

## Teaching Scripture

*By Rev. Mike Semmler, Lutheran Church of Australia*

How are we hearing Scripture? That is the question being addressed by the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) as it deliberates on many issues of teaching challenging the Church.

The LCA is returning to an approach which brought two former synods together in 1966. Largely at the instigation of the laity the pastors, whose call it is to speak both to and for the Church on matters of teaching and confession, were sent to discuss the issues in which there were obvious disagreements. In twos and threes theologians returned to the Church with the areas of agreement as stated in the Thesis of Agreement of the Lutheran Church of Australia for the convention of synod (one third pastors – two thirds laity) to stand together and celebrate consensus as a new Church began ([www.lca.org.au](http://www.lca.org.au)).

Twice now within a decade (2000 and 2006) without much noticeable shift the convention of synod has not accepted that the ordaining of women is permissible.

It is obvious that the matters of exegesis and hermeneutics are basic to the discussion. What hermeneutical approaches are acceptable as Lutherans in a confessional Church? The meaning of consensus is also under discussion.

The LCA is looking to re-establish the process in seeking confessional consensus on teaching and making statements on questions facing it now and in the future.

As part of this process a hermeneutics symposium will be convened on 13-15 October 2011 with theologians outside of the LCA presenting and responding.

The three areas to be addressed are:

### 1. Theological Hermeneutics

How does the evangelical Lutheran church derive its practice from the Scriptures in issues such as infant communion, exorcism/the ministry of deliverance, the office of president/bishop, the ordination of women, the diaconate, and the blessing of same sex unions?

Possible topics for consideration:

What is the role of dominical and apostolic instructions as mandates for what is done in the church?

What is the role of Tradition (the rule of faith/the creeds, the liturgy, and the Lutheran confessions) in establishing and confirming church practices?

What is the role, status, and legitimacy of inference from biblical teaching in establishing church practices? Is there a hierarchy of inferences? Can inferences (e.g. from Galatians 3:28) be binding on practice?

How do more recent exegetical approaches (e.g. rhetorical analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis; reader response) help in critiquing and clarifying texts for their applicability to church practices?

## 2. Scripture and context/culture

The revelation contained in the Scriptures has been given in specific historical, geographical, cultural and social settings.

This raises the following possible topics for discussion:

-How are we to determine when a specific setting limits the meaning and application of a passage of Scripture and when application is not limited to the original context; a test case being St Paul's words on the behavior of women in worship in 1 Corinthians?

-Since all scriptural interpretation is contextual and cannot be undertaken without presuppositions, how do we avoid the danger of reading into the Scriptures the agendas and assumptions of our own context?

## 3. The law—gospel distinction and the interpretation of Scripture

Questions and topics that may be considered:

-How are we to assess Pelikan's statement that the *doctrina evangelii* (note the singular) in Augsburg Confession, Article 7, is the one and only doctrine in the Christian faith, according to the AC, and that this *doctrina* (teaching) is the *evangelium*, the good news of the gospel?

-Can the law—gospel distinction be legitimately used as a critical principle in Lutheran theology, or is it intended only as a homiletical and didactic principle?

-Are the hermeneutical principles that undergird the argument in favour of the ordination of women necessarily the same as those deployed to justify the ordination and blessing of same sex couples?

Church Presidents, Educational Staff of Australian Lutheran College, the members of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, as well as a select group of theologians not previously involved in the ordination discussion, but who have been asked to look at the issue afresh, and a number of pastors will be joined by guests from many parts of the Lutheran world, including partner Churches in SE Asia and Papua New Guinea as well as Lutheran Church—Canada which has a special relationship with the LCA.

This event will give the LCA exposure to theological opinions beyond its own bounds. It will be a starting point to deal biblically with its approach to the challenges of a rapidly changing society.

The symposium will be attended by some younger theologians of the Church who will take the LCA into the future and will also help model a process for partner churches in SE Asia facing issues in their contexts.

## **Indicating a Problem: Burn-out Among Pastors**

*By Rev. Hans-Jörg Voigt, Chairman of the ILC*

This article arises out of a series of lectures presented in the area of Practical Theology/Pastoral Care as part of the vicarage training programme at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Oberursel/Germany.

## 1. The Situation at the Outset

The SELK church leadership retreat (Kirchenleitung) in December 2009 discussed at length the illnesses among pastors in SELK that can generally be summarized by the key word “burn-out syndrome”. About ten percent of the Ministerium of SELK are in some way affected by this symptom.

The possible causes seem to be as many and varied as the affected pastors, their families and parishes. Causes directly common to all cases cannot immediately be identified. Pastors in large parishes are affected where exorbitant demands are recognizable. But also pastors in smaller congregations are affected where such demands are not at once obvious. Areas of conflict in the congregation can be the cause, but also problems in the family. It would therefore be helpful if our churches would continuously deal with the kind of view the pastor has of his own position and profession, so that certain “illusions” about his position and “disappointments” connected therewith may lead to additional reflection and exchange amongst us, but also to remind ourselves about what is really the basis for our being pastors of the church.

## 2. Biblical Foundation

The comments the Apostle Paul made to his students Timothy and Titus should determine our view of the Pastoral Office.

The Apostle writes to his student: “Since a bishop is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (Titus 1:7-9) These admonitions are valid to this very day. And their true relevance can easily be recognized when you for a moment imagine just the opposite – over-bearing, quick-tempered, given to drunkenness, violent, etc. The talk here is of personal attributes and characteristics that are more or less part of the pastor’s professional outlook.

He is to be an example to his flock (Titus 1:7-9) and should be well spoken of by those not in the church (I Tim. 3:7). This points to the public nature of the Office, which is no doubt deliberate and necessary for the public proclamation of the Gospel of the cross of Christ.

This being an example can become a difficult burden to bear and the public nature of the Office can weigh heavily.

For instance, if the marriage of a pastor fails it does not happen secretly, but somehow touches all of the things he’s involved with.

As confessional Lutheran churches we necessarily need to come back to this starting point.

## 3. The Pastoral Office as a Matter of Relationships

It lies in the nature of relational vocations that the view of one’s own profession is influenced by the changes experienced by the other people we deal with. So the pastor’s profession as relational vocation is also subjected to the changes affecting prevalent views of family, congregation and society. And such ongoing changes stand in some tension to the unchanging nature of God and his holy Word. The historic comparison with examples of the 19th century demonstrates such changes. This is what Wilhelm Löhe wrote of the pastor’s wife: “She is the pastor’s wedded wife, the mother who raises his children, his help mate to reach and live up to the apostolic demands, that he should “manage his own family well and see

that his children obey him.” (I Tim. 3:4) The more perfectly she does that, being aware of the apostolic injunction I Tim. 3:11 (“their wives are to be women of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything”), the more she is what she is called to be. To prove themselves, to perfect themselves in this, that is her vocation and goal in life.” (Wilhelm Löhe, “Der Evangelische Geistliche”, 1872).

Emancipation, women’s job employment, an understanding of marriage as partnership up to and including divorce as completely normal especially in western society define societal changes at this point, implying possible reassessments in our understanding of Biblical injunctions. This also offers some potential for conflict in these areas between the congregation and the family.

A particular example would be the apparent general acceptance of divorce that stands in blatant contrast to the insolubility of marriage as taught in the Holy Scriptures. The exemplarity of the public character of the Pastor’s Office, in case of divorce demanding at least a transfer to another congregation, is hardly understood anymore.

#### 4. Disappointed Expectations in the Parishes

The way we see ourselves as pastors to a great degree is a reflection on the expressed and unexpressed expectations of the congregations. In 1984 the German theologian Löwe wrote as follows: “The parishioners that a pastor is dealing with put him in a position where, because he is needed by others, it is worthwhile to be. His parishioners define the Office of the Pastor to a greater degree than any scrupulous reflections of our own ego, and certainly more than the constantly changing views of momentarily fashionable theologies. The pastor is what Christian people expect, require and demand of him” (Pfarrer vor 100 Jahren und heute, 1984).

So every pastor, whether he wants to or not, is what his parishioners expect of him. And in my opinion it is disappointed expectations and the resulting lack of appreciation that are some of the determining causes for discontent, frustration and in the end they are a major cause for pastoral burn-out.

It would certainly be helpful for pastors and their congregations to engage in regulated discussions about reasonable and unreasonable expectations of one another.

#### 5. Steps to Take in the Future

Constant high demands on the pastor’s workload or frustrations in his vocation must be taken seriously. And it is important that early warning signs of burn-out are recognized and help is offered. Making use of medical and psychotherapeutic assistance is as necessary as talking to brothers in the ministry. The interdisciplinary exchange between theology and medicine has always been most fruitful.

And yet I want to add a critical note to the debates in church and society about the problem of pastoral burn-out. I somehow get the impression that this whole topic causes something of a “transfer effect,” that is like jumping on the bandwagon of a fashionable topic. I would like to plead for a certain amount of sobriety and calmness in the present debate, as seems to be the case when I look at how psychotherapy deals with the problem.

It seems to me especially necessary also constantly to put the positive human aspects of the Call to the Ministry at the centre of our considerations. Let me just mention a few major concepts:

Pastoral versatility: Various sciences and arts flow together in the pastor’s profession. It is enriching to be involved with literature, arts, music and psychology.

Trans-Generational: The pastoral ministry is involved with all age groups. We generally do not deal with one generation only; rather we deal with people from birth to death. This variety helps prevent a permanent one-sidedness that concentrates only on one group. A challenging confirmation class can be followed by a more relaxed ladies' aid meeting with coffee and cake.

Flexibility: Our Ministry enables a great degree of flexibility in the way we carry out our duties.

A Broad Social Network: The pastor's ministry embeds him in a broad social network, due to his involvement in his own congregation and with other parishes.

### **Closing Remark**

If it were humanly possible to continue to develop in the church a climate of appreciation and recognition for part-time and full-time work, then people would be willing in the future to accept a call by the Lord of the Church into this wonderful service, to forgive sins in his name, to preach Law and Gospel, and to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ.

## **Seminary Kicks Off Renovation Project**

*Source: Reporter, Official Newspaper of the LCMS*

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, launched a major renovation project with a brief ceremony March 18 outside its Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus.

Urged by a crowd of students, faculty, staff and others to "tear down this wall," seminary President Dr. Dale A. Meyer used an excavator to knock down a portion of a wall outside the seminary's Koburg-Wartburg dining complex.

The Phase One project includes construction of a new entrance for the complex, a complete renovation and upgrade of the kitchen, renovation of the dining hall, additional space on the third floor of the complex and the addition of meeting spaces on the second floor, relocation of the Re-Sell It Shop and food bank on the lower level, and a new outdoor courtyard.

Additional fire exits and a sprinkler system also will be added, as well as upgrades to the sewer system on that part of the campus.

Funding for the Phase One project was made possible by the seminary's 'How Will They Hear?' campaign, which concluded last year and raised more than \$80 million for financial aid and seminary operations; campus renovations; and the endowment.

"We are most grateful to all those who have assisted the seminary with their gifts to this endeavor," Meyer said. "The benefits to those who use our campus will be many."

A video posted on the seminary's website shows Meyer signing the construction contract and, later, taking part in the Phase One kick-off.

"We are thrilled, I am thrilled, and we have committed ourselves over the years that the Lord gives us, to improve this campus, to bring it up-to-date, to reduce our deferred maintenance and make the infrastructure what is necessary for many years of service in the 21st century," Meyer says in the video,

pen in hand.

“The signing of the contract for the renovation of our dining hall complex is one step in that direction, and it’s a sign that we want our campus community — it is a sign that we want all of you and the church at-large — to know that Concordia Seminary is moving forward.”

To view the video and project plans, including progress reports on the renovation, visit <http://phaseone.csl.edu/>.

## **New President for IELP**

Pastor Genivaldo Agner is the new President of the Portuguese Evangelical Lutheran Church. He took office at the Synod held Sunday, April 10.

Conveying this news to partner churches, Pastor Jonas Flor, the retiring president of IELP his appreciation of their, encouragement and companionship during the 14 years served God as a pastor and 12 years as President of IELP. “The fraternal relationship with you was very important and supporting to serve the Lord with joy in Portugal,” he observed.

## **79th Convention of IELA**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina) (IELA), celebrated its 79th yearly Convention in Santa Elena, Entre Ríos from April 25 to 27. The Assembly gathered under the motto “Share What Live.” Several overtures received the attention of the delegates including: “Human resources for South America” and “Signature of Documents” Relations with the St. Paul Lutheran Church of Montevideo, Uruguay and the Lutheran Hour in Argentina.” Other overtures to pastoral service at the beginning and end of the pastoral career.

Among the visitors were representatives from Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, USA and Lutheran Hour Ministries.

The 128 delegates, pastors and laymen elected one half of the Comisión Directiva (Board of Directors) of IELA. As president was elected Rev. Carlos Nagel, 60 years old, at present pastor of the Lutheran Church in Leandro N. Alem, Misiones. He takes the place of Rev. Edgardo W. Elseser, who served during two terms as president, and according to the Bylaws of IELA couldn't be reelected. As second Vice President was elected Rev. Arturo Truenow; Secretary Mr. Alfredo Meyer, and as treasurer. Carlos Sebenlist. The Comisión Directiva (Board of Directors) is made up, with the above mentioned, the Vice-president Rev. Víctor, Treasurer Rev. em. Juan A. Beckmann, Vice-secretary Mrs. Gloria Eckert.

Five groups of volunteers had gone to Chile to help the church in Chile with spiritual support to the people that had suffered with the earthquake and. They received a diploma of recognition from the church.

## **IELA in Spain**

From May this year, Missionary Rev. Gustavo Omar Lavia will succeed Pastor Walter Raili as missionary in charge of the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina's mission in Spain and will assume the presidency of the Spanish Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELE). Pastor Raili had served the mission for nearly nine years, a period which he describes as "giving the possibility of seeing our Lutheran doctrines bear fruit that the Spirit produced by His Word, and which surely will

continue to produce fruit through His great work in Spain."

## **Vicar Ordained in Dominican Republic**

*Information from Rev. Walter and Ana Ries in Mission blog*

After five years of ministry in the Dominican Republic supported by the LCMS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil and other faithful partners, this year saw the ordination of Vicar Willy Gaspar on March 12 in Las Americas. Vicar Willy is the first Dominican pastor to serve in this growing church. In the same divine service, a protocol document was signed with the Argentinean seminary, committing the establishment of an independent seminary by 2017 for the training of pastors, deacons and deaconesses in the Dominican Republic.

## **Reflections on the East Japan Earthquake**

*The following is from Rev. Masahiro Ando's item on the East Japan Earthquake, Lutheran Church Relief in NRK News No. 2, April 15, 2011*

We reflect on our Lord on the Cross. Hope of salvation can be seen through Christ's suffering. May the Lord's abundant mercy and healing hands touch the people who are affected.

The name of the disaster has been changed at the four Lutheran synods presidents meeting held on April 11. It was decided it shall be called "East Japan Earthquake" which is used widely among Media recently.

### **Volunteer Centre is set up in Sendai**

Please check the following blog for more information about recruitment: [http://lutheran-tonaribito.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post\\_9702.html](http://lutheran-tonaribito.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_9702.html)

Please check for other information the following site: <http://lutheran-tonaribito.blogspot.com/>

If you are interested in volunteer work, please contact Japan Lutheran Church office. We would like to send you necessary documents. And also we will contact the disaster relief centre.

### **Information from East Japan Earthquake relief centre**

*This is quoted from an email dated on April 10:*

May the peace of the Lord be with you.

Rev. Koizumi (Chiba Church Pastor, JELC) who departed Thursday last week, is sent to Sendai and the "Lutheran Volunteer Support Centre – Tonaribito" will be set up tomorrow. (The Japanese word *Tonaribito* means *Neighbor*.) We have received an e-mail from Mr. Nagashima, a member of Sendai Church (JELC), where one of the affected sites is located.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tomorrow will mark one month after dreadful earthquake and tsunami. As a member of a church where one of most damaged areas is located, I would like to greet you.

On that day, I was at my workplace in Tagajo which is a suburb of Sendai City. I learned a couple days later that water surged up to Tagajo Station which is close to my workplace. The stone wall fell before my eyes when I went outside after the Earthquake occurred. I drove back to my house located in Izumi-ku with my colleague who lives at Aoba-ku and a student from Furukawa-shi who came to see the academic records announcement. Having stopped by my home, I took the wheel again and drove towards the direction of Sendai Station to drop off my colleague and find my daughter who was at Sendai station. There was a huge traffic jam on the roads, so I dropped my colleague off on the way and tried contacting my daughter on the narrow street. Finally I was able to get in touch with her and to pick her up. She had walked a couple kilometers in snow and escaped at microbus. A blackout continued about four days after the earthquake. I wrapped myself with my blanket, ate Senbei and listened to news from a transistor radio while in the dark. Probably out of cold and fear of earthquake, I went to bed with my jacket and pants on for several days. While the nearby supermarket was closed, other private shops opened up and sold food to us. A barber shop opened up for washing hair for 500 yen. A sushi restaurant sold 500 yen bentos at the parking space of the hardware store. Everyone helped one another somehow to manage living. However, things were not easy in terms of shortage of food, water and gasoline. I visited volunteer centres and affected sites with people from Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church. The view of these sites was beyond words. Station has an overpass which is the only thing remained. Countryside turns into almost like beach. Containers floated into the beach and so on. Even there were terrible sights; they reminds us of a beautiful Japanese home. People's life was there.

Sendai church started serving as a support centre. Rev. Koizumi from Chiba church has been helping in the setting up of the support centre. We placed tatami mats which were donated at church today after worship. I hope many people would utilize them. Support has two types, urgent support and long-term support. I hope many people would use this support centre in Sendai and carry the burden together with us on the field. Sendai will become hot in a month. Removal of a lot of debris and cleaning up houses which are full of sludge is hastened. Junior and high school, and college students who volunteer will be back to school at the end of this month.

Most of all, we must think about people who are in despair. There are old couples who lost their children, children who lost their parents, people who lost house and job. I can't imagine the anxiety of people who live close to the nuclear power plant. We must pray. What we need the most is your prayers. We are encouraged by the common prayers during worship. It is a grace that we are able to give thanks to our God together, supported by your prayers during this time of difficulty. May God protect you and the work of the Sendai Support centre.

### **Shinji Nagashima, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Sendai Church**

We are receiving a lot of donations from Lutheran Churches overseas. Thank you for your support.

### **Four Lutheran Churches in Japan aimed to raise 31,000,000 yen for our budget**

The total budget will be 250,000,000 yen including support from oversea churches. We would like to ask you for your support.

Mental care will become important from now on. There will be people who won't be able to receive governmental help. There are a lot of people needing financial aid, such as students, elders, people who suffer from this earthquake, and so on. More financial support will be needed continuously for these kinds of support.



### **We have focused on sending supply so far**

This help of sending supply is still needed for probably three months. The ways of support will change. However, transportation that will bring supplies and people is necessary, so transportation of trucks and buses will be continued.

### **What will be needed is mental support**

It will take a long time. On the matter of sending special counselors and education, Luther College is planning to initiate leading this support.

It is necessary to care for children. Luther College made a handbook of the mental care for affected children. The handbook will be published very soon. It is also available at following site:

<http://www.luther.ac.jp/news/110411/index.html>.

Others –

- Care for elders with a disability
- People who are still in fear from the disaster
- People who lost jobs and are in despair
- People who lost their loved ones

### **Direct financial aid will be needed also**

School expenses support to students who lost their parents. There might be people who won't be able to receive public aid. The affected people who came from overseas for work might not be able to receive public aid.

### **People will transition from shelter to temporary housing**

Various supports will be necessary such as to those who will move to temporary housing, to those who can go back to their house, etc.

Public organizations will give material support but delicate mental support is necessary.

This is where we can take part; to be neighbors for those who are in suffering and to be with them will be what we are asked to do.

### **It asks us to do things which we are able to do at our place**

- To participate in volunteer work at affected sites.
- To give donations for support.
- To translate news, information from churches if you are able. Translation will be into English, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, German, French etc. Please contact the office if you are willing.

### **It is also important to share online**

To make the prayer circle spread out by connecting friends overseas.

Please support whatever you can do.

☆☆☆ Let us pray ☆☆☆  
Let us pray for:  
Those who are in suffering  
Those who worry  
Those who do volunteer work  
Those who take part in dangerous work

Information regarding the relief fund is available on the Japan Lutheran Church website both in Japanese and in English. Account information is also available on the website.

Rev. Masahiro Ando

## **ILC Response to the East Japan Earthquake**

Esteemed Mr. President, dear Brother in Christ Yutaka Kumei:

With deep compassion and great sadness we hear of the natural disasters that have struck your Japanese homeland. And with some trepidation we are aware that the danger of nuclear contamination is not over yet.

On behalf of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) I want to express to you the deep sympathy and condolence of our member churches. I write also in the name of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK). At this hour we are thinking of you and of your congregations and of your entire church in our heartfelt prayers. We have already asked all the ILC churches to initiate financial offerings in your behalf. Right now it is likely much too early to inquire about the possibilities for assisting in the great reconstruction effort that you face. Please let us know at a later time how our various churches may be of help to you.

The Lutheran Church knows about God's inscrutable acts that so often are hidden to our human understanding. The question "Why, God?" can have no final answer. This above all lets us direct our eyes to the Man on the Cross, Christ Jesus, who bore on his shoulders all misery and guilt of the world. The tormented and crucified Jesus is our only answer, for "he has borne our grief's and carried our sorrows." And this Saviour will most assuredly show us the way out of the present suffering and darkness, He, the risen and living Lord.

Joined with you in the common confession of our Redeemer and his suffering in our behalf I send you my fraternal greetings!

Hans-Jörg Voigt, Bishop | ILC Chairman

## **News from Asia Ablaze**

*Source: Asia Ablaze, for more information, see [www.asiaablaze.org/newsletter.html](http://www.asiaablaze.org/newsletter.html)*

### **ALEA Conference Planned**

The Asia Lutheran Education Association (ALEA) will hold its fourth international conference on October 21-22, 2011. The conference theme is “Christ, Conscience and Curriculum.” Attendees will experience, share and discuss how schools can more actively and effectively teach and live out the Gospel in their curricula and school programmes in order to make a difference in their students’ lives and communities.

### **CISS in India and China**

This February the Asia Lutheran Education Association (ALEA) helped to coordinate a visit by Dr. Jim and Joanie Koerschen, Head of Concordia International School Shanghai (CISS), to some of the Lutheran schools in the Ambur Synod of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC). The IELC runs some 80 schools in three synods (districts) in India, some dating back close to a century. The immediate purpose of the visit was to explore how CISS could partner with schools in India. ALEA was also able to provide CISS the chance to get a better understanding of the situation of Lutheran schools in India.

Students from CISS also took part in a Yunnan Education Project (YEP) outreach event and traveled to a mountain village in Yunnan province in China. There they held educational outreach activities with more than 700 students from the local middle school. Through different activities, CISS volunteers were able to share basic English skills with the local students.

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