SJT 60(4): 441–457 (2007) Printed in the United Kingdom © 2007 Scottish Journal of Theology Ltd
doi:10.1017/S0036930607003742

Hidden damage and current needs: pulpit and pew in Lutheran Australia

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Abstract

In both world wars, Lutherans of German origin in Australia were used as scapegoats by the government, as that church and its people were regarded as German and therefore a safely bounded object for spite. South Australia, the heartland of Lutheranism, was especially attacked, some pastors and long-settled citizens being interned, restricted and otherwise rejected: actual worship was also affected. The traumatic effects have lasted until now in rural communities such as 'Hope', the subject of long-term anthropological research by the writer. These effects are not merely personal, which are grim enough, but inevitably, in deeply religious communities with limited sacred–secular split, also theological. However, given the understandable yet unacceptable unwillingness of the church to face the past, the consequences are ignored. This article argues that crises, whether natural, the result of war, or of wrong behaviour by church officers, are present in every church context through the past to the contemporary world, as is the tendency to ignore the impact in favour of maintaining the institution. The lasting theological effects on laity and clergy should be acknowledged and acted upon in training and ministry for many years after the events, whether they resulted from the behaviour of one person in a parish or an entire government or empire. This may mean accepting the implications of locality for lived theology.

Background

In maintaining a church's theological understanding of its ministry amid sudden or prolonged crises, congregational needs can become subservient to institutional survival, especially if reflection and reframing come up against doctrine and power. Leaving both the ordained and laity in pain, plastering over the pus, may be the preferred option. Bold assertions – but theological and personal confusion for devout people is an ever-current issue, and one far beyond the safe distance of this case in which the Australian Lutherans of Hope suffered wartime, state-controlled abuse. Ancient is indeed modern, as one Hope resident explained in 1986: 'The younger people have no ideas what it did to us. We don't tell them. We don't like to admit it to ourselves, prefer to forget it. But it hurt so badly. And it still hurts.'

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930607003742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The detail, available for excavation from texts and from memories since 1914, enables a rounded assessment of lay needs and ministerial responses to those crises which, at various times and in varied forms, exist in other churches. The effect on theology and praxis for victims of natural disasters is clear enough, if underestimated: the institutional and individual challenge to Christ-praxis from apartheid, genocide, Nazism and other totalitarianism regimes, to the more banal abuses of sex, alcohol and power by the ordained here in Scotland, as elsewhere, are real and have to be taken seriously *for a very long time* after the event. Whether a church was victim, oppressor or both, to batten down the hatches and carry on as before on the basis that the Word is bigger than the pain may be to collude in the wrong by effectively supporting injustice. I put this so firmly lest what follows be read simplistically as an indictment of Lutheranism or pastoral inadequacy in Australia: it is not.

Certainly there are interesting theological issues in Hope, not least that in a context where clergy *rule* and *know*, the King in Revelations 1:6 may be seen as the Pastor, and Doubt may be taught as the greatest sin, the needs of the laity are not always at the forefront: perhaps concern for their salvation in the next life overrides that for their comfort in this. The Lutheran institution indeed failed to acknowledge and act on the damage to laity and clergy after war was over: yet it too was failed by the state. Trauma impacts on people's living faith, their view of self, others, the past and the future, on their theology and on their church life, and such events, whether natural or human in origin, offer the church a chance to re-evaluate both theological and ministerial shibboleths.

The core of the case

Having indicated that this issue has different faces, represented by an entire institution or a single parish, let me move to the case, the specific history and sociology of twentieth-century Lutheran war experience in South Australia. Lutherans, escaping religious oppression in Prussia, had arrived from various German-speaking territories in and after 1839, three years after British settlement began. Properly, for Lutherans, the newly founded state became their only home, for using their dearly won visa to emigrate from Prussian lands – the initial waves were largely from Prussian-acquired Silesia – had meant giving up that citizenship: they quickly became British. On the whole, and especially in the countryside in the early years, they were approvingly noted in the English-language media for their piety, hard work, frugality and close family ties. The rural Lutheran settlements used German in church and daily life, English being used by tradesmen and taught in the local German-speaking school. Given the deep commitment to Lutheranism, marriage was usually

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endogamous, people marrying into Hope becoming Lutheran. Until the rise of unified Germany after 1871, relations between 'English' and 'German' settlers were consistently positive. However, as Britain and Germany began to vie for position in Europe and Africa, an element of negative comment appeared in the Australian press in support of Britain and against Germany.

During the First World War attempts had been made in the South Australian Parliament to disenfranchise people of German origin, 'consigning to Hell persons of enemy origin . . . including those whose ancestors were from the enemy country'. Reporting 'unpatriotic comments' by certain prominent local Lutherans ensured their internment, usually for the duration of the war. The authorities themselves also picked some off expressly to quieten the local Anglo population. There was a clear element of economic envy in the debates from some quarters, but the focus of loathing was the 'German' church and its pastors, 'the most disloyal section of the Germans in Australia are the Lutheran pastors'.[1] The changing of German place names (some of which had religious significance) to English, the closing of Lutheran schools, the banning of that language in public places, caused serious difficulties for the church. Lutheran membership in Hope dropped from 85 per cent of the population to 77 per cent, less than in the country as a whole. The Anglican church was the main beneficiary, going from 6 per cent of the community in 1901 to 10 per cent in 1921, with an even wider influence resulting from ongoing attendance of Lutheran children at its Sunday School.

Communities such as Hope remained under surveillance after 1918 and when the Second World War began, the abuse resumed, as did internment of local Lutheran citizens and a cluster of Lutheran immigrants with less than ten years' residence. The church was again hit by the banning of preaching or confirmation in German and interning or house arrest of some pastors. The 'security' group, responsible for reporting 'dissidents' to the Adelaide authorities, was locally recruited and largely Anglican, helped by some Hope Lutherans. A resident explained:

> Albie next door managed by telling on everyone and going against us. Still walks around in shorts and long socks like a true Australian. Not that we weren't, but he made it clear he didn't belong here. He'd report anyone he could. He turned against himself, so anti-German. Never spoke a word of it again. If you visit him, never mention the war, or he'll go crazy, because he knows people haven't forgotten.

[1] Both quotes from State Parliament of South Australia, *Hansard*, 1917, p. 952.

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The immediate post-war period saw, by 1946, the return of those interned. The rival Lutheran seminaries in Adelaide were freed of control and services could, where people wished, be held again in German. On the surface, the difficulties were over. A comment made in Parliament about the excessive pressure on certain sections of the population, and the way to normal post-war life was set. Or was it?

Quite apart from Lutheran theology and ecclesiology and the personal trauma, two more problems constrained the resumption of normality. One was the injustice of mainly Lutherans being targeted, and the other the continuation of prejudice. Before voicing Hope people's views of the wars, we must deal with these issues lest we judge the inadequate pastoral response too simplistically. I have mentioned Lutheran citizens being harassed and even interned, rather than German, because the Lutheran church was coterminous with German.[2] As a scapegoat community, Hope could not be bettered. Far from Adelaide, Hope Lutherans in general had no external power-base, and Lutherans no leverage in Australia. And that mattered. In 1940, for example, the Roman Catholic archbishop threatened mass Catholic protest at the interning of German Pallottine mission-priests in West Australia.[3] The Prime Minister ordered their release as offending that church, just as in the First World War, when offending the Irish vote counted and risked too much: offending the Lutheran church risked nothing. Lutherans had once again been persecuted for being Lutheran, a blow from which some barely recovered. Pastors needed to deal with this but, apart from doctrine and clergy-power issues discussed later, the immediate post-war period made engagement for justice even less likely.

The second problem was continued prejudice. In his 1945 book on Germans in South Australia, and in later writing, Charles Price continued wartime propaganda against Lutherans. On their practice of endogamy he writes, 'Doubtless one of their reasons was to preserve the Lutheran faith, but another may well have been the pan-Germanic desire to keep the German blood pure unsullied by intermixture with other stocks'.[4] Australian 'Germans', just as 'unsullied British', were able to marry their own because they were one of the few groups with a relatively even sex ratio throughout the settlement era.[5] His argument that the Lutheran church was rabidly

[2] Italian aliens who were Roman Catholic were interned; Italian Australians rarely. Roman Catholic German Australians in the Clare valley of South Australia were not interned.

[3] R. Thompson, *Religion in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford, 1994), p. 98.

[4] C. Price, *German Settlers in South Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1945), p. 45.

[5] W. D. Borrie, *Italians and Germans in Australia: A Study of Assimilation* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire for Australian National University, 1954), p. 161.

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nationalist relied on speeches by Australian-based German diplomats and consuls in both the late nineteenth century and the inter-war years. Rebuttals from the Lutheran press were common, such as a 1939 editorial making clear that, while synods did strive to keep German language and culture alive, 'these sentiments have nothing to do with Nazism from which we hold ourselves severely aloof as we are Australians having no other flag than the Union Jack'.[6] Whatever the church had written, Price either ignored or reframed.

In such a climate, which lasted in print for at least a decade after hostilities ceased, for the Lutheran church to have spoken out strongly against negative propaganda and wartime abuse could have increased its difficulties and exacerbated tension. Yet were members' needs for affirmation sacrificed to the institution's need to regain stability and respectability? And what of the pastors?

The war for the pastors

Now that the background is set, let us start with four very different pastors discussing the wars effect on ministry or community.

The first, German-born Pastor R, worked in Hope from before the First World War until after the Second. Initially an 'enemy alien', he just avoided internment in the First. He began English services in 1926, the year he was naturalised. Annoyed that his house was searched and a picture confiscated in 1940, he got through the Second World War without major problems. However, he was by no means uninfluenced by the wars, as his pastor son explained in 1990:

> He was always careful, and had little to with other German-born pastors here in the 1930s [placed under house-arrest in 1942]. The main Hope person who reported people to the authorities liked him, which was embarrassing, but it helped. He'd been so careful, starting English services in 1926. He was very angry to be searched again.

What his son ignores is that, at the outset of war, Pastor R ceased to visit Mr W, a German immigrant and his family. My informant in 1988, W's daughter, reports R as telling her parents in November 1939, just after she had been confirmed in October, 'I won't be coming again because I'm afraid I'll be interned if I do'. The woman noted that her parents had been very upset, and repeated the pastor's 'I don't want to come again', during our discussion, laconically explaining, 'Dad was picked up in January 1940: we moved congregations'.

[6] *Lutheran Herald* (21 July 1939), quoted in Price, *German Settlers*, p. 70.

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Pastor K came from a strongly German-speaking locally born family in ethnically mixed northern South Australia. He remembered living through the First World War and was reflecting on the Second and its effects shortly before his death.

> I can sense how they felt here: we felt isolated too, and it wasn't pleasant being called German. But they had it really bad here – my wife is from here – in both wars. You couldn't trust people then, even your neighbour, and that sense of fear comes up again and again. So much suspicion, and never knowing if it would get worse. Some of the present generation can't understand their parents, who didn't talk about it because they felt angry and ashamed. That's another reason why in our church when you say to [his former Hope congregation] 'You are an evangelist, go out and speak', they'll say, 'we are too timid to go out and approach foreigners [English]'. It all left its mark, until now.

Pastor G, born near Hope in an ethnically and religiously more mixed village, remembers being in seminary at the outset of war in 1939.

> There were soldiers with bayonets at each door: they put us into a room while the entire building was searched . . . it was a long time before we got over that. We weren't so much angry as resentful, and a bit ashamed that people should think we were enemy agents. My grandparents were born here: how long do you have to belong? It was a traumatic experience. At least I could go home to X, where there wasn't any trouble: people in Hope had it worse. But in Adelaide it wasn't nice: they'd say things like 'go back to Germany you bloody Nazi Huns'. Yes, it took a while to get over it.

Finally, Pastor P, from a family who used German only in prayer in a non-German rural region. He was 11 in 1939, entering the category of the 'neither child nor adult' which appears to have been badly affected by the hatred. The discussion we had in 1990, long after he left South Australia and during which he called his life schizophrenic, is worth quoting at length:

> As far as my perception was concerned I was Australian. By the time the war started I could vaguely find Germany on the map: but at school I was a bloody Hun. It was horrific: I was Australian, historically more Australian than some of those abusing me. When I went to Adelaide to Seminary [in 1947], it was the same: we were not allowed to be Australian. Every ounce of me rebelled against this, but when anyone asked what I was, I was so brainwashed I'd say 'German'. It seemed safer, more sensible, to say German rather than have them say I wasn't. It's only this last ten years I've deliberately thrown that away, after hearing a Dutch parishioner, with

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> an accent as thick as they come, saying 'I'm an Aussie and I'm proud of that' and I thought, 'bloody hell, what's wrong with me!'. I spent my life pretending, but from that day on I changed.

Four pastors from three different German-linked backgrounds who were variously affected, and who affected others, until today. Socio-political constraints on resolute post-war opposition to earlier injustice have already been reviewed, but there were also internal reasons for the church keeping a low profile. It was busy training new pastors, accepting new immigrants and serving established congregations: Lutheran habits of obedience and loyalty to the state, irrespective of the state's failure to support them, supported the covering over of the abscess.

The war for the laity

So what of wars' effects on the laity, those ordinary workers in the community and objects of the pastors' teaching, preaching and discipline? People who had thought themselves Australian were harassed and jeered at as Huns, as Nazis. One lady (born in 1898) recalled, in 1984, the distant past:

> In the First War, [there was] an English-speaking colleague of my father and every time he passed our church, he'd shout, 'there go the Germans' and worse. You never forget that when it happened as a child, especially when it was someone you knew. In the Second War, you didn't know who you could trust, whether your 'friend' would pass something on. So you didn't talk easily to people. Even [with] your family you were careful.

Did it affect all Hope people equally? Vagaries of personal character and history apart, age did appear to play a part. As one woman explained:

> In the First War, people passing Hope used to jeer at us. My uncle was interned then because he'd been trading in Germany. The hate wasn't so bad in the Second War, *or I didn't notice it so much because I was* 39.

Age indeed affected experience, people who were teenagers in the Second World War being far more deeply traumatised than either children or established adults, as was Pastor P above. Lena, almost 70 and active in church, discussed the past one afternoon in 1986 in her kitchen:

> People of my age were affected by the war. You didn't feel sure of yourself. You should forgive, but . . . You didn't trust people. We didn't tell the young people . . . didn't like to admit it to ourselves . . . But it hurt so badly. And people are still hurting. It was the war that broke us. I can see it now. Soldiers with bayonets poking into our roof, tapping the walls to

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> see if they were hollow, making holes there, just behind your head, trying to find bibles, Sunday School books in German. Of course they were in German. We had to hide everything, and that in our own home. But many things didn't look German to us. The soldiers pounced on that picture [Peace on Earth] saying it was German. All that, in my own house, the house of my great grandfather.

Her recollections had welled up amid a personal crisis in which she felt misused by someone she had trusted, the trigger for many such episodes of anxiety and ancient grief.

The past in the present for Hope laity

Fifty years on from the end of the Second World War, ninety years on from the First, the memory of rejection in one's own place, of the realistic fear of being reported to the state and national governments by neighbours or family, forms the bed-rock of knowledge of the world, which is not to be trusted. That Hope Lutheranism easily slips into a world-rejecting mode, in this time of waiting to rejoin God, merely underscores such a view. Usually the issue was kept under the carpet, but people sometimes made the pain clear even as they denied it.

The discussion might be rather matter-of-fact. Asking a woman the names of her children in 1984, she noted they'd wanted to call Charles 'Karl', but were still too afraid to use a German name in 1950, 'He's annoyed, as he'd rather have been Karl than Charles, but they don't understand how it was. It won't happen again, will it?' she asked, not entirely rhetorically. Some years later, chatting over an evening glass with Gil, and his sick wife Eunice, the latter explained how her fragile health was being maintained by her German doctor.

> 'He's not German, he's Austrian', said Gil firmly. 'OK', we both shrugged, and the conversation continued. Again she mentioned her German doctor. 'He's not German, he's Austrian', repeated Gil. 'What does it matter where he's from!' we said. His tone switched: 'If another war comes, they'll get us if you've been to a German doctor'.

Another aspect of this inner tension occurred with Willy and Erna in 1987. The ABC was to shoot a television film near Hope, featuring the death in internment of a German migrant who had arrived in 1912, taking the easy option by having an immigrant, not a born citizen, as victim. Willy was angry about the whole enterprise.

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> It was not so bad in the war. Not often did things happen which irritated or offended me. And some of the pastors were very strong with the German. It should be forgotten. If they make the film and people see it, it will revive the hatred and they'll turn on us again. It is best forgotten.

He left the room, shaking with rage and fear, after which his wife Erna remarked:

> I disagree totally. It should be said. It was wrong, what was done to them, and it did damage and should be brought out into the open. Then people can know it properly and then leave it behind.

She herself, brought up in a more mixed community nearby and with an English mother, was not especially bothered by the issue for herself but was fully aware of the problems Willy had had, with two interned relatives and a lifetime in Hope.

People born after the war have also imbibed the lessons thoroughly, as one successful man explained. His father was suspected of being an 'alien sympathiser', indeed towards the end of the war, the year John himself was born, he got all 'German' items out of the house after being quietly advised he was next for internment. The son admits he has been and still is easily affected by his father's experience and teaching:

> My father would always say 'don't trust people, especially anyone outside Hope' and I have to tell myself sometimes, 'Relax, they're not coming to get you'. And yes, I think that's behind quite a few Lutherans here no longer having the push the old ones had.

That Hope was especially picked out for opprobrium and oppression has already been mentioned. A 1990 comment by a devout Lutheran man, who arrived in town shortly after the war, picks up that theme, and its consequences, sharply.

> They almost have an inferiority complex here: just get along, don't make trouble, don't stand out. When I came here at 13, not having experienced that much antagonism where we came from, that shocked me. And it hurt. It was soon after the war, about 1947, and everyone with a German name was still under . . . Even though my people came here in 1838, that didn't matter. We had uncles and people die in the war, but that didn't matter. They lumped everyone together. As a kid, that hurt. It was a rude shock. People here still apologise for existing, covering everything up, the anger and bitterness and resentment and shame.

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The pastor as leader

Having set out early Lutheran experience and the twentieth-century stigmatisation and abuse suffered by the people of Hope, let me now pick up on the options for ministry once hostilities were officially over, bearing in mind that both the (practical) theology and the socio-political context of that era spoke strongly for the swift girding of the Shepherd's loins with the cloth of institutionally approved doctrine, even if hindsight questions the outcome.

All preaching and 'discipline' is part of ministry, whatever its intention and reception, for the entire group. While one-to-one interaction enables the pastor, if he wishes, to see and react to the other's response, tailoring words to needs to some extent, the teaching of doctrine and discipline for salvation in the next life, embedded in the teaching and preaching of collective ministry, is a blunter tool which can negate individual ministry, especially given the propensity for sermons to lack affirmation for this life. Moreover, where the role of pastor as True Teacher and Good Shepherd is so strong, the collective aspect of pastoral care, unless imbued with the critical 're-framing'[7] twist of the Wise Fool addressing issues of collective injustice and collective misapprehension of gospel, will only avoid sinking into the 'rut of the ruler' by a conscious act of will. Given the pressures for correct doctrine, this takes courage.

We have seen that, in Hope, Lutherans endured external pressures which threatened their civic identity, their religious and in the worst cases, their personal identity, and that pastoral care was inevitably affected by this, from the refusal to visit for fear of internment to controls over language use, insult and denial of self: it did not, however, much affect the preaching and teaching aspect of care. So did external pressure, real and offensively unjust though it was, just exacerbate internal problems resulting from past choices, ecclesial and doctrinal rules? To assess this, we need to deconstruct both the role of pastor and their actions.

I have intimated that pastors in the Australian Lutheran context have been experienced as rather controlling and even authoritarian. This is not an uncommon pattern in Australia's past, the Lutheran pastor, like his confrere in other Australian churches, being in charge with 'almost patriarchal power'[8] . Firm shepherds, they owned their sheep; 'fixed' the election of elders, the better to run the congregation[9] and were furious if any strayed into another

[7] D. Capps, *Re-Framing* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

[8] Borrie, *Italians and Germans*, p. 196.

[9] M. McKernan, *Australian Churches at War, 1914–1918* (Sydney: Catholic Theological Faculty and Australian War Memorial, 1980), p. 21, on the period: '[Protestant] laymen supported what the clergy proposed even in debates on current affairs or

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Lutheran fold. Luther himself gave mixed messages on priesthood,[10] priestly power then being firmly embedded in celebrating the sacrament, preaching, teaching and discipline. It was this last which caused considerable tension, as Luther himself saw, strongly influencing ministry: 'People do not want to be disciplined, but that is the pastor's job.'[11] Discipline befits less the pastoral role of equal as Healer or as Fool, and more the Shepherd as superior.

Indeed the rural Lutheran pastor is still seen, or sees himself, as 'the shepherd of his congregation, who feeds and leads his people . . . A special gift to the rest of the church'.[12] There is a strong institutional demand that the pastor and his family must behave more piously, dress more neatly and be more abstemious than the laity.[13] Indeed they were a near-endogamous class, and any who tried to be less dogmatic were liable to be pushed back into line by other pastors or by those lay persons who demanded clear rules from authoritative teachers. The knowledge that past pastors had lost members (or even their job) after being accused of being doctrinally deviant may induce a certain rationalisation of inactivity. As Pastor S explained:

> I don't like being the shepherd leading obedient silly sheep, but being the shepherd is imposed on you by the congregation, not just your wants and ideas. Being a wounded healer is what I would rather be, because that's the only way I can cut down on the authoritarian role. But it's hard to change things here.

Indeed, learning to change is a slow process, demanding trust and goodwill on both sides, together with a recognition of what the pattern was and is. Moreover, Pastor S did not see that consistently serving as a Wounded Healer

politics . . . Each [Presbyterian] congregation elected elders from among the laymen but the minister chaired the meetings and assigned their work: he was the leader, they were clearly subordinate. The Catholic church did not even give its laity a voice.'

[10] Luther in 1520: 'We are priests, which is much more important than being kings, because ordination enables us to stand before God and plead for others. Indeed, only priests can stand before God and plead' yet in the same year, 'a priest in Christendom is nothing else but an officeholder. As long as he holds office he takes precedence: when he is deposed he becomes a peasant or townsman like anybody else', 'Von der Freiheit eines Christenmensch' in *Martin Luther*, ed. H. Gollwitzer (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1983) and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1970).

[11] Saying of Luther, no. 302 in *Tischrede*, ed. K. Aland (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960).

[12] R. Caemmerer, 'The Pastor at Work', in *The Pastor at Work* (various editors) (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1960), pp. 5, 11.

[13] This demand 'smacks of works-righteousness and not justification by Grace through Faith alone, for it implies a primary purpose of the church is to develop a certain standard of public conduct which the pastor symbolises', W. Horden, *Living by Grace* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 19.

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would have radical implications for the way in which he did his ministry: along with other Hope pastors, he (a pleasant man) was fond of 'pastorally' quoting Hebrews at people going through problems. He would have had to change. There has indeed been some change in the last decade, yet with little thorough and joined-up knowledge, derived from reflecting on the past and its consequences for today, vital when that past was fraught with problems. Four pastors' comments about their approach to crucial issues for their members indicate some confusion:

> There is sin in us all the time, and I put sin down to putting the self first, and I must tell them that because it is true . . . They know all about love so I must tell them about sin . . . but there's a problem in Hope, because people do not understand the Gospel.
> I have no problem with saint and sinner and rely on that a lot in coping with life. But people here have difficulty with it. They are just happy with the sinner bit.
> Changing things in Hope was hard. They've been taught to go down the narrow line, just having faith. If you say, 'you must live your faith', they get muddled, thinking you mean it's about Works, not Faith. I talked a lot about sin because they expected it.
> Older members often say, 'We need the Law, we need to be told. You tell us, Pastor, what to believe'. I tell them they are saints, the Lord forgives them. But they say no, they are sinners. They have endured so much here, and are bitter beneath and cannot get it out . . . What I do about it? I just move on when they say they are sinners not saints as well, because they just don't see it.

Such views reflect solid Lutheran doctrine as taught in that region and in Silesia in previous centuries, where the maintenance of the True Word as inscribed in the Confessions as well as the Bible was controlled both by the church authorities and the Pastors' Fraternal. Yet is it pastorally appropriate to set aside the realisation that members did not understand grace or forgiveness and insist on the abnegation of self, the slough of sin, in a community where such a message may merely intensify inner negativity and desolation among people who had endured such bad times? Lip-service may be given to preachers' awareness of the specific audience, but anxieties about the relation between contextualisation and the salvific value of 'immutable' doctrine still exert a strong control, and not only in Lutheranism.

Some Hope pastors, as those above, were aware of a gap between the teaching and the hearing and (occasionally) tweaked their message a little. Others, totally rejecting 'compromise' as a grave sin, might be seen, in their

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insistence on 'business as usual', as accessories to abuse after the fact, as this 1984 comment indicates:

> They say God sent that flood two years ago [in which some died] and this year because we had been wrong and had not confessed our sins. That's what Pastor Elymas said. I don't know, but it makes sense, doesn't it, because God has to keep us on the right way. And we are sinners through and through.

Did pastors in general not take note of the fact that so many people had been hurt in the past that to continue to insist on people's utter sinfulness, on pride, on God's vengeance, might not be helpful? The reiteration of the message of sin was replicated to a greater or lesser extent in every pastor with whom I spoke between 1984 and 1991 and in most sermons – 'reject pride, be humble, be broken, remember you are lesser than any others' – *despite* the fact that the hearers as a group were not especially proud, not especially independent, indeed as a group had been traumatised.

Why is there such a stress on sin, on law, on the exercise of complete pastoral authority, on the perfection of doctrine and the inadequacy of the listeners? The stalwart practical theology teacher, Janetzki, for many years in the Adelaide Seminary, wrote as he taught: 'The Law constantly accuses us and is God's expression of wrath against us . . . The Law must destruct the person before the Gospel can construct, after the listeners' hearts are opened.'[14] Yet quite apart from the dangers inherent in destructing *any* person in order to rebuild, let alone people whose underlying sense of self in the world has been severely battered, Janetzki seems to assume it is perfectly possible neatly to separate the two activities. Another local Lutheran theologian, who knew Hope but left Australia for the more life-affirming Bavarian church, critiqued such a viewpoint: 'When preachers make a principle of reducing expectant or timid Christians on Sunday mornings to heaps of misery, before reminding them in reproving tones that Christ died for their sins, they are mixing Law and Gospel.'[15]

Reflection on the case

Well taught in doctrine, committed to 'their' people's salvation in faith and damaged themselves, pastors appear to have set aside issues of theodicy and despair in favour of correct doctrine and church order.[16] Yet doctrine and

[14] E. Janetzki, *The Church Teaches* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), p. 17.
[15] F. Hebart, *One in the Gospel* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House 1979), p. 53.
[16] Anxiety and doubt about salvation becomes, writes Joest for Luther, 'unbelief, the refusal to accept God and his promise'. Hope people know this, but the ensuing

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930607003742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

order are already compromised if even one person conflated the pastor with Christ in Revelation 1, one child of God yelled at by the pastor 'to show who is boss', one devout person accepted only their sinfulness, rejecting the balancing saint. Given the belief that Christian life *follows* correct faith, sticking to the seminary last was logical, especially given Luther's (potentially sacerdotal) view that 'The whole life and nature of the church exists in the Word of God':[17] given the fact that *all* faith exists in a specific time and place, it was unfortunate. Moreover, assuming that preaching, theodicy, pastoral care are separate items in the church check-list, and that issues in one 'box' do not spill over into all the others is intellectually simplistic, sociologically naïve and ignores the lived experience of some laity and not a few clergy.

Noting that hindsight easily slides into hubris, let me draw together various strands, theological, sociological, historical, of life in Hope thus far. The post-war need to 'get the show on the road again' amid continued antagonism gave the church little space for reflecting on the continued stress on certain theological issues such as sin, pride, despair – even if the Lutheran acceptance of suffering[18] had led it to reflect. Parts of the doctrinal core either sat ill with people's experience or confirmed the weight of personal and collective wrongdoing. Some existentially crucial areas of stolidly maintained doctrine are of particular interest. The 'fact' that a person's righteousness is 'imputed not imparted and alien to us'[19] is difficult for those who (heretically) assume the soundest evidence of being in a state of grace is happiness,[20] in short supply then and thereafter. 'Being in bondage' to ourselves as long as we refuse to be bonded to a (locally perceived) punishing God does not speak of neighbours who may have hurt us or the state which certainly did. The insistence that a perception of sin as oppressive derived from the failure to emphasise the Law did not help people whose experience of Love was challenged. Regular teaching that hell is the end, for those who are or have become uncertain in their following of God, exacerbated

communication block is unhelpful. See W. Joest, *Dogmatik*, vol. 2, *Der Weg Gottes mit den Menschen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), p. 400.

[17] From 'Ad librum Ambrosii Catharini responsio', 1521, in *Luther's World of Thought*, ed. H. Borkamm (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1965), p. 137. This contrasts sharply with Nouwen's comment that 'The Word of God is always coming into the World'. *Creative Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 40.

[18] 'Luther', in E. Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 11 (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 891.

[19] Alister MacGrath, *Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 115.

[20] Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, p. 658: 'Justification by faith is the key which unlocks the heavenly treasury, and the happiness to which this gives rise is regarded as the only clear proof that the soul is in a state of grace.'

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930607003742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the earthly hell of post-war doubt. In the battle between the hellish future consequences of weak belief, the hellish contemporary consequences of trauma lost out rather badly.

In the light of the elevation of the knowing Lutheran shepherd and submission of unknowing sheep, acting otherwise by critically unpacking the issues was most unlikely. Power issues apart, Lutheran fears of both pietist emotionalism or doctrinal deviation enabled the church to ignore the probability that, for a community coming through trauma, the repetition in teaching and preaching of the negative, without the affirming and love of God for all, and by all, served to engrave the wartime abuse onto each soul. Against such insistent negativity, even the kindliest 'pastoral care' hour can do little beyond the moment. Moreover, ministering care cannot be carefully ring-fenced from teaching and preaching, for the laity are in charge of their own reception of pulpit teaching, not the pastor, and all aspects of priestly performance feed into people's perception of care, not just the segments or words so labelled. Maybe whatever care had been exercised, Hope would still carry hidden grief, suppressed anger, distorted theology. But one thing is sure: the uncertain identity, unsure grace, inner emptiness, is still there like an abscess which begins to seep, if gently excavated, dripping in half-sentences, long, contradictory monologues.

The German aspect of the church in Hope has diminished: all services are in English and some pastors have English names. Boundaries between Lutherans and others at surface levels weaken, orders against collective prayer with non-Lutherans are ignored. Yet there is still a strong sense, and not just in Hope but in the wider Lutheran church in Australia, that commitment to the church, the Word of God, demands the submerging not only of individual interests but also individual justice, if that means washing dirty linen in public. There is still a residual siege mentality.[21]

This, as elsewhere in the world, is a matter for theologians as well as parishioners, for the issue, as I have said from the outset, is far wider than the example chosen, important though that is in its own right. In different clothing it pops up in all churches at some point. How does faith embodied in church, that church which talks of the love of God for all who live in faith (and in some versions for those who do not), cope with injustice meted out by the state towards the people, by the church authorities in supporting the abusing state, by its own abusing ministers, or its own abusing members? How can the church as an institution minister to people, collectively or individually, when such abuse has occurred, without taking its share of responsibility?

[21] In 2004 church employees' behaviour to women and children led to the community chastising *complainants*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930607003742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sweeping untoward events under the carpet, while insisting on doctrinally ordered rules on sin in the face of anxiety, resentment and despair, cannot readily engender that hope, with justice and love, which is faith. Capps, no mean thinker, notes that 'No Christian ethic worthy of the name takes justice any less seriously than love'.[22] Indeed, if love is taken less seriously than sin, and justice than love, sin is prime, grace a yardstick not a fact, and despair the short measure. Contributing to others' living in despair, by insisting on doctrinal perfection in imperfect situations, may achieve for a church *precisely* what it wishes to avoid: faithlessness which is that 'Sickness unto Death'.[23]

In the particular case discussed, and in some other contexts mentioned at the outset of this essay, there was ethnic rivalry, injustice meted out to one segment based on envy and veiled in religion, a struggle for hope amid its earthly removal, the elevation of the pastorate and its rigid adherence to the doctrinally agreed Word of God in sermon and teaching, a setting aside of congregants' needs for the sake of the whole. These are all part of and consequent upon the world in which ministry could focus as much on the sacred cow of the institution as on damaged communities and individuals.

In concluding, let me therefore pick up on the womanist theologian, Orr, who, in insisting that the 'ought' needs to be challenged in a politically creative manner,[24] speaks of the continued need, while maintaining a solid theological and spiritual foundation, for justice in critical times. This need, she points out, may demand a Kuhnian paradigm shift – which surely sends shudders up the spines of doctrine-as-salvation adherents:

> The shifting of the paradigm will mean that [people] must find ways to maintain ways (most especially through support systems) to maintain the dialectic of envisioning, risk-taking, and confronting inequities and injustices, while also being able to be nurturing and compromising when needed. To 'speak the truth in love' remains a difficult task.[25]

Ministry (which is inseparable from theology) which ignores justice colludes in retaining the abscess; layering on plasters is no resolution. Crises, to which churches have been party, or in which churches have suffered, should engender a radical reassessing, risk-taking shift. For the parishioner anywhere, in any parish, pain resulting from the behaviour of pastor or

[22] Donald Capps, *Reframing* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 88.

[23] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (London: Penguin, 1989).

[24] Nouwen wrote of hope and responsibility but, failing to set that in the socio-political and historical frame, offers undemanding baselines; see H. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 80–5.

[25] J. Orr in C. Cozad Neuger, *The Arts of Ministry: Feminist-Womanist Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1998), p. 135.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930607003742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pew-member can be just as faith-threatening as the damage resulting from state-organised oppression.

Given that lived theology embraces both love and doctrinally based faith, let me allow the last word to the seventeeth-century Lutheran, Dinckel. Commenting on the then fashionable tendency for hair-splitting disputes, he writes:

> True *theologia practica* (that is the teaching of faith, love and hope) is relegated to a secondary place and the way is again paved for a *theologia spinosa*, (that is a prickly thorny teaching) which scratches hearts and souls, as happened before Luther[26].

[26] Quoted in Philip Spener, *Pia Desideria* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fortress, 1964).

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