

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2004

EDITORIAL

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE REFORMATION?

Reports of Reformation services from Lutheran circles prompt our heading. Reformation Day has become in many places a vehicle to promote the worldwide ecumenical movement. The message is one of amalgamation at the expense of doctrine. The ecumenical movement has produced a climate where the goal is an alluring vision of strength and unity through numbers. To do this Scripture can be adjusted to suit the requirements of the new unified organisation. So for the sake of union it is possible to join with bodies that ordain gay and lesbian pastors and advocate "gay marriage."

This anti Reformation movement paints a picture of a European church that was split and torn apart by the Lutheran Reformation, and then fractured into numerous denominations. It is of course admitted that this church, based at Rome, had fallen on corrupt times, but surely commonsense and good will could have fixed the problem. Despite the damage nearly 500 years ago, it is now time to get together with better understanding and reach common goals under a strong, progressive worldwide organisation. The doctrinal differences and attitudes to social questions do not matter as long as we can have similar overall goals.

There are two fallacies here. People tend to think of the church in the fifteenth century as "corrupt" because it had tolerated and participated in morally corrupt practices. While this was so, the Reformation aimed, not at the sinful behaviour, but at the root cause of the sinful behaviour which was doctrinal disintegration and the abandonment of the Truths of Holy Scripture. In huge areas of Europe even the clergy were abysmally ignorant of the message of Scripture. Luther turned the Church back to its beginnings, to its truly "catholic" nature.

Secondly we need to appraise ourselves of the so-called unity of the church.

The unity of the church before Reformation is, in Australian speech, a "furphy." Christendom has never been a united monolithic organisation. From its foundation there have been Arians and Donatists with their man-made heresies, then came the great split between Constantinople and Rome, with each body trying to excommunicate each other. The body based on Rome was later rent with internecine strife, at one stage three claimants contested for the title of pope. Then in the thirteen and fourteen hundreds there were movements such as that commenced by Peter Waldo in mountainous north-east France that translated the Bible for the people. In England John

Wycliffe, born in Yorkshire in 1329, translated the Bible and was the first Englishman to point to Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice.

So what became known as the Lutheran Reformation, and the other reforming movements such as in England, could in no way be accused of harming the true Christian Church. In fact it did just the opposite. It preserved the truth of Holy Scripture and returned mankind back to the true path to salvation, a path which had long since been corrupted. Furthermore, in the years from the 1500's to the 1800's, particularly coming out of Great Britain, we saw a mighty mission effort by many denominations who vigorously spread the Gospel around the world.

The crux of the Reformation was the opposing views of the Lutherans and Rome on Justification. We now see doctrinal gymnastics in the wording of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, a document negotiated between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.

The issues we face are still the same as they were in Luther's time, and despite the pious hopes of many Lutherans and Protestants, the position of Rome has not changed. One can use all the fanciful phrases which theologians used to put together the JDDC, but in the final analysis the Roman Catholic Church still stoutly maintains that man's good works are necessary and an important factor in his salvation.

Does this really matter? For thousands of well meaning Christians the issues of doctrine do not trouble them as they go through life, but it is vital that there be people who take their stand on the truth and preserve it, just as Luther did.

As Dr. John H. Armstrong points out in his brilliant little booklet titled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," *"in controversies of faith, the difference between antagonist systems is often reduced to a line as sharp as a razor's edge, yet on one side of the line is God's truth, and on the other a departure from it."* Reformation Day is a time to proclaim that Luther was on the right side of the razor's edge.

But some may ask, was he? At the meeting called by Emperor Charles V between Lutherans and Catholics Dr Eck, the chief theologian among the Catholic representatives, was asked if he could contest the Augsburg Confession. Dr Eck's answer was that he could from the writings of the church fathers, but not from Scripture.

It is therefore sad to hear of Lutherans extolling the J.D.D.J. Document, of Pastors Conferences giving assent,

and congregations being advised that Reformation day is not a time for denominational self-glorification.

There is a vast difference between self-glorification and thankfully standing tall proclaiming God's truth despite the opposition. And the latter is where we stand.

The attacks on the Bible are never ending. Most people simply accept that these attacks must be true because it is on the TV screen. Pastor C. Priebbenow challenged the ABC programme on Jericho with the following article. If you want the facts on Jericho read this fascinating account and pass it on to friends.

THE COMPASS PROGRAM ABOUT THE CAPTURE OF JERICHO

The first part of the ABC Compass program broadcast on 26 September 2004 said that many features of the archaeological work of Garstang in the 1930s confirmed much of what biblical scholars had long accepted as date of 1400 BC for the capture of Jericho. However, the program refused to accept that the collapse of the walls of Jericho was a miracle, and looked for naturalistic reasons such as sound waves or an earthquake. The second part of the program was based on the work of Kathleen Kenyon, and concluded that most of the Hebrews had not come from Egypt at all, and that there was little at Jericho to conquer or destroy when the Bible says Joshua conquered it. It left viewers with the conclusion that the biblical reports were a collection of myths that had no basis in fact, but had only a kernel of truth.

Kathleen Kenyon was an archaeologist who made her excavations at Jericho in the 1950s. Since then many archaeologists have been saying the same. They have written off the account in the Bible as so much folklore. Kenyon concluded that, when the Israelites came, there were no walls to come tumbling down! Many archaeologists have followed her, saying that the Egyptians or the Hyksos had destroyed the city about 150 to 200 years earlier.

Kenyon had based her work on a very limited excavation area, two 26-foot squares. It was an impoverished part of the city, in which there was little of the expensive imported pottery that Kenyon was looking for. Viewers should not have been upset by negative claims based on the work of Kathleen Kenyon, because the program was not based on more recent archaeological work, which again supports the biblical description of the conquest in both method and chronology. Detailed evidence about the pottery on which Kenyon based her claims for a late date for the destruction of Jericho, 1230 BC, was not

published until 1983, and scholars had not until then been able to analyse her claims. Kenyon had based her claims on the absence of pottery in two colours imported from Cyprus. She had excavated one of the poorest parts of the city. Her claims were based on what was not found, rather than on what was found. Because Jericho was removed from major trade routes, unlike Megiddo, one would not, after all, expect to find expensive two-colour pottery in that part of the city. Rather, careful examination of pottery-ware does indicate a Late Bronze date, which fits the time of the Bible.

Many of the facts mentioned earlier in the Compass program about the site of Jericho were simply ignored in the later part. What was in fact found at Jericho has confirmed the record of the Old Testament. As the Bible says, the city was burnt (Joshua 6:24). In the burnt debris there were many stone jars full of grain, indicating that when the city was taken there was an ample food supply.

This corroborates a series of points. The Egyptians used to mount campaigns and besiege fortified cities just before harvest, when food supplies were lowest. The Bible indicates that the attack took place shortly after harvest. The Israelites crossed the Jordan when it was in flood at harvest time (Joshua 3:15). The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs. There had not been a long siege. Successful attackers normally plundered grain, but it had not been taken, as the Bible says. The fact that the grain was found at all confirms God's command to the Israelites not to plunder the city (Joshua 6:17-18). Rahab was drying freshly harvested flax on the roof of her house then (Joshua 2:6).

The Compass program did not mention that recent work by Bryant Wood of the University of Toronto has reopened the case and re-examined Kenyon's evidence. There is now much more evidence. It includes the sort of pottery Kenyon said was absent at Jericho, stratigraphic data, Egyptian royal scarabs, carbon-14 dating, seismic activity, and tumbled walls. The dating of about 1400 BC fits the Bible account, but clashes with many "scholars", who want to date the exodus from Egypt about 200 years later. The newer evidence suggests that the Israelites were in Canaan throughout the Late Bronze II period, after all. One piece of charcoal was carbon-dated to 1410 BC, plus or minus 40 years. It is clear that the city was destroyed when the Bible says it was, not 150 years earlier. When the Israelites came, it was a strongly fortified city.

A review of the evidence about the walls of Jericho shows that the walls did fall down flat, as the Bible says (Joshua 6:20). Walls and floors of houses inside the city

were blackened or reddened by fire, but the bricks outside the revetment wall were not affected by fire. This shows that the walls fell before the city was destroyed. A wall of red bricks on top of the raised area that had been built on former ruins fell over the outer wall at the base of the tell. The amount of bricks suggests a wall six and a half feet wide and 12 feet high. The collapsed wall provided a ready-made ramp for the attackers to enter the city. As the Bible says, everything in the city was destroyed. The biblical references indicate that this took place in about 1400 BC.

The program claimed that archaeological work elsewhere in Palestine showed no evidence of a violent conquest of Canaan. It gave the impression that the Bible is unreliable about the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. However, it was based on wrong assumptions.

The people who produced the program did not look at the biblical accounts carefully enough, either. The Bible in fact does not say that the Israelites destroyed all the cities in Canaan at the time of Joshua. Only some cities were totally destroyed. Property was destroyed only at Jericho, Ai, and Hazor (See Joshua 10:28-29). We can only deplore the anti-Christian bias in the program-office of the ABC. Honesty should have added a note about more recent work, and deleted assumptions that supported unbelief in the biblical record, or else not screened the program at all.

Editor's Note. Pastor Priebbenow received a reply from the ABC's Executive Producer which read in part, "This research finds that while it may have some basis in history, it could not have happened literally as it is presented in the Bible. This is the view that is accepted these days by most mainstream Christian biblical scholars."

With this prevailing view, need the world wonder why the mainstream churches are in decline?

HYMNS OF THE CHURCH

Following the production of a word-only edition of *Hymns of the Church*, a DVD recording of all 647 hymns is now available. The music for these hymns is played by the late James Thiele on the pipe organ of Bethlehem Lutheran Church Adelaide. Each hymn is preceded by an introductory verse and then the appropriate number of verses as printed in the hymnbook.

The intention is to enable Christian families to sing these hymns in their homes with good music even if none of them can play an instrument. These hymns may be used in small gatherings and church services where there is no organist. All that is required is a DVD player as used to play videos and other music in the home, or a computer that can play DVDs. In order to fit such a vast amount of

material on one DVD disc, it was necessary to record it in MP3 format. Unfortunately some early DVD players may not read MP3 format or they might not handle such a large number of separate files as is needed for the 647 hymns. Fortunately the price of DVD players has come down dramatically so that a player which can play these MP3 files can now be bought for less than \$100.

The present DVD disc contains the music for the hymns as originally intended at the time of printing the *LUTHERAN HYMNAL*. Some believe that better tunes could have been selected for many of these hymns. Therefore an ongoing effort is being made to substitute other tunes for many of these hymns and produce a second edition with this music. If anyone is interested in this project and ready to help, his or her assistance would be very welcome.

The price of the *Hymns of the Church DVD* is only \$15.00 posted to anywhere in Australia. Furthermore, on principle, there is no copyright to this production. It is only the recording process and postage that is paid for, not the content or the message itself. This belongs to the Church, as the title asserts, and ultimately to the Lord of the Church, and is intended for all to use and cherish. Everyone is therefore free to make additional copies and distribute them freely without reference to those who have spent untold hours and months in the preparation of this disc. Their reward is that the Hymns of the Church may be sung far and wide in worship and praise to the Heavenly Bridegroom.

DVD discs of *Hymns of the Church* are available from V.S. Grieger, 79 Sykes Road, Bells Bridge, Qld, 4570, telephone 07 54831414. Email address vernashi@dodo.com.au

WHERE LIES THE GLORY

Australia has been inundated with electioneering in some form or other for most of the year, and particularly during the 6 weeks of the official campaign.

We have been subject to a glory seeking exercise in which most politicians tried to convince us that they are the greatest. Far too often the message was: give us the power and we will make for you a literal heaven on earth.

In 1934 the English author and poet Rudyard Kipling, penned the following. It should be in large type on the office walls of all our politicians and bureaucrats.

The title "Non Nobis Domine" literally means "not ours the glory, but Thine O Lord."

Non Nobis Domine

(Written for the Pageant of Parliament 1934)

by Rudyard Kipling

Non nobis Domine!
Not unto us, O Lord,
The Praise of Glory be
Of any deed or word,
For in Thy Judgement lies
To crown or bring to nought
All knowledge or device
That Man has reached or wrought.

And we confess our blame-
How all too high we hold
That noise which men call fame,
The dross that men call gold.
For these we undergo
Our hot and Godless days,
But in our hearts we know
Not unto us the Praise.

O Power by Whom we live-
Creator, Judge, and Friend,
Upholdingly forgive
Nor fail us at the end.
But grant us well to see
In all our piteous ways-
Non nobis Domine
Not unto us the Praise.

MARBURG JOTTINGS

Activities continue apace at Marburg. Including a carload from the Darling Downs, 20 young people held a weekend holiday camp at North Stradbroke Island, a popular resort catering for swimming, hiking, fishing, and a commando style high rope course.

Informative and serious discussion groups examined subjects like “absolute truth” and how a Christian should be discerning and objective in the choice of literature and TV.

Marburg’s energetic Pastor Mark Hampel, who led the discussion groups, said the weekend was most invigorating, constructive and enjoyed by all.

YOUTH MEETING FRIDAY 26 NOVEMBER

The last meeting of the Parish Youth for the year will be held in the Church Hall commencing at 7.00pm. Guest speakers from the Bible based organisation Answers

in Genesis will give a presentation on Creation Science. This promises to be an exceptional and interesting night.

Pastor Hampel said that this meeting is being advertised in the Marburg District and invitations have been extended to the wider community. Anybody who is in driving range of Marburg is encouraged to get there.

CONFIRMATION

A recent Confirmation Service was the cause for rejoicing when seven adults were confirmed. Four are now members of the Minden congregation and three at Marburg. Trinity Church hall was the scene of a welcoming gathering over a friendly “cuppa and goodies.”

Newsletter continues to receive requests from people wishing to be added to our mailing list. Please, if you have friends or family who would like to receive Newsletter, by all means contact the editor at the address below.

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 **new** address below.

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Newsletter would like to wish all our readers a safe and joyous Christmas, as we remember the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

May the joyous thoughts of this season fill our hearts and minds with comfort and peace.