, learn and take to heart, the revealed moral law. Through the knowledge of scripture no true Christian has excuse for any ignorance of God’s Law. In fact we are highly privileged to know exactly what our heavenly Father demands of us.

Then the reader is presented with the great attributes of the moral Law. They are: 1) *It is Holy*; 2) *Unchangeable*; 3) *Eternal*; 4) *Supreme*; 5) *Final* and 6) *Spiritual*. Expanded, these attributes give a rich and full understanding of God as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the almighty, all-wise, and righteous Lawgiver of all the world. It clearly reveals that God is the source and fountain of all authority and law and order in the world.

They show the Law as right and just. It is unchanging, unlike the opinions of men. There is no higher authority, lawgiver or judge in heaven and earth and hell. They show that the law is final, being the sum of the twofold commandment of love. Finally they show that the Law is spiritual in relation to the conflict of one’s soul with sinful evil nature.

The book then goes on to the three uses of the law, which are: 1) *As a curb*; 2) *As a mirror* and 3) *As a rule*.

These are given a thorough and most necessary explanation.

A SUMMARY OF THE LAW SECTION

In the light of the very flimsy and almost non-existent use of the Law in many churches today, it is without a doubt that a book of such sound and revealing truth of God's holy Law is more than ever necessary to again restore the wonderful balance of Law and Gospel, as did Dr. Martin Luther so faithfully at the time of the Reformation.

After reading this section of the book one can only be compelled to join with David as he exclaims in Psalm 119:1-48. *"Blessed art thou, O Lord; teach me thy statutes. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes. I will not forget thy Word. I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. Give me understanding, and I shall keep the Law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. And I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts."*

On a number of occasions we have stressed the importance of upholding the Genesis account of Creation. We therefore have much pleasure in submitting the itinerary of John Mackay, Director of Creation Research. Readers are invited to make up groups to attend these lectures, and to advise friends who are in the areas visited by John Mackay

DON'T MISS JOHN MACKAY IN VICTORIA, NSW
AND QLD DURING MAY JUNE 2005

QUEENSLAND

Toowoomba

Friday – Sunday 3rd June - 5th June.

"World Changes Conference" West Twmba Presbyterian
492 South St Toowoomba.

Contact: Rolly Sondergeld (07) 4633 4000 Email:

wtpc.admin@ozemail.com.au

Friday 3rd June: 7.30pm Youth night

Saturday 4th: am Men's breakfast; 7.30pm Family night.

Sunday 5th: 8am, 10am & 6pm West Toowoomba
Presbyterian Church

Gympie

Friday 10th June 7pm Public meeting. Civic Centre
Prospectors Hall Mellor St Gympie (Use entry closest to
Senior Citizens Centre)

Saturday 11th June 9am - 5pm Field Trip Gympie.

Contact: Leanne Grieger (07) 5483 1010

Sunday 12th June 10am Gympie Baptist 133 Corella Rd.
Gympie.

Contact: David Blackburn (07) 5482 8525 Sunday 12th
June 6.30pm Church of Christ 57 Horseshoe Bend
Gympie Contact: Adrian Risser (07) 5482 6331

NSW

Sydney

Wednesday June 15, 7.30 pm Baulkham Hills - details to
follow.

Gundagai

Tuesday 21st June. Noelene Yabsley (02) 6944 9153

Email: sebastie@dragnet.com.au

Orange

Friday 24th June Orange 7pm Public meeting. Contact:
Arthur Gilmore (02) 6364 3288 H, (02) 6391 3922 W

Molong

Saturday 25th June pm Molong Baptist 122 Bank St.

Molong Topic: Giants.

Contact: Brian Morgan (02) 6366 9029

Sunday 26th June Molong Baptist 122 Bank St. Molong

am Topic: Relevance of Creation pm Topic: In the
Beginning was the Word Contact: Brian Morgan (02)
6366 9029

NSW/VIC BORDERS

Deniliquin

Friday 17th June Contact: Cliff and Ruth Hampton (03)
5881 2736

Albury

Sunday 19th June Albury - Lavington Baptist Church 450
Parnell Street

Contact: Colin Trevaskis (02) 6025 5979 Email:
colinj@dragnet.com.au

CANBERRA

Wednesday 22nd June Canberra Home Schoolers Day

Contact: Gary & Christine Hosking (02)61613940

Thursday 23rd June Canberra Home Schoolers Field Trip

Email: g@hosking.id.au

THE EMAIL POST

Our email news service has been launched with a
number of news items not normally seen in the press or
on TV being emailed out to those people on our address
list.

More subscribers are welcome. Write, phone, or
email your wish to be included in this up to date service.
The editor can be contacted at the address below.

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