

Australian Hymn Book

Another bad decision in Melbourne LCA convention, 1997 was to approve the forthcoming Australian Hymn Book II “for judicious use.” It has been claimed that theologically 99 per cent of the hymns in it are good, though that figure seems somewhat specious. The Worship Commission has promised to write a critique, which will point out doctrinal deficiencies of some hymns. What Christians believe is reflected in the hymns in which they praise God. However, that is only one part of the equation.

For many who love the precious Lutheran chorales, which have had played a time-tested, wonderful role in supporting and preserving faith and life, a much lower proportion of them in the Australian Hymn Book 11 is a decided disadvantage.

However, there is a third, and more insidious danger, encouragement to more unionistic worship. If Lutherans are using the same hymnbook as other churches in the ecumenical mould are, people will more and more attend the nearest convenient church of whatever denomination that uses the same hymnbook as a suitable place of worship. The Anglican and Reformed churches will continue to encourage them to commune there as well, and confessional consciousness, and worship that is doctrinally right, with the elements in the service that Lutherans rightly regard as essential, because they offer, convey, and seal the forgiveness of sins, will be absent. This may well prove to be as much a disaster as members of the Old Lutherans faced in Prussia in the first half of the nineteenth century, when King Friedrich Wilhelm III legislated for a common liturgy book (called an “Agenda”) for Lutherans and Reformed. It used a compromise formulation for the distribution of the Lord’s Supper. It did not say, “*This is My body*”, etc., but “*Jesus says, ‘This is My body’*” and left it to both groups of worshippers to interpret His words as they saw fit. Many of the first Lutherans to emigrate to Australia and to Perry County, Missouri, left their homes, country, language, and culture, out of the difficult decision to do what was necessary to preserve their faith in its purity for themselves and for their children. In 1988, at the time of the 150th anniversary of that momentous year, 1838, a certain General President of the LCA expressed the opinion that Pastors Kavel and Fritsche were separatists, and should have remained in Prussia in the Union Church. We may well suggest that as time goes by more and more members of the LCA will acquiesce in his assessment.