

# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

## NEWSLETTER MAY 2007

### EDITORIAL

#### THE ROAD AHEAD – SURRENDER OR SURVIVAL

Whether we like it or not, we have to be realistic about the future of a rapidly changing world, mostly hostile to the Christian faith. We avoid facing up to the problems of the future at our peril.

Early this year Dr. Adam S. Francisco presented a paper to the Concordia Theological Symposia at Fort Wayne, Indiana titled "Luther, Lutheranism, and the Challenge of Islam."<sup>1</sup> This paper is required reading at a time when we are confronted with a situation which is more dangerous than that witnessed by Luther when Turkish armies were hammering on the gates of Vienna.

In his paper, Dr. Francisco quotes Michael Scheuer, former head of the United States unit charged with hunting down Osama bin Laden. Scheuer wrote that Islam "will never trade their harsh and medieval Islamic theology for the Pillsbury Doughboy version of Christianity now on offer from the Vatican and Canterbury."<sup>2</sup> In substantiating this claim Scheuer presents several astonishing examples. In the D'Arcy Memorial Lecture at Oxford (2000), Thomas Michel, a renowned Jesuit scholar of Islam and Secretary for Inter Religious Dialogue in Rome, suggested that Christians might be able to recognise the prophet Muhammad, in some sense, as legitimate. Anglican theologian Keith Ward has articulated in the first tome of his multi volume work on systematic theology that, whilst there is something peculiar to the Christian revelation, the Quran, too, could be considered to contain divine revelation. With Christian theologians expressing these ideas it is no wonder that Bible-believing Christians have doubts about Christian Europe's being able to defend itself in the long term and survive.

"The End of the World as We Know It" is the subtitle of book with the head title of *America Alone* by author Mark Steyn. The title of this publication, "*America Alone*"<sup>3</sup> is unfortunately misleading as it suggests a volume awash with American propaganda. However, the subtitle may be far more accurate than most people would care to admit. It is not the type of book you would expect to find in a Christian book shop. However, because it is about the worldwide impact of Islam, it is a "must read" for all Christians who hope to continue the practice of their faith and enjoy freedom of worship. It depicts a stark image of how our children and grandchildren will be living in 20 to 40 years time. Michelle Malkin of the New York Times in reviewing Steyn's book writes, "*His new book provides a powerful, abrasive high velocity assault on encrusted layers*

*of sugar coating and whitewash over the threat of Islamic imperialism. Do we in the West have the will to prevail? Steyn strips away intellectual rust and Political Correctness rot to uncover the writing on the wall.*" Do we have the will to prevail? A very good question indeed.

In 2007 we have a situation that is both similar in some respects to the time of Luther, and in other respects very different. In Luther's time the threat to Europe was a direct military threat by the armies of Turkish Sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent. Today Europe and the entire Christian world face a very different situation. The spread of Islam is not due to armies on the march, but is the result of a great migration programme coupled with a population explosion. Sheer numbers are the deciding factor. By contrast, currently the European nations are in no state to resist, due to declining population and birth rates, the doctrinal disintegration of the Christian churches, rejection of their Christian faith by the vast majority of the people, and the multicultural policies of compromising governments, who are unable, or too weak, to resist the demands of rapidly growing Muslim populations who have been invited into their midst.

Dr Francisco quotes Efraim Karsh,<sup>4</sup> "*As a universal religion Islam envisages a global political order in which all human kind will live under Muslim rule as either believers or subject communities. In order to achieve this goal it is incumbent on all free, male adult Muslims to carry out an uncompromising struggle 'in the path of Allah,' or Jihad. This in turn makes those parts of the world that have not been conquered by the House of Islam an abode of permanent conflict.*" If the reader thinks that this cannot happen here, and strong governments will defend our way of life, please note that the British Union Flag no longer flies over Heathrow Airport, the Drivers and Vehicles Licensing Agency, or Her Majesty's Prisons. Our Union Flag contains the Cross of St. George, which was a Crusaders' Flag and is offensive to Muslims. So it has been removed.

Also confronted with a dedicated and powerful Islam, Luther wrote extensively about the situation in Europe in the fifteen hundreds. In the event of direct military threat, he responded by arguing that Christian Europe should stand up to Turkish (Islamic) imperialism in a defensive war, but that this must be conducted by the secular authorities, not the Church. However, open warfare does not apply to us today.

Luther's most important advice for us applies when Christians are living in a society dominated by Islamic laws and customs, a condition quite possible within

the next two or three decades. He writes that Christians must learn at least the basics of the faith - the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. What is particularly essential is the second article of the Creed. Not only would this serve to nurture one's faith, but the historical data would also provide all that was needed to defend one's faith.

Luther's advice reveals our great weakness. There was a time when great numbers of children attending Sunday Schools knew the Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer by heart. Today it would be rare to find a child who could do this, even children from Christian homes. If we want our children and grandchildren to withstand the rigours that lie ahead, it is time to give them the weapons with which they can defend themselves.

- (1) Dr. Adam Francisco. "Luther, Lutheranism, and the Challenge of Islam," *Concordia Theological Symposia, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 2007.*
- (2) Michael Scheuer. *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*: Dulles, VA. Potomac Books, 2004.
- (3) Mark Steyn. *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*: DC. Regency, 2006.
- (4) Efraim Harsh. *Islamic Imperialism: A History*: Yale University Press, 2006.

**LUTHER, LUTHERANISM, AND THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM**

We do not have copies of Dr. Adam Francisco's paper that we could post out, but it is saved on our computer and can be despatched by email as an attachment. It is a highly recommended paper, which should be studied and read by the widest possible audience.

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**NATIONAL CHURCH LIFE SURVEY**

Every five years to coincide with the Commonwealth Census the NCLS conducts a survey of churches in an attempt to ascertain how they are faring.

Church members are asked to assess how their churches are performing in categories such as "Leadership," "Commitment to Vision," "Sense of Belonging," "Inspiring Worship," and "Growth in Faith."

In all these categories the Pentecostal Churches had a strong response from members, with percentages well above those of other denominations. The percentages of Pentecostal people who were positive on these categories ranged from 45 to 69 per cent. These figures are apparently due in large part to the Hillsong operation. In the "Inspiring Worship" category Pentecostal members' approval rating scored 43 as against Anglicans 18 and Catholics 20.

Sadly, the responses from Roman Catholics, the largest denomination in Australia, were disappointing. Only 15 per cent of regular attendees are reported to award the church top marks for Leadership, 18 per cent declared growth in faith, and 17 per cent felt strongly committed to the church's vision.

At this stage Newsletter does not have individual

figures for Lutherans in Australia.

The most important statistic is the number of people who regularly attend a church service. This figure is 8.8 percent. For a country that claims to be Christian, this is indicative of how, despite the vigorous efforts of many denominations, the people have turned their backs on the faith that to a very large extent built the nation.

**A POIGNANT CRITICISM**

How can we expand or even hold our own in today's society, let alone prevent the epidemic of decline, which is prevalent in so many of our Christian churches?

From time to time we have commented on the reasons for this decline, searching like many others for an answer. James Packer, not our gambling and TV guru, but the noted English theologian of the same name has made an interesting observation.

He writes, "*Christians no longer live for heaven, let alone practise detachment from the world. Nowadays, nonconformity to the world is limited to the means that the world adopts to achieve its goals, and rarely touches the goals themselves. Does the world around us seek pleasure, profit and privilege? So do we. We have no readiness or strength to renounce these objectives, for we have recast Christianity into a mould that stresses happiness above holiness, blessings here above blessings hereafter, health and wealth as God's best gifts, and death, especially early death, not as a thankworthy deliverance from the miseries of a sinful world, but as the supreme disaster, and a challenge to faith in God's goodness.*"

Dr C.F.W. Walther wrote on a similar theme over 100 years ago. He said, "*Much depends on how a person sees his whole life on earth...If a Christian recognises that his life is nothing but a trip towards blessed eternity, this conviction will compel him to refrain from the fleshly lusts that war against the soul. His life may tempt him to attach his heart to such earthly things as money and goods, house and property, glory and vain decoration, but if he recalls his journey, he will remember the words in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.' Then the thoughts of fleshy delights and good days will cause him to become frightened and he will quickly tear the bands that ensnare his soul. Then he will set out again on his journey, saying, 'It is not meant for me to sleep on soft pillows here, I have still not reached my destination. Perhaps the sun of my life will sink and the night will come, in which no one can work and no one can complete the way to the heavenly destination.'*"

James Packer and Dr Walther have put their fingers on a very touchy point. Our society simply does not want to know about the life beyond the grave. One has only to attend a "modern-day" funeral or watch the funeral of a notable citizen on the TV News. All you get is that the deceased was a great chap and hear recordings of his

favourite jazz pieces or songs. The idea of a life after death and salvation with a loving Christ is definitely “old hat” with the society of our day. Nobody believes this any more.

And it is not a popular theme in many churches today. Why would anybody want to go to a church when all that is on offer is an extension of the welfare state or the promise of earthly rewards and success if we do our duty and practice our good works?

It may be time for many of the Christian churches to re-think their mission strategy and return to the theme that there is a heaven, which is our goal. For those whom Christ rejects the alternative will come as a frightful shock.

### **CHRIST ACADEMY**

God willing, two young men from St John’s Minden, Stephen Behrendorff and Mark Lehmann, will shortly be on their way to Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA, where they will attend the 2007 Christ Academy. This two week residential programme, (June 17-30), is for young men around high school age. It is designed to give them a taste of what studying theology might be like for them, a chance to study the Christ who is present in His Word and Sacraments with some of the excellent teachers at CTS; a chance to explore the possibility of some day becoming a pastor.

Fort Wayne is a Confessional Lutheran Seminary, which is thoroughly committed to upholding the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Holy Scripture, and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in all its theology and practice. It is the seminary where Dr Kurt Marquart was a professor. Unlike other seminaries that are weak on the authority and inspiration of Scripture, CTS, Fort Wayne is rock solid on this score. As someone who was privileged to attend CTS for one and a half years, I can vouch that the clear and intentional focus on being a Confessional Lutheran ran through the place like a precious seam of gold, and consequently the Gospel was brought home to me in a way I had not known before.

I believe that the experience gained by sending these two young men to the 2007 “Christ Academy,” would be a great help to them as they contemplate their future.

Thanks must go to COL for their financial support of this project.

Story kindly supplied by Pastor Mark Hampel.

### **A DAY FOR REJOICING**

Members of the AELC have reason to rejoice on Sunday 17 June when another pastor is added to their ranks.

After a time of intense and diligent studies Owen Ohlson will be ordained at a gathering of the Parish at Divine Service to be held at Trinity Church of Marburg. The Service will be a combined Mission Service and Ordination.

Owen Ohlson has expressed his appreciation and

thanks for the support and wise instruction by our pastors during his study period. Pastor Vern Grieger has been particularly helpful with assignments and work sheets as Owen completed Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*.

The newly-formed Bethania congregation has already called Owen, so upon ordination he will be able to commence immediately the mission work that will eventually cover much of Brisbane.

Further training is planned, and Owen will complete a course in early church history under the tutelage Pastor Clarence Priebbenow and Pastoral Theology with Pastor Vern Grieger.

The training of faithful pastors without colleges and seminaries is one of interest, and reminiscent of the 1840s and 1850s when the school at Lobethal, South Australia was established under Pastor Fritzsche. In conditions that people today would call backward and very inadequate, Pastor Fritzsche went about his pastoral duties walking from settlement to settlement with his four students, who recited their lessons as they walked through the bush. Those pupils went on to become some of the great leaders of the early Lutheran church in Australia.

### **SERVICE INFORMATION**

#### **DIVINE SERVICE WITH HOLY COMMUNION ORDINATION OF OWEN OHLSON**

VENUE: Trinity Lutheran Church, Edmund Street,  
Marburg.

DATE: Sunday 17 June.

TIME: 10.00 am.

#### **THE SERVICE WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A COMMUNITY LUNCHEON**

The congregations of Marburg, Minden, Lowood, and Bethania extend a hearty welcome to all.

In our March Newsletter we announced a family camp, which was to be held at the Sonshine Ranch at Minden, and encouraged members and friends to attend. Errol Priebbenow reports on a very successful occasion.

### **REPORT ON FAMILY CAMP AT MINDEN**

This year’s family camp was held at Sonshine Ranch at Minden on April 28-29. The camp began on Saturday morning with settling into dormitory accommodation and socialising. This was followed by lunch. After this, Pastor Mueller led us in some interesting and challenging studies on training and obedience, while Pastor Grieger took the younger children for a Bible story and Lynne Seidel led them in some activities. After the studies we went for a hike up to the top of Minden Range

and enjoyed the views before returning in time for the evening meal. After the meal, Pastor Mueller led another study on disciplining our children. A camp fire had been planned to follow this, but as it was showering outside we opted for some indoor games until bedtime.

Sunday morning began with some of the brave (or silly?) campers going for an early morning swim. This was followed by a study on the importance of home devotions led by Bob Seidel. After breakfast we all went over to St. John's, Minden for Divine Service, which had their little church packed to overflowing. We then returned for a BBQ lunch and packed up and cleaned up while the children went for a swim.

The camp was very well attended with over 100 there each day. While most people stayed over night, some of the locals just came for the days. It was a very well organised camp, thanks to Bob and Lynne Seidel. Sonshine Ranch proved to be an excellent venue and the meals, which were all provided by the staff were also very good. But above all I think we were all enriched and better equipped as we as families grow together as God's children and we as parents better understand how we are to train our children through not only teaching them, but also setting our lives as an example for them to follow.

### **CLONING AND STEM-CELL RESEARCH**

The Federal Government has given the nod for scientists and researchers to go ahead with therapeutic cloning. Australian scientists will now be able to create cloned human embryos from cells that are extracted human embryos. However, all the states and territories have to approve the bill before cloning can go ahead.

On Sunday 1 July, 2.00 pm at Bethlehem Church, Troy's Road, Toowoomba, Mrs Joy Wurst, the Queensland President for *Lutherans for Life*, will give a talk on Therapeutic Cloning and Stem Cell research. It is important to know this research from a Christian perspective. It is hoped that our people will pray about this, write to politicians, or even make deputations to local MPs.

### **INSTALLATION AT TOOWOOMBA**

On Sunday 13 May, Pastor Peter Ziebell was installed as the Pastor of Bethlehem congregation at Toowoomba.

This followed the decision by Bethlehem to become a congregation of the Downs Parish.

The installation ceremony was carried out by Pastor C.R. Priebbenow, and Pastor Ziebell preached the sermon to his new congregation.

The transfer into the Downs Parish places Bethlehem in a more closely knit group of congregations and this will allow Pastor Phil Mueller to devote more time and energy to his far flung parish based on Hivesville.

### **HIVESVILLE INITIATIVE**

Pastor Mueller has in his spiritual care families and individual members who extend over a huge area out of Hivesville to Rockhampton, Mackay and there is even a member in Darwin. In Melbourne there is also a group of people who have been long-time members.

Distance makes contact with these far-flung people infrequent. However, Hivesville have put to good use a modern invention. Every Divine Service is recorded on DVD, and the DVDs are mailed each week to all who need them.

Hivesville welcomes all requests for these DVDs. They are particularly useful for people who are in hospitals, nursing homes or are incapacitated, as well as people in remote areas. All that is needed is a request, and these DVDs will be mailed regularly.

### **A REMINDER**

Readers are reminded to note in their diaries or on calendars that Pastor Daniel Preus will be addressing the Christian Interest Seminar at Marburg on 21 and 22 July. A further reminder with programme details will be announced in an early edition of Newsletter in July, or you can contact Marburg direct.

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

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