

Blessings by Clergy

The Adelaide "Advertiser" reported (15 Nov. 97) that more than 400 people from 20 different religious denominations and church groups met for breakfast at Adelaide Football Park. The meeting was organised in preparation for the Festival SA with Mr Franklin Graham. He is the son of Billy Graham, and he will speak at the festival in Adelaide from 30 January to 1 February 1998. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in the USA will sponsor the festival.

The chairman for the Reference Group for the festival, the Reverend David Paech, the SA and NT District President of the LCA, said that the purpose of the festival would be to proclaim "God's good news in Christ for the world." Pastor Paech said that the festival would involve various events, including large public rallies and a youth night. The festival is expected to attract 75,000 people. The purpose of this breakfast meeting was to bless the football ground for the coming occasion. The "Advertiser" had an accompanying photograph with leaders of various churches with hands raised, performing an act of blessing of the turf of Football Park.

There are two aspects to this that warrant comment. One is the thoroughly ecumenical nature of the exercise, and the assumption that the more churches of different denominations are involved in the blessing exercise, the more effective it will be. That is not the biblical attitude to the confession of the truth. Compare Galatians 1:8-9.

The second comment is the foolish notion about who blesses, and how. Clergymen have no indelible quality that gives a blessing from them special potency. During the Middle Ages various acts of blessing developed, baptismal fonts, baptismal water, bells, and so on. That has carried over into the use of "holy water" and so on. According to Jewish usage, the Word of God and prayer sanctifies things. Paul also wrote: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (1 Tm 4:4-5). If a Christian prayerfully uses anything, including the food at his mealtime, all he has to do is thank God for it. He does not have to call in a clergyman, or the leader of a denomination, or the leaders of twenty denominations. If a child has a pet and thinks it will do better if it is blessed, let him simply thank God for it, and it is done. He doesn't need the president of the church to do it!

There is something to be said for the Jewish form of prayers. They characteristically began with "Blessed are You, O Lord..." Even the Pharisee in the temple began his prayer with the formula, "God, I thank You..." but unfortunately the rest of his prayer was nothing by boasting about himself. In other words, Jewish people praised God as the Giver, rather than acting as if one person were bestowing some kind of special quality on the thing blessed. When we say, "Let this food to us be blessed" we should remember that we are essentially praising God the Giver, not doing something to the food. We "sanctify it", we "bless it", setting it apart by the word of God and prayer.