



THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

January 2021

"Amen and Awoman"

The prayer used for the opening of the 117th congress in the United States on Sunday the 3rd of January ended with the words, "Amen and awoman." Yes, you read it correctly. The final words read by Emanuel Cleaver, the Democratic U.S. Representative from Missouri, a Methodist pastor of more than three and a half decades, finished the first daily congressional prayer of the new session with the words "amen and awoman" on Sunday. "And dare I ask, oh Lord, peace even in this chamber now and evermore," Cleaver said while serving as guest House chaplain. "We ask it in the name of the monotheistic god, Brahma, and god known by many names by many different faiths. Amen and awoman."

Apart from the fact that this prayer is addressed to false gods, the word "Amen" from the Koine Greek is indeclinable because it is a transliteration from the ancient Hebrew word "Aman." And in the Hebrew language, "Aman" is not gendered. The Hebrew "Aman" is related to the verb "to believe" and the noun "faith." Thus to say, both "Amen" and "Awoman" at the end of prayer is not only grammatically foolish (since no gender is implied in the word "amen") but it is also academically dumb and destroys the blessing of the word "Amen." The word "Amen" is a unifying word of assurance, not a tool to be used for politically correct virtual signalling.

Such foolishness reminds me of the words of God: *"The tongues of wise people will make knowledge successful, but the mouths of fools will allow folly to gush forth"* (Proverbs 15:2).

The Need to be as Shrewd as Snakes

If you want to understand politics and leadership, there are two simple words that capture it all - power and control.

Now, obviously, this is the negative side of politics and leadership, for as you know, good leaders go the way of servanthood and suffering for those whom they lead. But those who let the old Adam have its way? Well, with them, it is easy to spot - power and control.

Take, for instance, King Herod. When he heard from the Wise Men that a child had been born - a

Child that was the King of the Jews, King Herod freaked out. He freaked out because if Jesus was the King of the Jews, then that meant a loss of power and control for Herod.

And so, as you know, King Herod went the way of protecting King Herod. He went the way of protecting his power and control. So, when he was visited by the Wise Men from the East, King Herod pretended to be just as pious and devout as they were. He said to the Wise Men, *"Go and search carefully for the Child and, when you find Him, report to me, that I too may go and worship Him!"* (Matt. 2:8). Yeah, right - spoken like a crooked politician! King Herod had no interest in laying down his power and control. Instead, he wanted to know precisely where this Child was so that he could kill the Child.

Later on in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says to His disciples, to *"be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves"* (Matt. 10:16). In other words, we Christians are called to be upright and without bitterness. We are not to be the ones creating chaos in this world through manipulation, deceit, and bloodshed. We are to be as inoffensive and simple as possible, not calling attention to ourselves. We are to be as innocent as the doves. However, keep in mind that this does not mean that we Christians should be foolish and naïve. Frankly, too often, we Christians are naïve and obtuse to the problems in the world.

Sure the 8th Commandment calls us to put the best construction on everyone around us; however, the 8th Commandment does not mean that we are to be dumb as a doorpost - naïve to the dangers and deceit around us. Putting the best construction on someone is simply that - putting the best construction on them. But again, this does not mean that we are to be fools. And so, this is why Jesus calls us Christians to be as shrewd as a snake. Keep in mind that snakes are aware of their surroundings. They know when to retreat into their shelters to protect their head from being cut off. They know how to move through the scrub with silence, and so, we Christians are called by Jesus to be shrewd to the realities of life. We are called to be diligently aware of the threats around us. We are to be aware of the old Adam in others.

The Wise Men were warned in a dream about Herod's thirst for power and control - that he was

not so pious after all, and so, being shrewd as snakes, the Wise Men did not return home to the East by stopping by to say goodbye to King Herod. They did not report the identity and location of the Christ-child to King Herod as they swung by Herod's palace to pick up warm homemade cookies for their road trip home. No, they left for their own country by another road.

To the point, everyone knew how King Herod operated. When Jesus was born, not only did Herod freak out, but the people did too, for they knew that Herod was capable of terrible things. They knew that his wrath could pour out on everyone.

This is why we pray for our leaders and politicians. We know that the road breaks two different ways for those in leadership. Either our leaders go the way of servanthood and suffering (doing what is right for those they lead), or they go the way of power and control (doing what is best for themselves).

Since you and I are to be innocent as doves and shrewd as snakes, we are fully aware that the old Adam often gets the best of those in leadership. We know that the thirst for power and control is so big that the threat of losing power and control can do wicked things in the minds of leaders. For example, when Herod realised that the Wise Men were shrewd as snakes and evaded him, he was enraged. Now, Herod was not a little upset, but he was filled with boiling blood so that his wrath exploded everywhere. *"He sent some men, and they killed all the boys in Bethlehem and in all the districts around it who were two years old and under"* (Matt. 2:16).

This is the danger of being in leadership. Once the appetite for power and control are satisfied, corrupt leaders will go to any length to keep their power and control - even by inflicting death upon others. What this all means is that you and I must repent of the many times that we fail to be shrewd as snakes with respect to those in leadership. This world that we live in is not a pleasant walk on a beach but a vale of tears where mankind is infected with depravity and hatred of the Gospel. We must repent of being foolish and naïve. We are called to put the best construction on our leaders while also honouring them according to the 4th Commandment but not at the expense of failing to be shrewd as snakes. We must always pay attention, to be cunning as a

snake - awake and aware of the times when those in leadership go the way of power and control instead of servanthood and suffering.

But we also need to repent of the many times that we too go the way of power and control. Why? Because the thirst for power and control is not exclusive with leaders, but it is a part of all of us, for we love to build and uphold our little kingdoms. As it goes with Herod, it goes with sinners like you and me. We love to put ourselves first and subordinate others underneath us. Our sin corrupts us, and we thirst for power, control, greed, and selfishness, thinking that these things supposedly help build our little empires. But in the end, our little empires do not last. We can't take our little thrones to our graves. And regardless how powerful we are in life, we all end up six-feet under the ground together. Indeed, it is easy to let our old Adam have its way and for us to try and enhance our thrones and kingdoms by stomping on others to keep power and control. But in the end, when we do this, we not only hurt everyone else around us, but we damn ourselves to the pits of hell.

Just think if the Lord had acted this way. That Christmas long ago, "God could have come with terrible power and slain Herod and all like him. But if He [slaughtered] everyone prepared to put themselves first, there would be none of us left. [Therefore, the Lord] came the way of love, which knows that we are not made better by force... Force deals only with the outside of a person. [However,] when God came [He] came to save us from sin. [He came to save us from ourselves. He came to save us from our love for power and control. And as He came to save us,] He used no force but love - love that brought Him to a stinking stable and a cruel cross."¹

Jesus did not put Himself first. He did not seek power and control for Himself. He was there for us. His whole life was such action of love (servanthood and sacrifice for you and me). He lived the life that is expected of us, and He died the death that was coming to us for our sin. He did this to be our servant. He did this to be our sacrifice. He did this to give us His kingdom. He

¹ Norman Nagel, *Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel: From Valparaiso to St. Louis*, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 326-327.

did this to strengthen us by His power. He did this to possess us and keep us steadfast in His might.

Certainty in Christ

Our heavenly Father is pleased when a Christian is absolutely certain of His love and forgiveness now, certain of eternal life with Him upon death and certain of a bodily resurrection like Christ's own at the Last Day. In the face of all the bad stuff happening to him at the hands of people and of God, Job confesses with absolute certainty: ²³ *"Therefore, I wish that my words were written! I wish that they were inscribed on a scroll! ²⁴ I wish that they were engraved for ever on rock with a stylus of iron and lead! ²⁵ I myself know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last He will stand on the dust. ²⁶ After this, my skin will surround this body, and from my flesh I shall see God. ²⁷ I myself shall see Him for myself. My own eyes will see and not as a stranger."*

There are many ways we can describe this Christian certainty, and it may be summarised in the Six Chief Parts of Martin Luther's Small Catechism (SC).

① Ten Commandments.

The Law is given to all. Its chief purpose is to drive us to repentance. It is given, says St. Paul, *"We know that, whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. Therefore, no human being will be justified in His sight by doing what the Law says. For through the Law comes the recognition of sin"* (Rom. 3:19-20). Christ has come for sinners. You'd better be one. There's no grey here. The Law condemns because its demands are not met by us. The Law drives us to Jesus, who met all its demands and died to put its punishments to death.

② The Creed.

The First Article (Creation) teaches that this world and its inhabitants are God's precious creation and creatures. It is certain. Our heavenly Father is the source of all that we are, have and enjoy. The Second Article (Redemption) teaches with all biblical certainty that Christ "has redeemed me ... not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death"

(SC, Second Article; See 1 Peter 1:19). My salvation is as certain as Jesus' conception, birth, life, suffering, death, burial and resurrection. The deed was done already 2,000 years ago. The Third Article (Sanctification) teaches us, "I believe that I cannot ... believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel" (SC, Third Article). My salvation is certain because it's not won by me, not worked by me, not decided by me, not preserved by me. It's all God's working, beginning to end. It's an *"an inheritance that cannot be destroyed or defiled and never fades away and which God has reserved for you in heaven. You are protected by God's power through faith, until you come to the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Peter 1:4-5).

③ Lord's Prayer.

Jesus promised His apostles, *"I shall also do whatever you ask in My name"* (John 14:13). Jesus invites us to pray to Him: *"Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden, and I shall give you rest!"* (Matt. 11:28). Jesus teaches us the very words to pray in the Lord's Prayer: *"Our Father who art in heaven"* (See Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). *"With these words, God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence [certainty!] we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father"* (SC, Lord's Prayer Introduction).

④ Baptism.

By being baptised, Jesus put Himself into Baptism. Jesus mandated Baptism, saying that through Baptism, disciples are made of all nations (Matt. 28:19). He also taught, *"Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved"* (Mark 16:16). The apostles repeatedly taught that Baptism is a saving act, for it connects us with Christ's death, burial and His resurrection (Col. 2:6-15; Rom. 6). *"He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit"* (SC, Baptism 3; See Titus 3:5-8). Baptism IS the forgiveness of sins. Baptism IS justification. Baptism IS the Gospel. And it's certain.

⑤ Confession and Absolution.

Why do we confess our sin at the beginning of the church service and receive absolution from our pastor “in the stead and by the command of” Christ? Why do we sometimes speak with our pastor about challenges in our lives and request in those circumstances that he take us through the order for individual confession and absolution? Because Jesus mandated it. “*He breathed on [His disciples] and said to them ... ‘If you forgive any people’s sins, they have been forgiven’*” (John 20:22–23). Jesus said it. Jesus gave it. Faith receives it. It is the Gospel. It is certain. In fact, “this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself” (SC, Confession). It’s also meant to open our lips to speak the Gospel of forgiveness to those in our lives.

⑥ The Lord’s Supper.

The Lord gives His Gospel to us in manifold ways. Salvation was earned on the cross and is distributed by the proclaimed Word of the Gospel, Absolution, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Jesus says, “Take, eat; this is My body ... Drink of it, all of you; this cup is ... My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” (SC, Sacrament of the Altar). (Those who assert that “this is My body” actually means “this is not really My body” forever have the burden of explaining why Jesus did not mean what He said.) Jesus’ words are clear and very certain. We receive the gift believing Christ’s words. And it is absolutely certain.

I KNOW that my Redeemer lives. He has given all the above and multitudes more so that I may be absolutely certain that I am His baptised child now, and I shall enjoy the resurrection of my flesh, with Him and all the saints, into eternity.

From the Pastor

The AELC has been in existence for over 20 years now, but when was the last time you read our *Statement of Faith*? Perhaps you have never read it from cover to cover. Now is a good time. If you don’t have a copy of the latest edition (updated July 2019), please ask pastor for a copy.

You should have all received a copy of the service times calendar by now. Again, ask pastor for a copy if you haven’t. The calendar has been

mapped out up to Easter. It is straight forward, but Downs members, please note that our mid-week Lenten services will be held on Thursday nights this year. And Marburg members, please note your Maundy Thursday service will be held on the day before, on Wednesday. This is the only way we can accommodate HC services for this day.

There will be no Bible Studies held on the Downs till after Easter, but they are set to resume mid-week at Lowood in February on a date yet to be decided. Men’s Fellowship and the Women’s Guild will also resume in February.

Visitations have resumed, and I shall once again be working on a rotational basis, one week above the range, the next week below. If you know of anyone who isn’t receiving a visit, but would appreciate one, please let pastor know so he can add them to his roster. Thursdays and Fridays are his usual visiting days, and of course, you are always welcome to call in for a visit at pastor’s place or give him a call anytime.

Remember, if you are having a hard time or need a bit of encouragement during our journey through this world, then know this: God tells you that already in eternity before this world was created, He chose you, personally and individually, as His own. “*From the beginning* God has chosen you for salvation by the Spirit’s making you holy and by faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). “*For before He made the world*, His love led Him to choose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight” (Eph. 1:4). Think of it! Before we were formed in our mother’s womb, before we had opened our eyes upon this world, in fact, before there was a world, God knew us and chose us as His very own. What deep concern God has shown for us!

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Weekly sermons and bulletins are available at www.aelc.org.au