

STANDING FIRM

FAITH AND HOPE
ANCHORED IN
CHRIST JESUS

Issue 1
April 2025



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Theological Editing

Pastor Joshua Muller

Pastor Carl Thiele

Peter Wittwer

Editing and Design

Renea Falkenberg

Karl Jericho

Article Contributors

Josh Ariens

Tim Bayha

Tasmin Bourne

Rev Dr Kirk M Clayton

Karl Jacobson

Pastor Shaun Manning

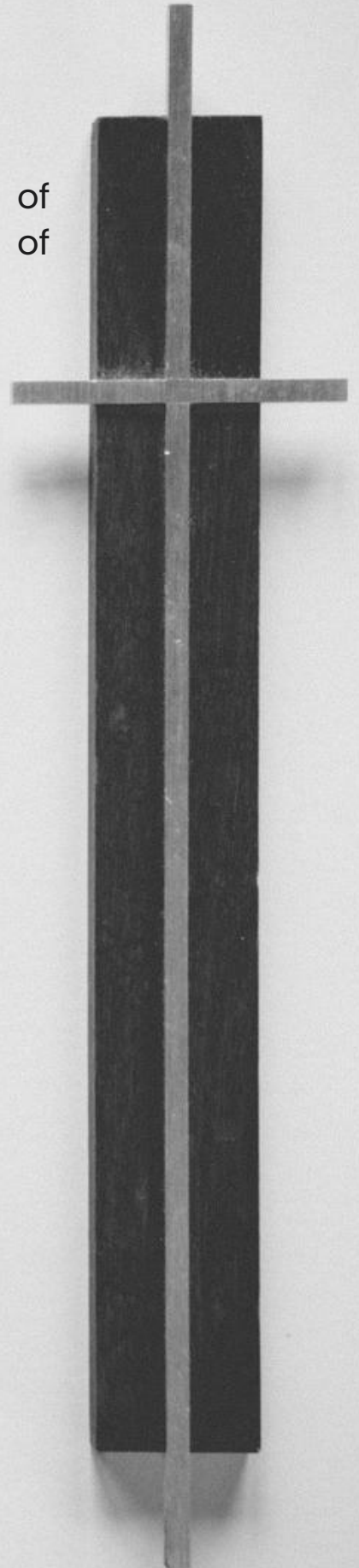
Pastor P. James Noble

Pastor Lee Van Rossen

Pastor Tapani Simojoki

Rev Dr John Stephenson

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller

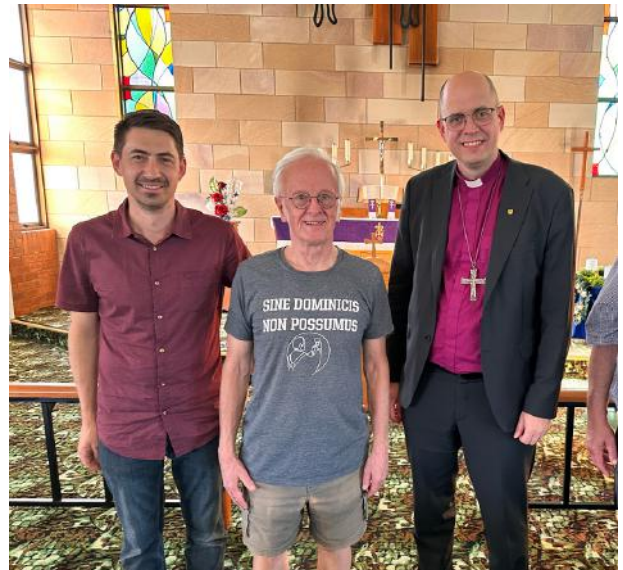


STANDING FIRM

FAITH AND HOPE ANCHORED IN CHRIST JESUS

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Photos by Peter Wittwer

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Letter from the Editor



Greetings and God's richest blessings and welcome to the first edition of Standing Firm.

It has been a privilege and honour to be a part of this project and provide another avenue to share and grow in what it means to confess and be Lutheran.

I have never drifted far from the church during my life, but perhaps always struggled and never really understood or fully appreciated what it all meant at its heart. I would memorise the liturgy, went to Youth Conventions, made friends with many faithful Christians while boarding at "The Sem", attended church weekly, attended a night class or two on denominational differences, but that is where the depth of knowledge tapered off.

After discovering some Lutheran communities online, becoming a fan of "Lutheran Satire", watching videos from pastors like Bryan Wolfmuehler and finding some pre-COVID worship live-streams, some of those things learned at Confirmation, or heard in sermons begun to make sense and fall into place.

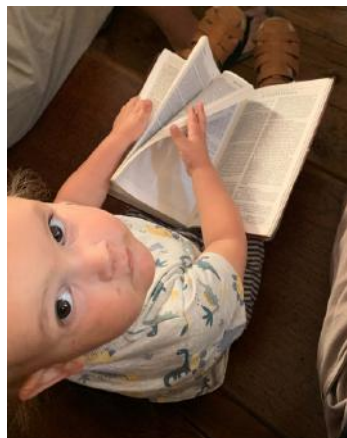
Even though I can't easily grasp the differences between a- and pre-millennialism, or the implications of free-will vs. monergism, I have come to learn if nothing else, that I can hold firm onto the Lord's promises made at my baptism, and when Christ says "is", it really means "is", for the forgiveness of sins and for my salvation in the bread and wine, and that message can be shared to those who are doubting, walked away from their faith, or hearing for the first time.

Attending CWF events, listening to the guest pastors and speakers, I hear messages of faithfulness, joy and hope, which sometimes can be in short supply in our modern world.

Small things in my life bring me joy - listening to my children sing a hymn or recite the Lord's Prayer, watching them flick through the Bible, or using their imagination and recalling the Christmas story using their toys. There is still lots to learn and as a father, husband and occasional lay-reader, lots to share too. But praise to God for the simplicity!

My hope and prayer is this magazine will also bring you that journey of knowledge, hope and peace in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Karl Jericho
Editor



Letter from the CWF Chairman



This magazine has been born out of the desire of having faithful and more in-depth theological content and discussion which unfortunately has been lacking from current publications available to the majority of Lutherans in Australia. Many people over the years have raised concerns to me regarding these publications, but unfortunately their content has continued to become too worldly and focused less on sharing God's Word to build up His flock.

Our endeavour with this magazine is to focus on His Word and building up the faithful. We hope to release 3 magazines per year around major church festive seasons. That, like all things, is in God's hands. Hopefully this issue of our magazine sets the tone of things to come.

God is doing great things within His church, and He has given us many opportunities to come together as Confessional Lutherans to worship together, to listen to His Word, and share the experiences that His faithful followers have endured.

Many of these experiences have been organised or assisted by Creative Word Fellowship (CWF) and more recently also by the newly formed Lutheran Mission – Australia. CWF has had a lot of assistance too, receiving grants and donations that have enabled us to rapidly grow from running a single Speak Lord conference a year, to running a yearly Young Adults Retreat, continuing to invite overseas pastors to speak at various events, and running an overseas tour, all whilst continuing to stock theological resources.

Some of the specific events and speakers CWF have organised over these previous years:

- Pastor Jeffrey Hemmer (USA) spoke at the Lutheran Men of Victoria – Men "Led by God" camp, also joined by Pastor Charles Ferry (Taiwan). Further, Pastor Hemmer spoke at a joint event with Lutherans for Life at Glandore Lutheran Church and at the Men's Shed in Cummins on the Eyre Peninsula.
- Bishop Juhana Pohjola (Finland) and Rev Dr John Stephenson (Canada) spoke at our inaugural Confessing Christ conferences (a collaboration with the now LM-A) hosted in South Australia (Loxton, Naracoorte, Underdale), Victoria (Hamilton) and Queensland (Toowoomba).
- Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller (USA) led us through Romans and the New Testament highlighting the hope that we have in Christ for the 2023 Speak Lord conferences held in SA (Magill) and Victoria (Hamilton)
- Pastor Bryan Kachelmeier (USA) led the Young Adults Retreat through the Old Testament in 2024 along with taking pastors and layworkers through the teaching of Isaiah during the week after in Hamilton.

- Doxology USA came to AUS to help nourish our pastors with well needed spiritual care. We were privileged to welcome Dr Bev Yanke and Rev Dr David Flemming to guide the pastors through this weekend.
- Young Adults world conference tour 2024. I was privileged to lead a small group of Young Adults from SA and Vic over to America to attend the Institute on Liturgy Psalms conference and the Higher Things youth conference, we then went to Germany to attend the Corpus Christi Young Adults conference.
- Pastor Carl Thiele spoke to us about Church Fellowship and how our theology informs our practice at the 2024 Speak Lord conference in Murray Bridge.
- Deaconess Sandra Rhein, Professor of Music Rob Rhein, childhood music educator Rehema Kavugha, and Pastor Jacob Fabich spoke to the Young Adults at this year's 2025 Young Adults Retreat 'Sacred Song – The Voice of God's People' where we explored the richness of Lutheran hymnody and liturgy.
- Concordia Publishing House (CPH) Book deal: This has been a slow burner and something CWF has been actively working on since 2017, this was greatly assisted by Pastor Charles Ferry in Taiwan who connected us to the right people. CPH graciously offered us 40% off and the LCMS assisted in covering the shipping costs in 2023 for a one-off deal.

Other joyous experiences have included –

- A pair that we at CWF affectionately call the 'Podcast Girls' started a monthly podcast for women by women, 'Here She Stands'
- Enjoying each other's company at the now monthly 'Adelaide Confessional Lutheran Gathering' at the Ern Malley pub in Stepney, which has been a great way to get to know and spend time together as an organic means of support and lifting our pastors and laypeople alike.

A labour of love for us at CWF is importing the theological books. We would not be able to offer the books at the low prices without the generous donations of a few which cover the shipping cost of importing these books.



Photo: Conference Tour 2024 – Higher Things Conference

As we publish this magazine, we are at the height of the Easter season. I always look forward to and enjoy the festivities and the fantastic worship that we share together over this period. However I lament the uncertainty and distress currently felt by many due to the events of the previous year in the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), and the worry about expected issues in the year to come. But we must remember that Christ has conquered all and has been raised victorious over sin and the devil.

As confessionals, some of us have left the LCA and joined LM-A, while others have stayed. We continue to pray for the leaders of the LCA as many recent decisions have left people, families, and congregations hurting and distressed.

We pray for wisdom of those involved in the implementation of the Way Forward Project and what was adopted at the 2024 Synod, that they may see and have the courage to conclude, uphold, and confess that “we believe and accept without reservation the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life”, and that a church with two practices cannot stand.

It’s a strange thing, to on the one hand to be distressed and sometimes angry as many of us want the church to remain steadfast in her teachings to hold to the Confessions of the faithful who have gone before us. Yet at the same time for those of us who have left the LCA it’s an exciting time to be a Lutheran. Where we may boldly confess and stand firm. Where we are no longer fighting against an

organisation that we belong to, but are now in a time of enrichment and enjoyable fellowship with new people that all have the same mission and focus as us, to worship and teach faithfully in accordance with God’s Word.

Pray for our leaders, pray for our pastors and their families, pray for our Church Councils and Elders, young and old, new to the faith and those whose Bibles are thoroughly worn from faithful use.

God’s blessings to you and your families and church communities this Easter Season.



Photo: Doxology Halls Gap – Dr. Bev Yanke



Peter Wittwer
CWF Chairman



By Pastor Bryan Wolfmueeller
17 Sept. 2018

I'm convinced of a few things.

1. Theology is an adventure.

It saddens me to no end to see people bored with theology. There is nothing better, more beautiful and full of wonder than God's revealed Word. Theology should go together with "joy" and "delight."

The forgiveness of our sins sets us free from sadness.

2. The Bible is true, good, and beautiful.

Being the words of Jesus (who is the True, the Good, and the Beautiful), the Bible can't be anything else. I'm also convinced, as a subpoint, that what is true is also what is best. In other words, you couldn't imagine or make up something better than what is true, but that sends us off into the woods.)

3. Law and Gospel is a most brilliant light.

Distinguishing between the Law (God's commands) and the Gospel (God's promise of forgiveness in Christ) is like turning on the lights. The Bible comes clear, and comes alive. If you are new around here, this is a short introduction.



Photo: Pastor Bryan Wolfmueeller, Rhodes 2018

THE ADVENTURE OF THEOLOGY

I'm Pastor Bryan Wolfmuehler. Pastor of St Paul and Jesus Deaf Lutheran Churches in Austin, TX.

I've been on a theological journey, starting in Liberal Protestantism, moving through American Evangelicalism, and finding rest in the simplicity of Christ (as confessed and taught by the Lutheran Church).

I've been talking, teaching, and writing about this simplicity of Christ, and most of that stuff ends up here, on this website.

I think we've got something for everyone.

But, before that, the best way to keep in touch is to sign up for my free weekly email called "Wednesday What-Not". I send our all sorts of whacky stuff, things I've enjoyed reading, watching, listening to, tips and tricks I use, etc.



Now, to help you get started, here are some curated links.

Top Blog Posts

- Five Things to Do at the Deathbed of a Loved One
- Lightboard: Law and Gospel
- Liturgical Bootcamp for Evangelicals

Audio, Podcast, Radio

If you are the listening type, we've got lots of audio.

- What-Not, The Podcast
- Issues, Etc.
 - Introducing the Books of the Bible: Isaiah
 - A Biblical View of Conscience

Audio, Podcast, Radio (cont.)

If you are the listening type, we've got lots of audio.

- Sermons
- Luther Sermons

YouTube

If you are a visual learner, we've been goofing around with YouTube.

- Sunday Drive Home
- Grappling, A Bible Study of Philippians
- Lectures
- What-Not
- And a lot more

Books

If you are a reader, we've got stuff for you as well.

- Has American Christianity Failed?
- Everyone's Luther
- Around the Word Classic Reprints

Travel

And, if you really want a theological adventure, come and travel with us. We plan a trip a year, at least. We've been to Germany, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Spain, and we have plans for more. (Click the travel tab to see what's coming up.)

Speaking

The EVENTS page has all the upcoming stuff. It's great to bounce around and see everyone.

Pastor Bryan Wolfmuehler

All of these great links can be found on Pastor Brian Wolfmuehler's website:

<https://wolfmuehler.co/>

This article was originally published on 17 September 2018 on

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Rev. Dr. Kirk Clayton

DEFENDING THE FAITH

THE TIMELESS TRUTH AND
RELIABILITY OF WHAT WE BELIEVE

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SAT 14th + SUN 15th JUNE 2025
ST PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, TANUNDA

*The reliability of scripture and archaeological
support for scripture*

VICTORIA

SAT 21st + SUN 22nd JUNE 2025
GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH, HAMILTON

*The truth of events in the life of Jesus,
the resurrection and events of Acts*

QUEENSLAND

SAT 28th + SUN 29th JUNE 2025
ST JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, COOLANA

Defending against current attacks on Christianity



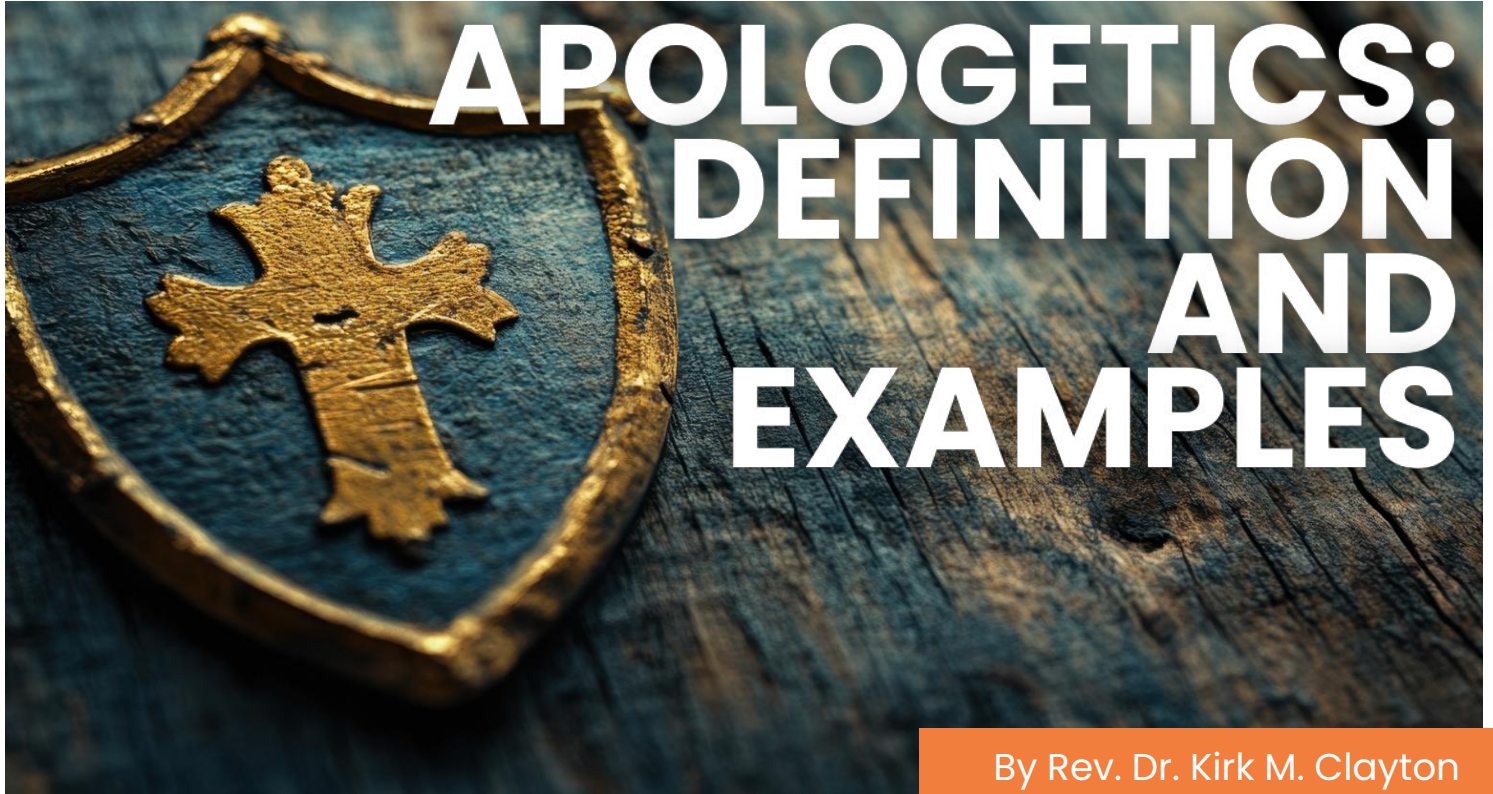
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WHAT ARE APOLOGETICS?



By Rev. Dr. Kirk M. Clayton
April 2025

Introduction and Definition

“Apologetics” is not a commonly used term among many Lutherans. We are very familiar with apologizing, that is, repenting and saying we are sorry for something we have done wrong. However, that is different than apologetics, even though they sound very similar. We know exactly what it means to say we are sorry, to apologize, and to repent. After all, as Lutherans, repentance and dependence on God’s forgiveness are central to our belief. The practice of repentance and forgiveness is so central to Lutheranism that it is even addressed in the very first of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses, nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517 as the initial step in the Lutheran Reformation. Luther wrote that when Jesus called Christians to “repent” He meant that the entire life of a believer should be one of repentance. Yes, as Lutherans, we are very familiar with repentance and apologizing for what we have done wrong. Apologizing is one thing. Apologetics, however, is something rather different.

In fact, apologetics doesn’t mean saying you are sorry for being wrong. It actually is a defense of why you are right. In this way, apologetics and apologizing are almost exact opposites. In the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, when you were accused of something and taken to court, you would make an “apology.” That is, you would make a statement in your own defense. We see an example of this when St. Paul is placed on trial before Felix and again before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice in Acts 24 and 26. At each trial the Bible says St. Paul made his defense. We read that at his trial St. Paul said, “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense” (Acts 24:10 ESV). The word used in Greek for “make my defense” is the word that comes into English as “apologetics.”

WHAT ARE APOLOGETICS?

We see this word used prominently again in 1 Peter 3:15. There we read,

“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect ” (ESV).

Once again the word that is used for “make a defense” is the word that comes into English as “apologetics.” Thus, apologetics is not to admit we are wrong and say that we are sorry, but to say that we are right, and to give an explanation as to why.

Since apologetics traditionally meant making a defense at a trial, it also implies that apologetics is needed when someone challenges Christianity or has a question about Christianity. The wonderful Lutheran lay theologian, Gene Edward Veith, describes apologetics this way. “The word apologetics comes from the Greek word for ‘defense.’...At its heart, apologetics is about defending Christianity from those who attack it.”¹ Similarly the Lutheran apologist, Adam Francisco, writes, “let apologetics be defined as a defense of Christianity over against objections to it.”²

Throughout the 2000 years of the Church’s existence people have raised questions about Christianity and challenged the truth of what Christians believe. Whenever a challenge to the Christian faith arises the need for apologetics also arises. We still face challenges to the Christian faith today. So, while “apologetics” may not be a terribly common word among Lutherans, in the face of the questions people have about Christianity perhaps it should be!

Examples of Apologetics

Based on this understanding of apologetics, let us look briefly at two challenges that Christianity faces and see how well the truth claims of the Church hold up. We will consider challenges to the truth of the Bible and challenges to the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. While the following examples will be short, I hope they give you reassurance that Christianity truly can practice apologetics, that is, make a defense, when needed.

First, we will consider the question of whether the Bible is reliable in what it records. Many scholars today would question whether we can really trust what the Bible says, alleging that we don’t really know the actual words that the Prophets and Apostles wrote down since they were written so many years ago and have gone through so many changes since they were first written down. For example, Dan Barker, a former Evangelical pastor who has since become an outspoken atheist, writes, “I was forced to admit that the bible is not a reliable source of truth: it is unscientific, irrational, contradictory, absurd, unhistorical, uninspiring, and morally unsatisfying.”³ Does Barker’s allegation hold up in court? Well, no.

WHAT ARE APOLOGETICS?

Actually, we have excellent evidence to show that the Bible is a very reliable source of truth. In fact, the Bible has better evidence to support it—by far—than any other ancient document. We have other ancient documents, such as Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars, Tacitus' Annals, Suetonius' The Twelve Caesars, and others. Scholars do not question whether we have the true and reliable text of these ancient documents. However, for most of these ancient writings we only have 10 or fewer ancient copies of these works to demonstrate their accuracy and reliability. By contrast we have over 15,000 copies of the New Testament from ancient sources, and the copies we have of the Bible are far closer in age to the time that the New Testament was written than for any of the other ancient documents mentioned.⁴ This means that since we have every reason to believe that an ancient document with only 10 sources is trustworthy and reliable, we have much more reason to believe that the Bible is true and reliable since we have over 15,000 copies from ancient sources to show its accuracy.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ has always been a point where Christianity has been challenged, going all the way back to the very first Easter morning. Matthew 28:11–15 tell of how the guards at the tomb went to the chief priests after Jesus rose and were bribed to say that the disciples came and stole Jesus' body while the guards were sleeping.

Over 100 years later, this story that was first recorded by Matthew was still being spread among the Jews.

Justin Martyr records a conversation he had in about 160 AD with a Jewish man named Trypho, in which it is asserted that the Jews sent men throughout the world to proclaim that after Jesus was crucified, "his disciples stole him by night from the tomb where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven."⁵

Whether the challenge is that Jesus' body was stolen, or some other excuse, the argument that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead has continued down to the present day. The prominent New Atheist, Richard Dawkins, has written that there is no good evidence for the resurrection of Jesus,⁶ and that "accounts of Jesus's resurrection and ascension are about as well-documented as Jack and the Beanstalk."⁷ Unfortunately for Dawkins, Trypho, and everyone else over the course of the past 2000 years who has tried to deny the resurrection of Jesus, the evidence for Jesus bodily, physically returning to life after three days in the tomb is actually exceptionally strong.

There are many lines of evidence that support the Christian belief that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Space will not permit us to delve into most of the overwhelming evidence in favor of the resurrection.⁸ In this brief article we will look at only two things: the claim that the tomb was empty and the charge that the disciples stole Jesus' body.

First, as Lutheran historian Paul Maier has pointed out, the claim that Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter morning is really more of a fact of history than an item of faith. He writes:

WHAT ARE APOLOGETICS?

If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Jesus was buried, was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology that would disprove this statement.⁹

For the story of Jesus' resurrection to spread, it is vitally important that nobody could find the dead, decaying body of Jesus. (This would have ended the account of the resurrection immediately, obviously.) The story of the resurrection spread precisely because nobody could find Jesus' body on Easter morning. That means, as historical fact, that Jesus' body was not in the grave. If Jesus' body had still been in the grave, the chief priests would have brought it out and put it on public display, thus ending immediately any story that Jesus rose. However, the chief priests had a problem. They couldn't find the dead body of Jesus, which absolutely means the body was not in the tomb. Thus, as historical certainty, the tomb was empty.

Once we have demonstrated that the tomb of Jesus was empty on Easter morning, which I take to be a fact of history rather than an object of faith, we need to explain why. One explanation is the one given in Matthew 28:11–15 and by Trypho in his dialog with Justin Martyr—that the disciples came and stole Jesus' body. Think about what would have to happen for this to take place.

First, the entire cohort of soldiers all had to fall asleep at the same time, even though it is documented that guards in ancient times always slept in shifts.¹⁰ Paul Maier suggests there may have been as many as 16 soldiers dispatched to guard the tomb, based on the number of soldiers who guarded Peter when he was imprisoned by Herod in Acts 12.¹¹ This detail makes it virtually impossible to claim that all of the soldiers fell asleep at the same time. Second, even if the entire group of soldiers did fall asleep, they would have to stay fast asleep while the disciples (who were actually hiding in terror) tiptoed over their sleeping bodies, and then rolled a large stone away from the entrance of the tomb, making a loud grating noise as rough rock rubbed rough rock. Finally, they would still have needed to stay asleep while the disciples carried a dead body over them. If any single one of the soldiers had stirred during this process, the whole game would have been over. This possibility strains credibility to the point of unbelievability. And yet, it is the least unlikely explanation for the empty tomb other than the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹²

These two pieces of evidence—the historical fact of the empty tomb and the impossibility of the “Stolen Body Theory”—lead to the conclusion that the best explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus physically rose from the dead.

WHAT ARE APOLOGETICS?

Three days after Jesus' tortured, crucified, dead body was placed in the tomb, Jesus' living, breathing, risen body left the tomb never to die again.

Because of this historical and factual evidence, we can have firm faith that as Jesus is risen, so also we will rise to live with Him into eternity.

Conclusion

We have nothing to apologize for when it comes to our confidence in our Christian faith. What we believe is true, and it is defensible. We do have answers to give when people ask for the reason for the hope that we have in us, as indicated in 1 Peter 3:15. There is no doubt that questions about our faith will arise. There is no doubt that people will continue to challenge the claims and beliefs of Christianity. When these trials come, we can be like St. Paul before Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice, and cheerfully make our defense. That is practicing apologetics, and there is no need to apologize for it!

Rev. Dr. Kirk M. Clayton

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- 1 Gene Edward Veith, "Foreword," in *Making the Case for Christianity: Responding to Modern Objections*, ed. Corey Maas and Adam Francisco (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), vii.
- 2 Adam S. Francisco, "Luther's Use of Apologetics," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81 (2017), 252.
- 3 Dan Barker, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2008), 40.
- 4 Craig Parton, *Religion on Trial: Cross-Examining Religious Truth Claims* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 66.
- 5 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* CVIII, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 1:253.
- 6 Interconnect, "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?," *The Spectator*, accessed April 1, 2025, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/did-jesus-really-rise-from-the-dead->.
- 7 Richard Dawkins, "Richard Dawkins: You Ask the Questions Special," *The Independent* (Independent Digital News and Media, December 4, 2006), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/richard-dawkins-you-ask-the-questions-special-427003.html>.
- 8 In fact, John Lennox points out that since the 1980's there have been over 3,000 scholarly articles and books written in multiple languages exploring and defending the evidence for the physical resurrection of Jesus. The amount of evidence and research supporting the reality of the resurrection is truly staggering. John Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), 198.
- 9 Paul Maier, *The Genuine Jesus: Fresh Evidence from History and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), 270–271.
- 10 Maier, *The Genuine Jesus*, 259.
- 11 Maier, *The Genuine Jesus*, 259.
- 12 There are other attempted explanations for the empty tomb, such as the Wrong Tomb Theory, the Lettuce Theory, the Swoon Theory, the Hallucination Theory, the Twin Brother Theory, and others, but they are all significantly less plausible than the Stolen Body Theory. For a fuller discussion of these theories, see Paul L. Maier, *The Genuine Jesus*, 255–262.

WHAT ARE APOLOGETICS?

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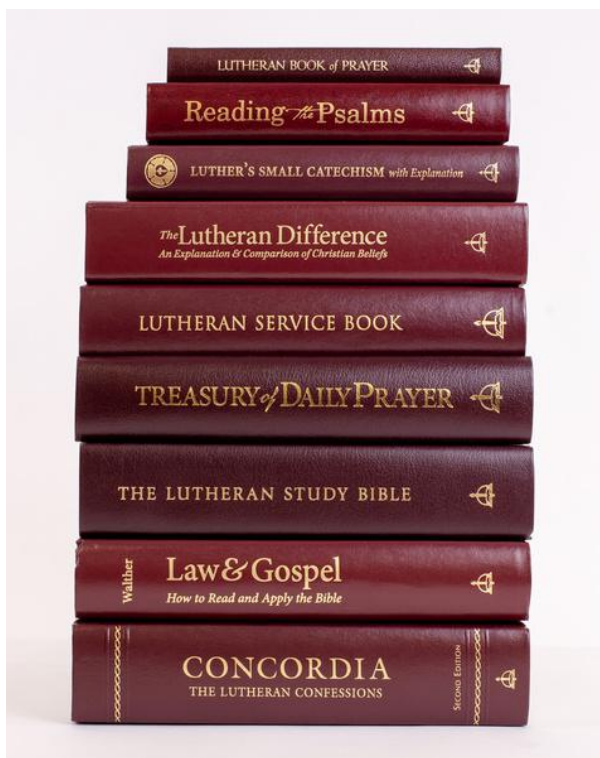
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Speak Lord 2025

Dr Kirk Clayton is the guest presenter for the 2025 Speak Lord Conference and will be speaking on "Defending the Faith, the timeless truth and reliability of what we believe".



SAVE THE DATE

2026 Young Adults Bible Study Retreat
15th – 18th January

Plans are underway for next years Young Adults retreat. Aimed for young adults aged between 18 and 40 years of age. Young families are more than welcome to attend. Keep and eye out on you emails and socials for more information.

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By Pastor Lee Van Rossen
2025

One Sunday after church, CWF chairman Peter Wittwer approached me and asked if I would be willing to write an article for this magazine. Slightly terrified, I gave my usual answer whenever asked to do something that I haven't done before: 'I need more information'. He described to me the intent of this magazine and how others are dedicating themselves to writing on a range of topics, and frankly, I felt completely unqualified to participate in such a thing! I've never been particularly talented regarding the more academic side of theology, especially writing articles. I'm not able to quote the Church Fathers off hand like some or flip open my Greek New Testament and read for fun like others. I expressed to Peter that all I feel I can offer is to joyfully and excitedly share core and basic Christian teaching from the heart. So, he encouraged me to do exactly that.

Peter asked me to write what I think we should focus on as a new church organization.

It may not sound exciting, but I wholeheartedly believe that our primary focus should be that which we should always focus on – The Word of God! What I want to encourage others to join me in focusing on is our catechism.

Now, not everyone seems to get excited when we mention the catechism. For some, it is just the book they looked at when they were a child or adult convert preparing for confirmation. For some, it may not have even been used in their confirmation, and for those who come from outside the Lutheran denomination (like myself), a 'catechism' probably sounds like some abhorrent addition to scripture!

So, I want to share with you the reason I think Luther's Small Catechism is so important and valuable and then give a bit of an overview of what our catechism is and how you might use it.

First, why do I think the catechism is worth focusing on? Some years ago, I was privileged to visit a couple at their home. I have visited many people over these past years, however this visit stuck in my memory more than any other. As we sat down for coffee, the lady began telling me her story, and from the look of anticipation and compassion in her husband's eyes, I could tell it would be intense. Hearing the first few sentences, I realised I was completely out of my depth. She began telling me the utter horrors that she had faced. From a physically abusive childhood, to abuse in church, an abusive and unfaithful husband; she had suffered a lifetime of being violently and sexually abused, deceived, and taken advantage of. It was such a stark contrast to the joyful woman I had come to know; she was so active in the church, and yet so excited to share God's love with others. In absolute shock, all I could do was ask how she hadn't blamed God. I know so many who blame God for even the tiniest slight, but in her case, I could have understood if she had. Her answer to me was four simple words;

"I was well catechised."

I remember that moment because that was when I realised that my job as a pastor could have lifelong impact. If I serve faithfully and catechise well, then those I serve will be well equipped to face any amount of suffering this life may bring. They will know God, His Word, His will, and His love so well that they rely on Him in times of trouble, rather than blaming Him. On the other hand, if I neglect to catechise, then I may rob them of the comfort and assurance they so desperately need. When trials come, they will have no firm foundation to stand on. It's no wonder that Martin Luther, in his preface to the Large Catechism, says that

one who looks down on the catechism (especially pastors) "deserve not only to be given no food to eat, but also to have the dogs set upon us and to be pelted with horse manure."¹

So, I believe that our core teaching as expressed in the catechism is the most important thing for us to focus on, and I would hazard a guess that our namesake Luther might agree. Whether we are well catechised, poorly, or not at all, we need to be studying it daily. "For not only do we need God's daily Word just as we do our daily bread; we also must have it every day in order to stand against the daily and incessant attacks and ambushes of the devil with his thousand arts."²

For those who don't know, whether because they never learned or their memory has failed, our Lutheran catechism certainly isn't an addition to scripture. It contains nothing new and is nothing new. When I was in confirmation class, I remember my pastor teaching me a good analogy; the catechism is like a map. When you approach the scriptures, they can seem like a vast landscape; some parts are full of immense beauty, whereas others seem dark and terrifying. To go out into this landscape alone is dangerous – you can end up getting lost and confused, as many of us often do! Instead, we thank God that those who have gone before us have prepared a fantastic map! We are equipped with a book that not only summarises the teaching of scripture, but it helps us to delve in boldly.

But we can't credit Luther with the idea of a catechism. The concept, and even the term itself, comes from scripture. So, Greek time! (I can hear you all cheering with joy, as we all do when studying Greek, right?) The word κατηχέω, or katécheó (pronounced kat-ay-kheh'-o) appears eight times in the New Testament. It translates as 'to instruct', 'to teach', 'to inform'. Literally it means to 'echo down'. To catechise is to 'echo down', to teach from one generation to the next. Time to open your Bibles! See if you can pick which word is katécheó;

Luke 1:1-4³
Acts 18:24-26⁴
Galatians 6:6⁵

From this word, some of our theologians seem to have gotten a bit too excited and made up a whole bunch of new words. I remember having fun in my classes as we tried to fit as many of these words in a sentence, and the best I remember was "Catechesis is when the catechumenate are catechetically catechised in the catechism!" (See if you can beat five in one sentence!) So, to put it simply, our catechism is the passing down of teaching that our ancestors in the faith received, 'echoing' all the way back to the disciples, and, of course, to Jesus Himself. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, that he delivered unto the Corinthians the message of Christ crucified and risen that he first received. The Catechism is much the same. It is this teaching that our Christian ancestors received that has been delivered down to us. We thank Martin Luther for writing it down so clearly and succinctly. Yet it is not his teaching, it is the teaching of scripture, summarised for us to understand.

A question for you; Do mature, long-term Christians still need to study and be reminded of the basic Christian teaching we first received?

Many of us might think that we are past the need for such things. But I ask you, is that the case in any other field? In martial arts, does there ever come the point where a grandmaster is beyond the point of practising his most basic punches and kicks? Is an electrician ever so experienced that he need not double check his safety procedures? Can an artist gain nothing from reviewing how they hold their paintbrush and mix their paints? Surely, those who reach the pinnacle of their fields consistently advise others that mastering the basics is far more important than learning new and flashy techniques. How much more so when we know that we have a demonic enemy actively working against us, trying to make us neglect and forget the core teachings we have received?

Luther in his preface to the Large Catechism put it in quite simple and hilariously blunt terms;

"Therefore, I beg such lazy bellies and presumptuous saints, for God's sake, to let themselves be convinced and believe that they are not really and truly such learned and exalted doctors as they think. I implore them not ever to imagine that they have learned these parts of the catechism perfectly, or that they know them sufficiently, even though they think they know them ever so well. Even if their knowledge of the catechism were perfect (although that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful to read it daily and to make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and devotion, so that it tastes better and better and is digested, as Christ also promises in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.""⁶

CATECHETICAL STUDIES

So, let's use it! It is not only for confirmees but for every member of the church (pastors included!) How you might use it is quite simple; read it. Read as much or as little as you can, but read it. Read it daily, read it piece by piece, read it and get it into your head! Give it time and space to bounce around in there! If you don't have one, there are many solutions to that! Creative Word Fellowship is more than happy to help get catechisms (and other great books) into your hands however possible, or you can ask your local church, your pastor, or even send me a message!

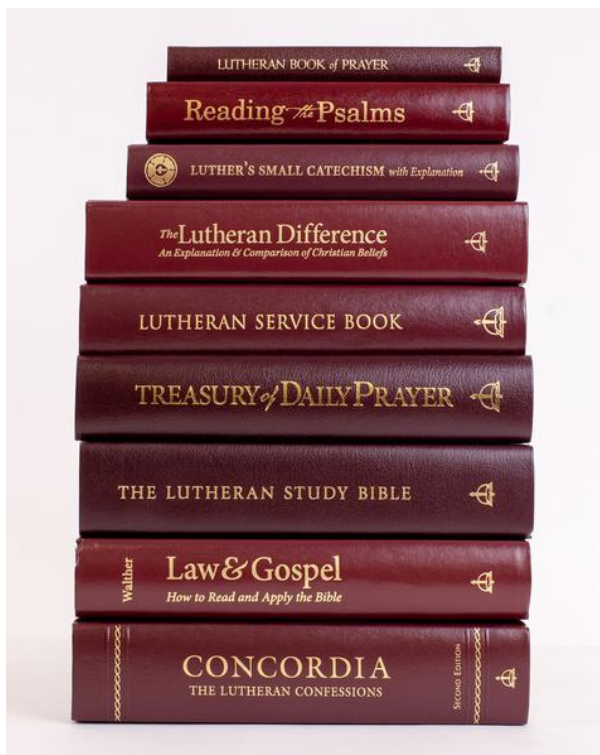
You can look it up online, read it in the Book of Concord, Lutheran Study Bible, or these days you can even download apps! Whatever it takes, get it and read it. Whether you are a lifelong Lutheran, or brand new to all of this, we start in the same place – just read it.

May God use it to bless you and His church. I can tell you from personal experience that He absolutely will.

Pastor Lee van Rossen

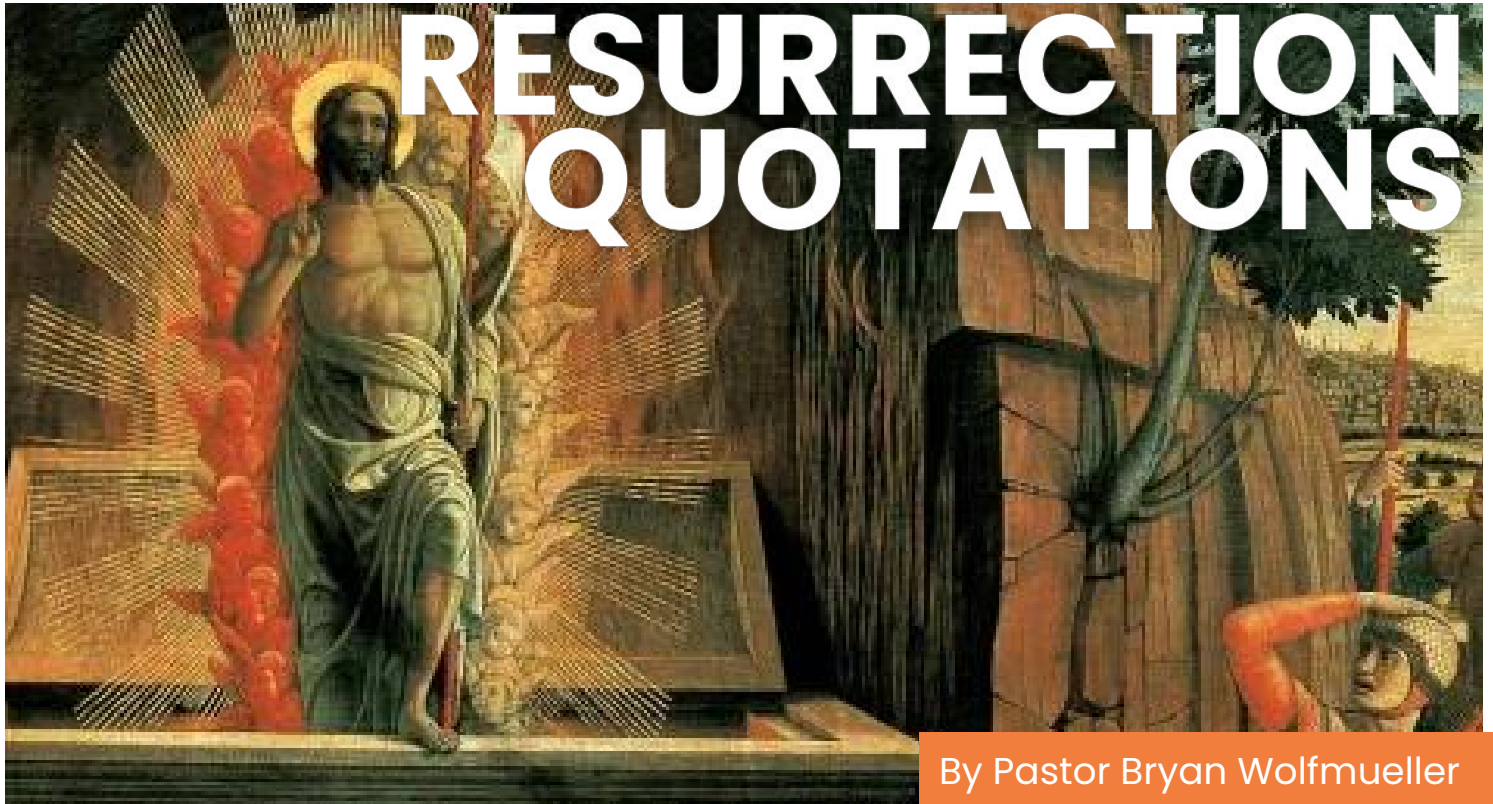
References:

- 1 (The Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert, 2000, Fortress Press. Page 381, paragraph 13)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Verse 2, translated as 'handed down' in NIV, 'delivered to us' in ESV
- 4 Verse 25, translated as 'instructed'
- 5 Translated as 'instruction' in NIV, 'taught' in ESV
- 6 (The Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert, 2000, Fortress Press. Page 381, paragraph 9)



BOOKSHOP

Creative Word Fellowship stocks all of the essentials for Lutheran theological studies, from Luthers Small Catechism, Book of Concord, The Lutheran Study Bible to Walther's Works and many more. We currently dont have an online store, but you can email to request a copy of our stock list or with an order at bookshop@cwfellowship.net.



By Pastor Bryan Wolfmueeller
19 March 2024

Matthew 28:2

ANGEL
[*ἄγγελος*] Our Lord, who is one and the same person, both Son of God and Son of Man, according to His two natures, at one time shows signs of His greatness, at another of His humility. As Man He is crucified and buried, inclosed in a tomb sealed with a stone; but the deeds done in the outer world prove Him the Son of God. The sun hiding his face; the darkness covering the earth; the earth itself rocked by an earthquake; the veil torn; the rocks rent; the dead raised; the ministry of Angels. Angels attended Him at His birth. An Angel was sent to Mary, to Joseph, to the Shepherds. He is tempted in the wilderness, and after His victory Angels minister unto Him. Now an Angel comes to guard His tomb, and by his white raiment intimates the glory of His triumph; and at His ascension two Angels appear to the Apostles and give a promise of the second coming of Christ, when He will appear with legions of Angels. (*Jerome.*)

RESURRECTION QUOTATIONS

Our Lord, who is one and the same person, both Son of God and Son of Man, according to His two natures, at one time shows signs of His greatness, at another of His humility. As Man He is crucified and buried, enclosed in a tomb sealed with a stone; but the deeds done in the outer world prove Him the Son of God. The sun hiding his face; the darkness covering the earth; the earth itself rocked by an earthquake; the veil torn; the rocks rent; the dead raised; the ministry of Angels. Angels attended Him at His birth.

An Angel was sent to Mary, to Joseph, to the Shepherds. He is tempted in the wilderness, and after His victory Angels minister unto Him. Now an Angel comes to guard His tomb, and by his white raiment intimates the glory of His triumph; and at His ascension two Angels appear to the Apostles and give a promise of the second coming of Christ, when He will appear with legions of Angels. (Jerome.)

John 20:22

JOHN 20 **[JESUS]**
22. ἀνεφύσησας "He breathed on them." They **felt** His presence, as well as **saw** Him present. He Who breathed into the first man, and he became a living soul (Gen. ii. 7), now breathes on His Apostles, and thus reminds them that His own Resurrection is the **beginning of the new Creation**; that the **breath of Christ risen from the dead is the origin of our new Life**, and the pledge of **Life Everlasting**; "for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all are made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 22); "and as the first man Adam was made a living soul; so the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit," **πνεῦμα ζωοποιόν** (1 Cor. xv. 45). The act of **breathing** was a proper preparation for receiving the **Πνεῦμα ἅγιον**; and for the exercise of that power by which, in consequence of Christ's Death and Resurrection, the Soul, dead in **trespasses** and sins, is raised from **death to life**.

HOLY SPIRIT

**ABSOLUTION
FORGIVENESS**

[Jesus] breathed on them." They felt His presence, as well as saw Him present. He Who breathed into the first man, and he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7), now breathes on His Apostles, and thus reminds them that His own Resurrection is the beginning of the new Creation; that the breath of Christ risen from the dead is the origin of our new Life, and the pledge of Life Everlasting; "for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all are made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22);

"and as the first man Adam was made a living soul; so the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit," (1 Corinthians 15:45). The act of breathing was a proper preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit; and for the exercise of that power by which, in consequence of Christ's Death and Resurrection, the Soul, dead in trespasses and sins, is raised from death to life.

RESURRECTION QUOTATIONS

1 Christ rose from the dead on this day; 2 He appeared twice in succession on this day; 3 He gave special evidence of His Resurrection on this day; 4 He gave the spiritual power to His Apostles, by which the soul is raised from the Death of Sin (v. 23). 5 He gave the earnest of the Spirit on this day (v. 22), and, finally, 6 He sent the full effusion of the Holy Ghost to His Church on this day (see on Acts ii. 1).

Hence it appears, that the proper exercise of this Day is to "rise more and more from the death of sin to newness of life." "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above" (Col. iii. 1); to "reckon ourselves dead unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ" (Rom. vi. 9—11); to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (Rev. i. 10). Every Lord's Day ought to be a Day of spiritual Resurrection. Every succeeding Lord's Day ought to prepare us for the Day of the Lord. Then "when Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, we shall also appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 1—4).

EVERY SUNDAY IS EASTER

EVERY SUNDAY IS PRACTICE FOR THE LAST DAY!

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RESURRECTION QUOTATIONS

Our Lord might have erased all marks of His wounds from His Body risen and glorified, but He has preserved them there; He showed them to Thomas, who would not believe unless he saw, and so convinced him; He will show His wounds to those who will not believe, and will convict them, and say, Behold Him Whom ye crucified, behold the wounds ye inflicted, see the side which ye pierced. (Aug. de Symb. ad Catech. ii. 8.) Our Lord arose with the marks of His crucifixion imprinted in His Body, in order that we might believe that He arose with the same Body as that in which He suffered. (Chrys.)

Observe, that the wounds which Satan inflicted in malice and scorn on our Lord's crucified Body, have been converted by His controlling power and wisdom into proofs of His Resurrection, and marks of His personal identity. They have become indelible evidences of His Power, graven, as it were, with an iron pen on the Rock of Ages, to be read by eyes of angels and men for eternity; and are glorious trophies of His victory over death and sin, and over Satan himself.

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They have become indelible evidences of His Power, graven, as it were, with an iron pen on the Rock of Ages, to be read by eyes of angels and men for eternity; and are glorious trophies of His victory over death and sin, and over Satan himself.

Christ is risen!
He is risen
indeed!

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller

This article was originally published on 19
March 2024,

<https://wolfmueller.co/resurrection-quotations/>, used with permission.



LUTHERAN MEN VICTORIA MENS RETREAT 2023

By Tim Bayha
2023

On the weekend of the 11th-13th August 2023, 88 Lutheran men from across Australia met for the annual 'Men Led by God' camp in Halls Gap, Victoria. Having been unable to proceed with camp in 2022, it was both encouraging and uplifting to gather in such a large number to spend time in fellowship, worship, and study of the Word.

***“the exploration into
the true definition of
masculinity as
established by
Scripture”***

We had the pleasure of hosting Pastor Jeffrey Hemmer (Assistant to the President – Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Author of 'Man Up') as the study leader for the weekend, as well as Pastor Charles Ferry (Asia Regional Director – Lutheran Church Missouri Synod) as a speaker.

The theme 'Man Up' allowed for the exploration into the true definition of masculinity as established by Scripture; a masculinity that is not about rugged independence, but about sacrificial giving. It is a masculinity preceded by Christ who lays his life down for the Church, his bride.

Friday evening opened with an Aussie BBQ as men arrived from far and wide, allowing for a time of meeting old and new friends, and getting to know our American guests. This was followed by a presentation by Pastor Charles who informed us about the many different missionaries currently serving across Asia, and the diligent work they are doing in sharing the Gospel, teaching, and translating.

He also assured us of the LCMS' support for Lutheranism in Australia, outlining ways in which we can continue to grow in a relationship together and how they might be able to further support us in the future.

MAN UP!

The evening closed with a vespers service led by Pastor Shaun Manning which was sung unaccompanied. It was a blessing to be able to fill the space with male voices coming from many different locations across various age groups, gathering together as brothers in Christ.

After an early start on Saturday for breakfast and a devotion led by Luke Nuske, we proceeded into the official study sessions for the week. In the first two sessions, Pastor Jeffrey laid the foundation for biblical masculinity as living in the example and grace of Jesus, using our God given roles as men for the good of those around us.

This included an interesting word study of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 showing where men fail, and a deep dive into the Genesis creation narrative exploring God's good ordering and the three P's of masculinity: protection, provision and procreation.

This highlighted the male responsibility to care for others, sacrifice themselves for the ones they love, and act as providers for the family. The third session of the day focused on the Fall: how our eyes now turn selfishly towards ourselves, and as a result our society has moved from 'Eden' to the "City of the Same".

Tolerance has become the highest virtue, and true masculinity has been denigrated to the point where everyone becomes an object and pleasure is the highest ideal.

The good and ordered distinction between man and woman has been dissolved.

Here, the Gospel offers a solution – before us we have an example of masculinity in Jesus, we have a saviour. Where we are failures as men, Jesus comes to save failures. Pastor Jeffrey concluded the day with a final dive into Hebrews 2:5-18 – adequately titling the section

'God down, man up'. Christ makes himself available as an advocate and defender,

and he can be called upon for strength to resist temptation to sin, as he has resisted all temptation.

Saturday afternoon saw a group of men tackling the Boronia Peak hike, which was a good excuse to get out in the sun for some rigorous exercise and conversation. Those who were brave enough remained at camp to attempt the high ropes course and giant swing. There was also an opportunity to sit around the fire and chat, or play a game of 500.

In the evening, we had the pleasure of hearing an interview with Pastor Shaun Manning, learning about his life story, conversion, and journey towards becoming a pastor in the LCA. After closing worship led by Pastor Carl Thiele, we shared in drinks and conversation into the late hours of the night.

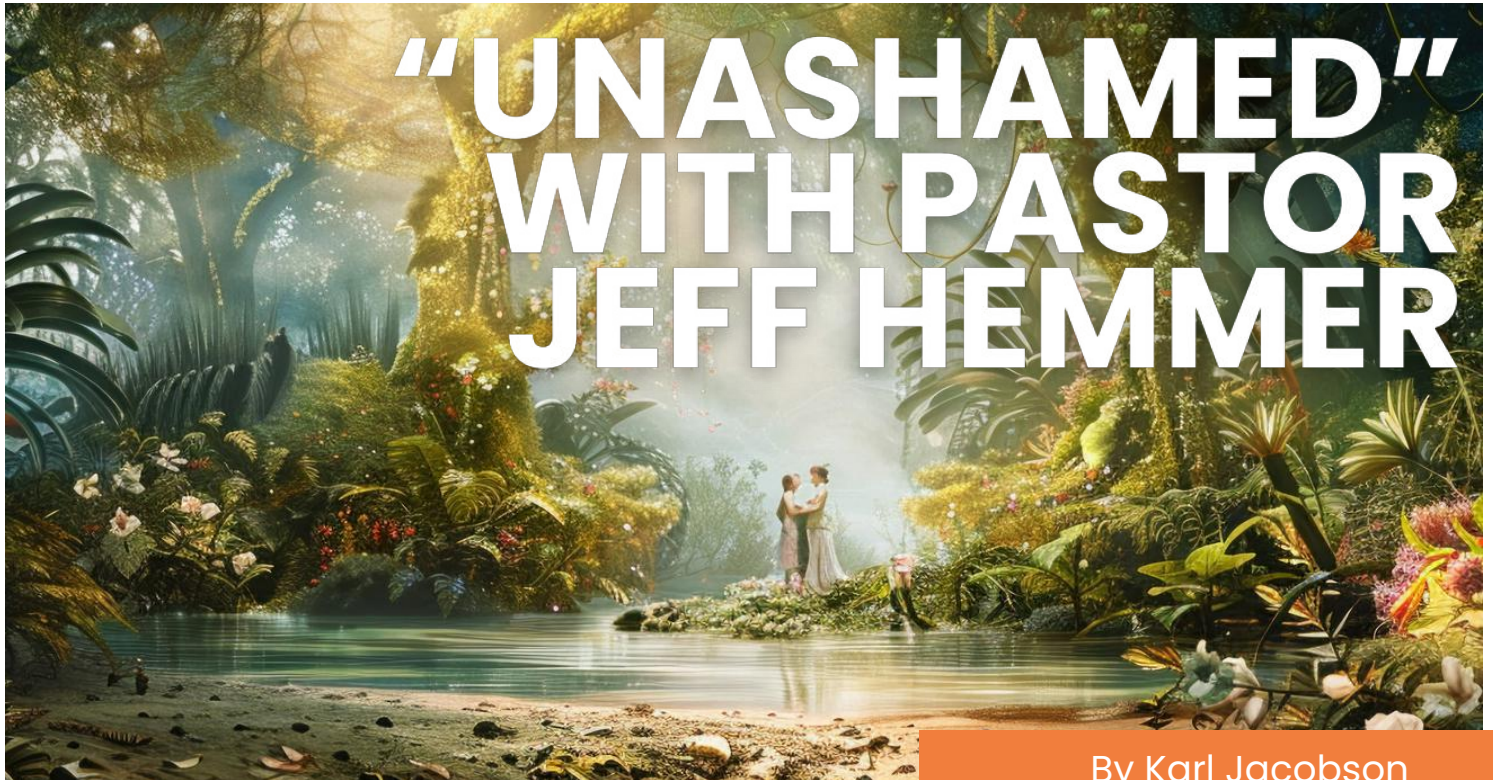
On Sunday morning we gathered together in worship to receive from our Lord in Word and Sacrament.

Pastor Jeffrey held a final study session offering a daily to-do list of prayer, loving, giving, and fighting, as well as some practical advice for everyday manliness.

After eating a final lunch, it was time to say farewell and start making the journey home.

Many thanks to Pastors Jeffrey and Charles for making the trek Down Under to lead us in our studies, to the staff at Tandara for their catering and hospitality, to the Lutheran Men of Victoria for organising and facilitating the event, and to Creative Word Fellowship for their additional support.

Tim Bayha



By Karl Jacobson
2023

On Wednesday the 16th of August 2023, my wife and I had the pleasure of listening to Pastor Hemmer lecture on “Male and Female He created them”. Hemmer, an LCMS Pastor proclaimed boldly and simply the truth from Genesis and Ephesians, that men and women are different and in fact, complimentary. This is a stark contrast to what the world would tell us. That men and women are interchangeable, offering the same skillset and equal participants in all roles of home, church, and society. Hemmer rightly began by commenting on the fact that we attended despite the women’s soccer world cup finals being on at the same time. This distinction so obvious in sport as we divide men and women is often glossed over as we manufacture false “equity” within so many workplaces. Men and women are in fact different. This topic, which is often seen as polarizing, politically charged and suspect to our Australian ears was attended to with grace and kindness using only the words of Scripture which God has given us.

One of the primary texts used by Hemmer during this lecture was Ephesians 5, which interestingly for us, we had as one of our wedding texts. Hemmer made clear this distinction between marriage and Christ’s relationship with Church. Noting that marriage is not the true reality, and that God gives us a picture of His relationship with the Church, saying “it’s just like the marriage you have” but rather we enter into our earthly marriage and in this, we get a taste of the true marriage, which is between Christ and His bride the Church. This is jarring as in this teaching we find out that we are not the center of the universe, but Christ is. Our lives serve His purpose, rather than His life being to serve our purpose. In our marriage Lucy and I, both failing of course, attempt to participate in this heavenly reality, as detailed in Ephesians 5.

***“Exceptions don’t
make good rules”***

UNASHAMED

Hemmer spoke about the fact that men live their lives in service of others and cannot truly be men without others around. For like how Christ came to serve, we as men should also serve. In contrast, but as distinctly different, Hemmer encouraged women as they embrace their unique biology as one who gives life not outside of themselves in service, like the man, but inside of themselves as they nourish, provide, and give life to humanity. He also highlighted the role of woman as helper, as described in Genesis and how this word refers to woman's relationship to man and God's relationship to humanity. It is no slight or putting down, but an exultation of their role. Obviously, there are exceptions to the rule, as men and women are either called into singleness or unable to bear children, but as Hemmer said, "Exceptions do not make good rules."

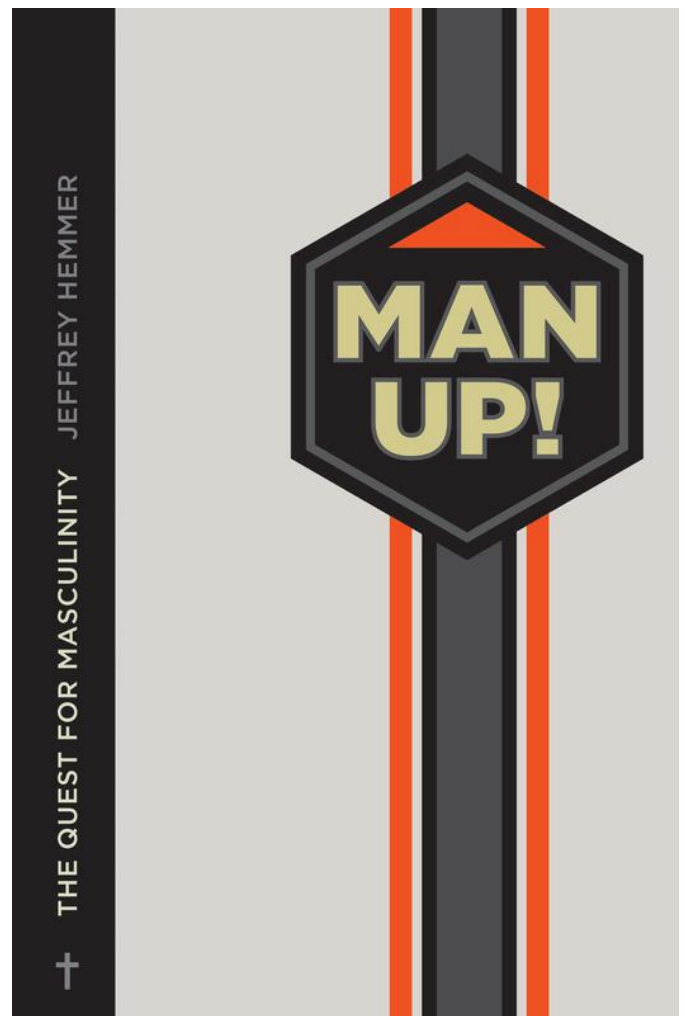
For us, this was an uplifting and encouraging event as we heard, unashamedly, God's truth be proclaimed by a Lutheran Pastor, something we don't see often in Australia.

We praise God for the continuing work of faithful Pastors in our Church and encourage to continue to unashamedly teach the faith. We hope that as this lecture is published online that it continues to bless and encourage others as they live the Christian faith.

Karl Jacobson

Written by Karl Jacobson by request of CWF. Karl was a seminary student at LCA before leaving to study to become a Pastor, at Concordia Lutheran Seminary St Louis in America under the sponsorship of Lutheran Mission–Australia.

"Unashamed – Male and Female He created them" was an event jointly hosted by Creative Word Fellowship and Lutherans For Life at Glandor Lutheran Church South Australia. You can read more about this topic in Pastor Hemmers book 'Man Up' which is available through the CWF bookshop.



Lutheran Men Victoria
invite you to attend their
“Men Led By God” retreat
with Rev Dr Geoff Boyle
on the topic of
**“Following Our Fathers
Along Ancient Paths”**

Tandara Lutheran Camp
Halls Gap

7th Aug – 10th Aug

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\$275

Friday - Sunday

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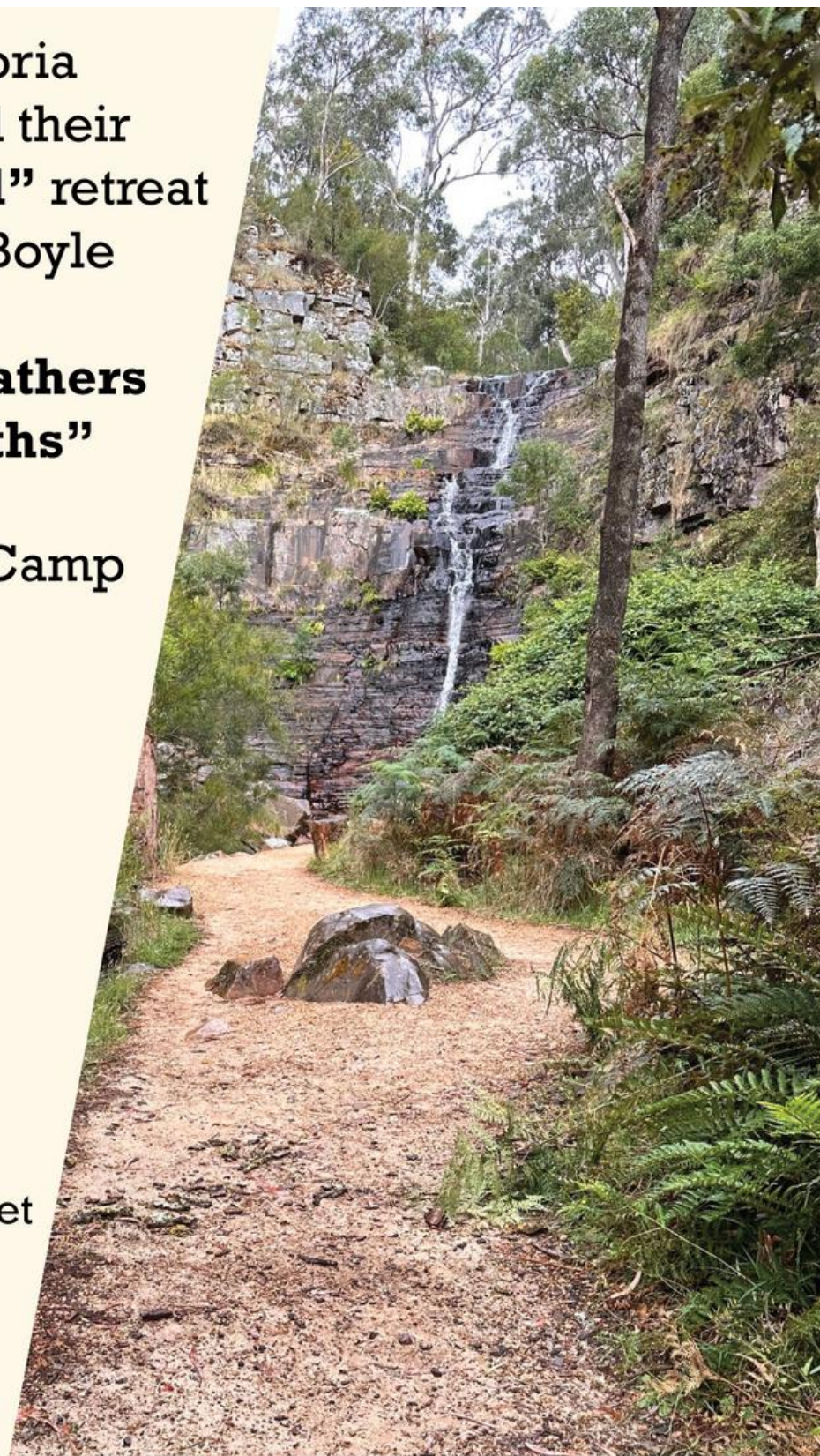
\$50

<https://cwfellowship.net>



20
25

Men
Led by God



Presented by Creative Word Fellowship and Here She Stands Podcast

She Prays

Women's Retreat

Join us as we focus on prayer; both learning about prayer from the Scriptures and our Lutheran confessions, and praying Psalms and Hymns.

Guest Speakers:

Sandra Rhein, LCMS

Deaconess & Sacred Music
Educator

Kimberley Pfeiffer, Writer
& Blogger

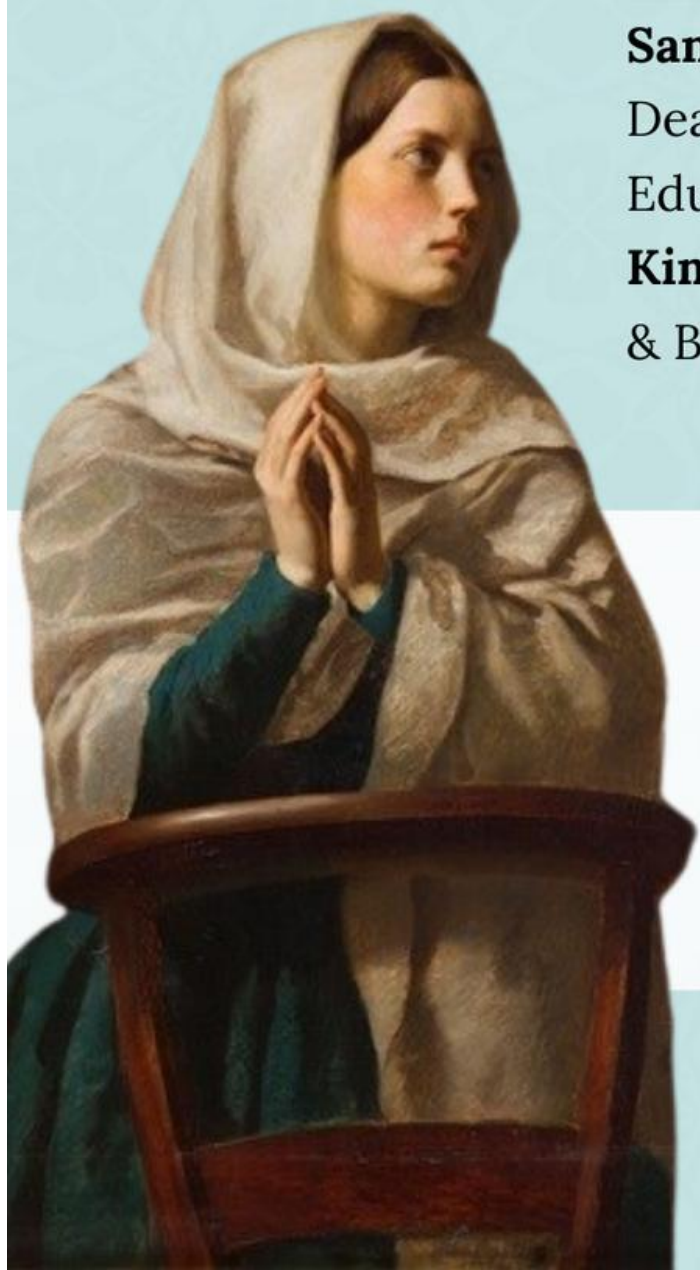
SAVE THE DATE

South Australia
24th - 26th October, 2025

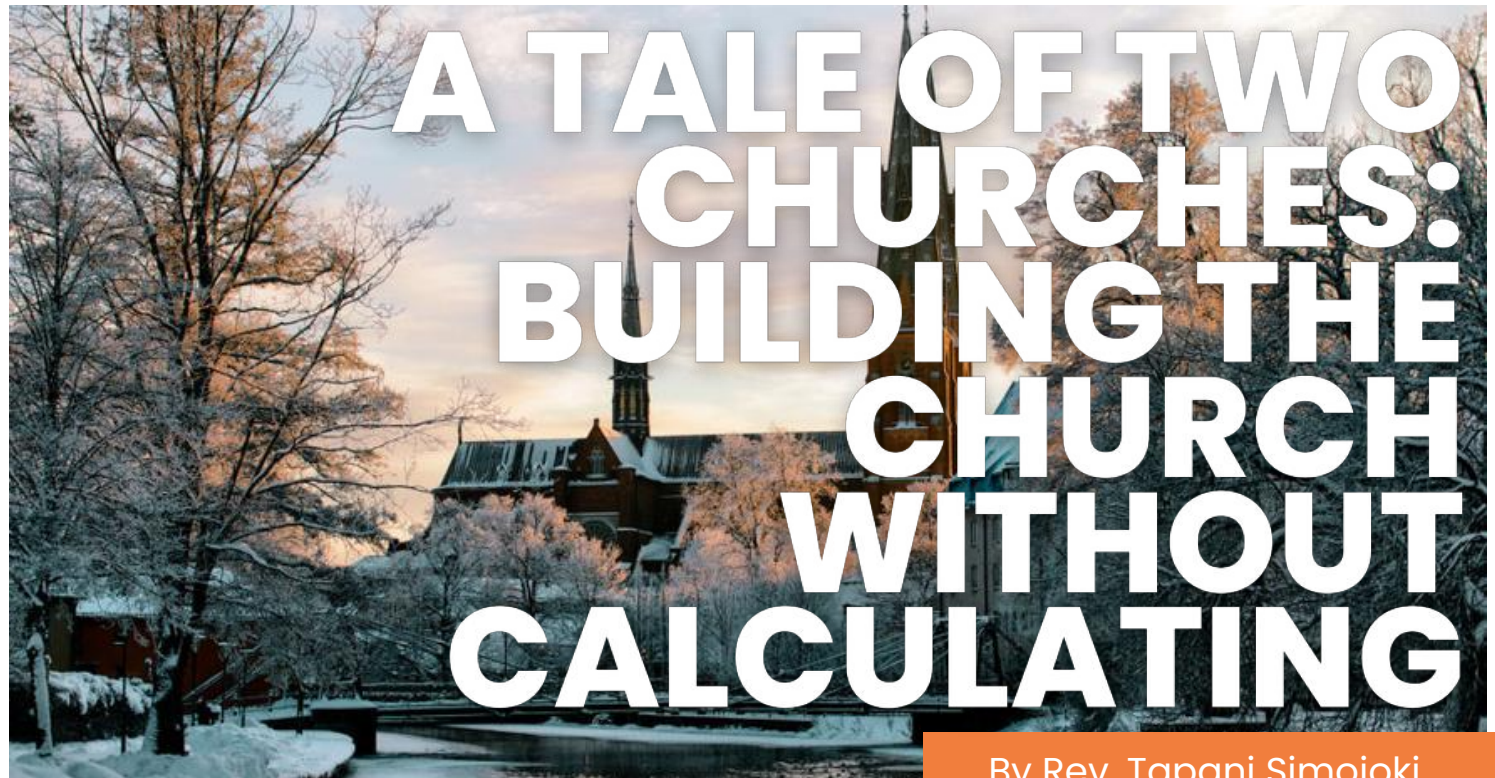
Victoria
17th - 19th October, 2025

Venues to be announced

SCAN
ME! >>



A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES



By Rev. Tapani Simojoki
March 9, 2023

On 23 July 1933, the young pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached a sermon on Matthew 16:13–18 in Holy Trinity Church, Berlin. The sermon coincided with the calling of the church elections of that year, the first such elections since the Nazis took power, and therefore the first where the openly pro-Nazi ‘German Christian’ were represented (they would go on to win major victories on parish councils in many parts of Germany). In this alarming situation, the young Bonhoeffer meditated on the Confession of St. Peter:

... it is not we who are to build, but God. No human being builds the church, but Christ alone. ... We are to confess, while God builds. We are to preach, while God builds. We are to pray to God, while God builds. We do not know God’s plan. We cannot see whether God is building up or taking down. It could be that the times that human beings judge to be times for knocking down structures would be, for God, times to do a lot of building, or that the great moments of the church from a human viewpoint are, for God, times for pulling it down.

It is a great comfort that Christ gives to the church: “You confess, preach, bear witness to me, but I alone will do the building, wherever I am pleased to do so. Don’t interfere with my orders. Church, if you do your own part right, then that is enough. But make sure you do it right. Don’t look for anyone’s opinion; don’t ask them what they think. Don’t keep calculating; don’t look around for support from others. Not only must church remain church, but you, my church, confess, confess, confess” ... Christ alone is your Lord; by his grace alone you live, just as you are. Christ is building. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. ... But victory belongs to the church, because Christ its Lord is with it and has overcome the world of death. Don’t ask whether you can see victory but believe in the victory, for it is yours.¹

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

This call to “remain church”, to “do your own part right”, rings out to the church at all times, but especially in times of crisis. It stands equally against activism and passivity. Both can exist in optimistic and pessimistic forms. Optimistic activism thinks that the future is bright, so long as we do enough of the right things; pessimistic activism thinks that the future is gloomy unless we do enough of the right things. Optimistic passivity thinks that the future is bright because ‘God is in control’ regardless of what we do; pessimistic passivity thinks that the future is gloomy because there is nothing we can do.

Both these positions have elements of truth in them, but they are not the full truth. God’s will is indeed sovereign, and he does all that he pleases (Ps. 115:3). His word accomplishes that which he purposes (Isa. 55:11). On the other hand, God works through means. In order to accomplish that which he purposes, he sends out his word by means of apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

Thus, a clear division of labour is established: we do what we have been called to do, while God accomplishes through the work given to us that which he purposes. It is not for us to determine what God’s purposes are, only what it is that he has called us to.

All the while, we are called to be faithful in our confession of Jesus as Lord, over against other allegiances (Luke 14:26).

Let me illustrate this with a story of two churches in crisis, and two different responses to those crises.

In 1958, under enormous political pressure from the government and with unusual political interference, the ordination of women was passed by the General Synod (*kyrkomötet*) of the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden, only a year after a similar motion had been defeated by the majority of bishops, pastors, and laymen.² Given that there was very significant opposition to women’s ordination, a conscience clause was inserted, to allow both proponents and opponents to continue to co-exist within the church. No bishop or pastor would be forced to co-officiate with female pastors.³

The opposition soon organised. The bishop of Gothenburg, Bo Giertz, formed an umbrella organisation for the opposition, *Kyrklig Samling omkring Bibeln och bekännelse* (Church Gathering around the Bible and Confession), initially drawing thousands of clergy and lay members. Conferences were held, journals and magazines published. Nevertheless, despite a few remarkable cases where open and eloquent orthodox bishops were appointed, in practice the episcopate was soon closed to opponents. The last orthodox bishop, Bertil Gärtner, was consecrated in 1970.

At the same time, the pressure on opposition to the majority view grew. As a result, the conscience clause was dropped in 1982. From 1993, anyone seeking ordination in the Church of Sweden had first to give public assent to women’s ordination. Since 1999, the church has demanded acceptance of women’s ordination of anyone seeking appointment as a rector of a parish. Opposition will also render any episcopal candidate formally disqualified from the episcopal office.

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

At the same time, a much wider liberal agenda, ushered in by the decision of 1958, began to erode the life and teaching of the church in almost every area theology and practice.

While all this was taking place, the concern for the future of biblical Christianity became increasingly urgent within Kyrklig Samling and other 'opposition' forums. However, when the inevitable question was raised whether it was time to start thinking about establishing a viable alternative to life within the official structures of the Church of Sweden, the answer was always, 'Not yet.'

Over the years, the magazines and journals kept coming out, and conferences kept being held. The answer remained the same, but so did the people giving it, though with less hair and more wrinkles. Instead, the strategy was to carve out space for the minority to be allowed to stay within the Church and work for renewal from within, even as ordinations and appointments for those holding to the traditional faith dried up, and the apostasy of the church became every more flagrant.

Finally, in 2003, the time had come, at least for some. The Mission Province in Sweden was formed of six congregations, ranging from low-church Pietists to Anglo-Catholic-influenced high church groups; not as a new church, but as an independent fellowship of churches with its own episcopal oversight within the church. A bishop from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, in fellowship with the Church of Sweden, consecrated the new bishop.

By this time, however, the thousands who had gathered in the early years of Kyrklig Samling were nowhere to be found.

Bishop Gärtner had retired in 1991; Bo Giertz died in 1998 at the age of 92, having been forced by old age from an active role years previously.

In the meantime, a whole new generation had grown up knowing nothing but the new status quo.

I met the General Secretary of the Mission Province a few years after its founding. He is a wonderful man, a brilliant organiser, and a great lover of the Gospel and of the Church. I asked him how things were going in Sweden. His melancholy judgement was, 'We were 20 years too late.' The momentum was long gone, the minority of the church had been slowly but surely brought into line with the majority, and society had long become aggressively secular. Moreover, what held the minority together was as much opposition to the majority, rather than a common positive conviction.

To this day, the Mission Province is the only such ecclesiastical structure in Sweden, and it remains relatively small, with 15 congregations, and only limited signs of growth.

In the meantime, Sweden's eastern neighbour, and former province, Finland has tended to lag behind its big brother with regard to the progressive agenda. Women's ordination was not accepted in Finland until 1986; but the speed of change was all the faster, with the conscience clause being abolished in 2000.

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

The warning example of Swedenish led the Finns ultimately to follow a different path. After a decade of activity as an opposition movement trying to carve out a living space within the national church, a small but highly influential group decided to pursue a proactive model.

At the 1997 conference of the North European Luther Academy, a pan-Nordic gathering of confessional Lutherans, the late Rev. Dr. Anssi Simojoki presented a paper proposing the establishment of what he coined “Luther Foundation”, an independent funding body that would start the process of planting churches that are characterised not by their opposition to errors but by their faithfulness to Lutheran doctrine and practice, to providing a biblically faithful alternative to the status quo.

In 1999, the last remaining orthodox bishop, Olavi Rimpiläinen, ordained a young man and assigned him to the task of serving the newly-founded Luther Foundation. Effective fund-raising enabled him to start drawing a full-time stipend within a year.

The following year, the Foundation planted a small independent congregation in Helsinki, under the oversight of bishop Rimpiläinen. All the while, the voices of the Swedish neighbours were loud and clear: ‘Don’t do what we did! Don’t wait!’

What difference did not waiting make?

The small church plant in Helsinki soon began to grow, as the faithful remnant in the wider church heard about it.

Luther Foundation became an active publisher in partnership with the American Lutheran Heritage Foundation, producing a bimonthly magazine, booklets and pamphlets on a wide variety of topics for lay readers, and books for both general readership and for theologians, including previously untranslated volumes of Luther’s works. (In 2015, it would go on to produce a hymnal supplement of 200 hymns to be used alongside the official hymnal of the national church.)

As the word spread – often through negative publicity in the national media – invitations began to come in from all over the country: “Come over and help us, too!” Bible studies gave way to occasional services, until there was sufficient momentum to form mission congregations. Following the retirement of bishop Rimpiläinen, new pastors were ordained in the Mission Province of Sweden; some pastors from the national Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, both active and retired, also came to serve the congregations of Luther Foundation.

In the early years, the congregations of Luther Foundation Finland formed part of the Mission Province in Sweden, which added “and in Finland” to its name. In 2010, the Rev. Dr. Matti Väisänen was consecrated as the bishop for the Finnish congregations of the Mission Province.

Finally, in 2013, the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland was formed as a de facto new church body, and Rev. Risto Soramies was consecrated as its first bishop. Today, it has over 50 congregations in every part of the country and is served by 50 pastors.

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

Having grown organically, the Mission Diocese is characterised by theological and liturgical uniformity with very strong grassroots involvement. Congregations have strong autonomy within a well-defined church order and clear episcopal polity, which fosters both freedom and unity.

The Mission Diocese functions in every respect as an independent church body, with its own constitution and by-laws, and an independent hierarchy. Internal discussions are currently taking place with members over whether to register formally with the Finnish state as a religious community (a discreet category in the Finnish constitution), all the while recognising that a church is a church regardless of what the state recognises.

Crucially, the Mission Diocese is very much not an opposition movement, defined by its opposites, but a fellowship of local churches that have consciously striven to “be church” and “to do it well” on the solid rock of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, within the liturgical tradition of the Lutheran Church. It fosters strong international connections to other confessional Lutheran churches around the world.

And what happened to that young pastor starting out in Helsinki in 2000? In 2014, he was defrocked by the Church of Finland for his role in the founding of the Mission Diocese. Indeed, almost every pastor ordained in the national church who has held a role in the Mission Diocese has been likewise defrocked, including Dr. Simojoki and the first bishop of the Diocese.

Today, the Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola is the second bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese and President of the International Lutheran Council.

What is the lesson of these two stories? It is the lesson Bonhoeffer’s 1933 sermon: while it is not within our power to build the church, we have been given a different task: to be the church. The faithful are not called to carve out space among, or to live by the toleration from, the progressive forces holding the levers of power.

Instead, the faithful are called to be the church by acting as the church. It may come at a great cost—indeed, that is very likely. But if it pleases God to give his blessing to such faithfulness, the church will be built. Wherever Christ is, there is the Church. When we confess Him as Lord in faithfulness to His word and institution, we can have the confidence that “victory is ours.”

The alternative is to acquiesce to the forces of progress (falsely-so-called) and allow a generation to grow up who no longer hear the faithful voice of the Good Shepherd, until there is little left to build.

Rev. Tapani Simojoki

Rev. Tapani Simojoki is a pastor of Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Fareham, Hampshire, a member congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, and editor of The British Lutheran.

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<https://adfontesjournal.com/contemporary-church/a-tale-of-two-churches-lessons-from-swedish-and-finnish-lutheranism/>

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

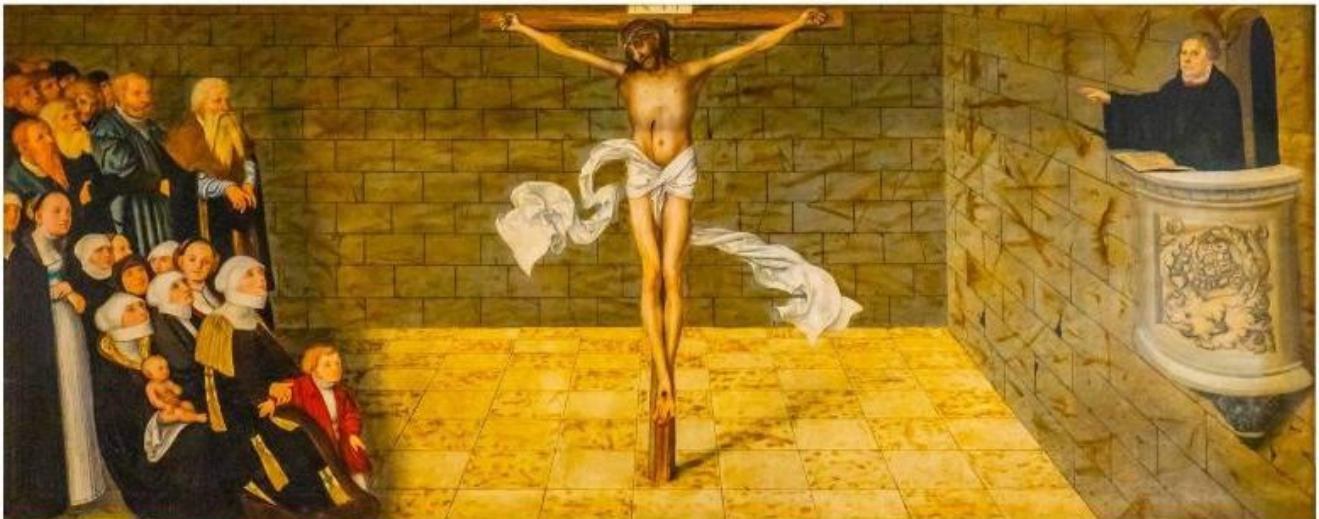
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According to Sidenvall, the General Synod was normally convened every six years, but following the 1957 vote, the government re-convened it immediately, and there was significant party-political interference in the run-up to the 1958 meeting of Synod.

3 Sidenvall, 228.



Before Christ and the World

What it means to be a confessional Lutheran

Seminar with Dr Stephen Pietsch

7-8 June 2025

Tanunda SA





STANDING FIRM FEAT. REV. DR. KACHELMEIER

By Josh Ariens
2025

***My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name:
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.
(LHS 331, v.1)***

The theme of the 2024 CWF Young Adults Retreat was "Standing Firm – Faith and Hope Anchored in Christ Jesus." Although over a year ago now, the lessons of this Retreat, like the Word of God, are timeless and true.

As is the tradition, the young saints gathered together for a time of fellowship at Tandara Lutheran Camp in Halls Gap. We were blessed to receive teaching from the esteemed Rev. Dr. Brian Kachelmeier, who was visiting from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LC-MS). He is Senior Pastor at Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church in San Antonio, Texas, and is an expert in Old Testament Theology and Hebrew.

In his presentations Rev. Dr. Kachelmeier shed light on Creation, the Fall and how we have redemption through Jesus Christ, our firm foundation. Beginning at the beginning, in the first few chapters of Genesis, he explained that it is the Triune God who creates, orders and works to sustain His creation. Having created humanity in His image, God then provides order in His institution of marriage. In this one flesh union God continues to create and bring new life.

With the fall into sin we are separated from God and the evil foe works to usurp and undermine the order that God has established, always seeking to bring an end to life. We see this most obviously in homosexual relationships, transgenderism, abortion and euthanasia. In all these, life is either impossible or is snuffed out too soon. In place of God's beautiful design for life, Satan brings disorder and death.

CWF YOUNG ADULTS RETREAT 2024

Rev. Dr. Kachelmeier taught that since we all have the law written on our hearts, there is an innate understanding that there is something wrong with ourselves and with the world. Because of this we all have a deep and right desire to be justified. As Rev. Dr. Kachelmeier illuminated, however, when we try to justify ourselves we are committing idolatry. This is a kind of false worship in which we are attempting to bend God to our will based upon our own self-chosen methods to make Him merciful apart from His Word of promise or the forgiveness of sins. When this occurs our faith has been misplaced and we are left floundering with claims of our own merit and righteousness before Holy God. We have no anchor. On this sinking sand we cannot stand firm.

But, thanks be to God that He does not leave us in this state. As Rev. Dr. Kachelmeier highlighted, God is not distant and removed from His creation. Rather, He is personally involved, so involved in fact that He became one of us, sharing our full humanity and coming to us in our distress. Living the perfect life that only He could and dying the death we deserved, He is our anchor in the stormy seas of life – a life in which we are constantly under siege by our flesh, the world and the devil.

To conclude his teaching Rev. Dr. Kachelmeier again impressed upon us the awesome power of God's Word to create. The same Word that spoke the whole universe into existence is active in Holy Baptism to recreate us into His image – restored, regenerated, redeemed. In this "water Word" we are named and claimed by God. Although Satan is forever at work to cause us to doubt our faith and to have us navel-gazing, we need only look to God's external Word in His means of Grace. There we will find hope.

Returning to the waters of Holy Baptism we can be fully assured of our salvation, having the anchor of Christ Jesus implanted into us. On this solid rock we can stand firm.

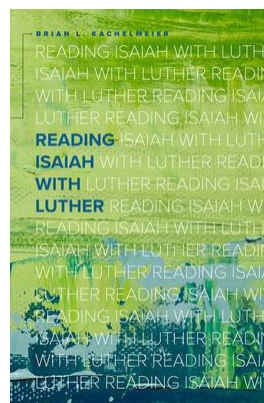
In the times when we were not receiving teaching we were enjoying fellowship with one another through rich conversations, hiking endeavours, swimming excursions, various games and in the sharing of meals. It was refreshing and uplifting to speak so openly and joyfully as brothers and sisters in Christ. All present displayed a love for Scripture and an assent to the authoritative and inerrant Word of God.

Across the four days of the camp we were further nourished by God's life-creating and sustaining Word through daily Matins and Vespers services, which culminated in a service with Holy Communion on the Sunday. Here we received not just a reminder that Christ is our solid rock, but actually received, in the substance of bread and wine, the solid rock of Christ, who is the content of that Holy and precious meal.

The Retreat was a time of great blessing for all. Through Christ our rock and our redeemer we stand firm in faith and look with hope to His return.

Josh Ariens

Written by Josh Ariens by request of Creative Word Fellowship



Copies of Pastor Brian Kachelmeier's book 'Reading Isaiah with Luther' are available from the CWF book shop.



The Book of Concord is an immense work of literature that has both explained and shaped Lutheran theology for almost 450 years. Its final form is the result of the work of numerous theologians over the course of three years (1577-1580) and contains 11 documents of the Christian Faith spanning 1400 years: The Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, and the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.

To an unfamiliar observer, the Book of Concord may appear to be a ponderous and irrelevant historical document that can barely be understood, let alone be a device for instructing modern people in Faith and practice.¹

I contend however, that this is not at all the case.

The Lutheran Confessions are relevant, accessible, and formative for Christians today, provided they follow some basic guidelines or keys to understanding and are aware of the unifying themes running through the individual documents. Let us focus on some of the most prominent unifying themes.

To get the most from this article, have your Book of Concord in hand, turning to the sections referenced and reading them for yourself (if you don't have a copy go online to bookofconcord.org).

Recognising their Individual Purposes

The documents of the Confessions were not all written for the same reason. The first consideration is being aware of the historical scene from which each document arose, and the purpose for which it was written.²

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For example, the Formula of Concord Epitome and Solid Declaration were written in 1576–77 with the main purposes of 1) correcting errors that had been brought into the Lutheran Church since the Augsburg Confession in 1530, and 2) unifying a church that had been severely divided by these errors.³ Luther's Small Catechism on the other hand is very different document with a different purpose. Luther wrote the Small Catechism in 1529 when he saw that Saxon laity and pastors alike were ignorant of the basics of the Christian Faith.⁴ Luther writes,

The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good God! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach [so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it].⁵ (SC Preface 1–3)

Understanding the controversies that gave rise to each document and what need they are addressing will help the reader to rightly understand the theological arguments and concerns being raised.

Recognising their Collective Purpose

We have addressed the need to understand the purpose of the Confessional documents individually, now let us turn to their collective purpose.

Confession of Faith

As one would expect from the name, the Lutheran Confessions function as a confession of faith. In particular, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, and the Smalcald Articles, were written for the express purpose of being presented and read before the Emperor and Papal church authorities to defend and explain their beliefs.⁶ At great personal risk the confessors publicly stated that this is what they believed and taught; '...this Confession...is ours and our preacher's.' (AC Preface 8). This theme of confession is consistent throughout the Book of Concord. The first documents are the three Ecumenical Creeds, (a creed being a confession of belief⁷); the Apostles and Nicene creeds both open with 'I believe', and the Athanasian Creed states 'Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith...And the catholic faith is this...'⁸ Nearly all the articles of the Augsburg Confession begin with 'Our churches teach' and the Epitome of the Formula of Concord strengthens this statement to 'We believe, teach, and confess...' This language of believing, teaching, and confessing, reminds modern readers that the statements contained within the Confessions aren't just hypothetical theological ponderings, but were strongly held beliefs that the Confessors were willing to not only proclaim before the world, but also die for.

Teaching the Faith

As discussed above, the Augsburg Confession, Apology, and Smalcald Articles were written for the purpose of defending the currently held beliefs of the Confessors, beliefs they understood to be the historic position of the Church (more on this shortly); but they, along with the rest of the Book of Concord, soon took on the new functions of pedagogy, and determining orthodoxy.⁹

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The Catechisms were of course always pedagogical documents as is clear from the preface of the Small Catechism, 'Therefore I entreat [and adjure] you all for God's sake... to help us inculcate the Catechism upon the people, and especially upon the young... impress them, word for word, on the people,' (SC Preface 6); and from the head of each of its sections, 'As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household.' Also, in the Introduction and Preface to the Large Catechism, Luther exhorts all people to daily read, meditate, learn and ponder the Catechism as it will drive away the attacks of the devil, and is what everyone must know if they are to be considered a Christian.

From early on, the entirety of the Book of Concord in addition to the Catechisms became a text-book for teaching what Lutherans believe. (FC SD Summary, Rule, and Norm)

Measure of Orthodoxy

We have previously noted how the Athanasian Creed clearly states its adherence as a measure for orthodoxy (Greek: upright opinion, correct belief), as do the confessors (Ep Summary 3); but by 1580 the confessors now place a similar emphasis on the acceptance of the newly published Book of Concord. They state regarding the contents of the Confessions,

Therefore we also have determined not to depart even a finger's breadth either from the subjects themselves, or from the phrases which are found in them, but, the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement, and we intend to examine all controversies according to this true norm and declaration of the pure doctrine.¹⁰ (Preface 23)

An even stronger statement is given in the Solid Declaration,

Since for thorough, permanent unity in the Church it is, above all things, necessary that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form wherein is brought together from God's Word the common doctrine, reduced to a brief compass, which the churches that are of the true Christian religion confess, just as the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols..." (FC SD Introduction 1) (Emphasis mine)

How is it that they could be so bold to claim that their Confessions were the standard for judging what is 'the true Christian religion'? That the writings and work of Luther, Melanchthon, Andreae, Chemnitz, and Selnecker could carry such authority? This brings us to our next key to understanding the Lutheran Confessions.

The Scriptural and Historical Faith

The confessors believed that the Confessions were the one and same historic faith of the Christian Church, grounded in the Holy Scriptures and the Creeds. The Confessions were not, as Schlink puts it, '...freelancing theological opinions; they are statements of doctrine...expositions of Scripture, more particularly [, a] summary presentation of the whole of Scripture...' ¹²

The confessors went to great pains to demonstrate both the scriptural basis for their teachings but also their catholicity.

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The confessors' understanding of the authority of Scripture as the source of doctrine is made clear in the Formula of Concord when they write,

We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with [all] teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119:105: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. And St. Paul: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed, Gal. 1:8. (FC Ep Summary 1)
In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament and all other writings is preserved, and the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong.¹³ (FC Ep Summary 7)

And,

First [, then, we receive and embrace with our whole heart] the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged. (FC SD Summary, Rule, and Norm 3)

The Word of God alone should be and remain the only standard and rule of doctrine, to which the writings of no man should be regarded as equal, but to which everything should be subjected. (FC SD Summary, Rule, and Norm 9)¹⁴

In keeping with this classic Reformation doctrine of Sola Scriptura, the confessors base everything on the foundation of the Word. The contents of the Book of Concord were understood to be authoritative and binding on all Christians because they were instructed by and in agreement with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures (Preface 3,22) which are confessed to be the infallible truth. (Preface 20)

The writers of the Lutheran Confessions desired the peace and unity of the Church (Preface 20,23) and did not seek to start anything new but wanted to affirm the historic catholic Faith; they repeatedly stated this and expressed a desire for ecumenical discussions. In the Preface they state that they are not introducing any new confession nor creating any new doctrine but only reaffirming the Faith of their ancestors and the Apostles (Preface 21,23).

Justification by Faith

A prominent theological key to understanding the Confessions is their focus on justification by faith alone apart from works, for the sake of Christ alone. This was the key controversy that sparked the Reformation and so this theme is prominent in the Lutheran Confessions also.¹⁵

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The first key section of the Book of Concord in this regard is Augsburg Confession Article IV which states,

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.¹⁶

This central doctrine of justification is seen, not only in the articles that directly deal with it: AC IV, Ap IV, SA I, FC Ep III, FC Ep VIII, FC SD III, FC SD VIII; but also throughout the entire work. The following are just a few examples of this common thread:

a. AC II, Original Sin. Because we are born in sin and are turned away from God, we cannot by our own efforts be reconciled to Him; it must be by grace.

b. AC V, The Ministry. Because of our sinful state we need the gracious work of God to bring us to faith, so God has established the ministry in order that He may bring us His gifts of baptism (AC IX) and the Lords Supper (AC X), through which we receive the free forgiveness of sins (AC XI).

c. AC XX, Good Works. Because of the gift of faith and the indwelling of the Spirit, Christians will necessarily bring forth good works, and yet these works do not justify. We are justified only by grace. Once we have been justified through the Gospel, we are set free to do truly good works; works done by faith, rather than to make satisfaction for sins.

d. The Catechisms are fundamentally grounded in the doctrine of Justification. They are not a guide on how to measure up to God's standard as if we could justify ourselves, but rather they proclaim the Good News of the forgiveness of sins through the unified work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the Means of Grace.

Law and Gospel

Another significant theological key to understanding the Confessions is understanding the distinction between Law and Gospel, and how the Confessions utilize it.

The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration states,

As the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is a special brilliant light, which serves to the end that God's Word may be rightly divided, and the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles may be properly explained and understood, we must guard it with especial care, in order that these two doctrines may not be mingled with one another, or a law be made out of the Gospel, whereby the merit of Christ is obscured and troubled consciences are robbed of their comfort, which they otherwise have in the holy Gospel when it is preached genuinely and in its purity, and by which they can support themselves in their most grievous trials against the terrors of the Law.¹⁷

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There is a close connection between Law and Gospel, and Justification in the Confessions. Since Rome taught that people contributed to their salvation by keeping the commandments, living a monastic life (AC XXVII 11-14), performing meritorious works (Ap V 62-67; XIA 75-76), and offering indulgences, and many other errors, the distinction between Law and Gospel was being confused. Penitent sinners were not being directed to the Gospel and free forgiveness through Christ, but rather toward more law which left them in bondage.¹⁸

The distinction between Law and Gospel as found in the Confessions puts the Law in its proper place of service to the Gospel as it convicts people of their sin; and directs that repentant sinner to the Gospel where forgiveness is received for Christ's sake. Like with Justification, this pattern is repeated throughout the Confessions. One notable example is in Luther's Catechisms which he structured to follow the rhythm of Law and Gospel. Luther begins with the Law (10 Commandments) which drives the reader to the Gospel (Creed) where he finds the remedy to his sin, finally the Lord's Prayer teaches him that God his Father desires to provide for all his needs.¹⁹

Conclusion

We have identified and examined some of the themes present within the Lutheran Confessions and explored some guidelines and theological keys to understanding this historically significant work. By understanding the history behind the formation of this work, and by being aware of its key themes, you will be better equipped to appreciate the Scriptural faithfulness, theological insight, and relevance of the Lutheran Confessions for Christians today.

The Book of Concord is a treasure of our church, and every Lutheran should own a copy and regularly read it. The content therein is not shackled to a past time but is truly relevant for our day and speaks to every controversy, need, and question that the modern Christian may have. A regular reading of the Confessions will inculcate in you the Scriptures, and the themes and keys discussed above, and equip you with the tools to rightly evaluate the world you live in, in a time when there is increased godlessness both in the culture at large, and sadly, within the visible church.

I pray you are encouraged to pick up the Confessions again, or for the first time, so that you may be trained in righteousness, confident in Christ, and emboldened to stand with the early confessors and say, 'I believe, teach, and confess.'

Tasmin Bourne

This article has been adapted by Tasmin, at the request of CWF, from one of his assignments whilst studying at Australian Lutheran College.

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14 Bente, *Concordia Triglotta*, 851.

15 Gunther Gassmann and Scott Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 75.

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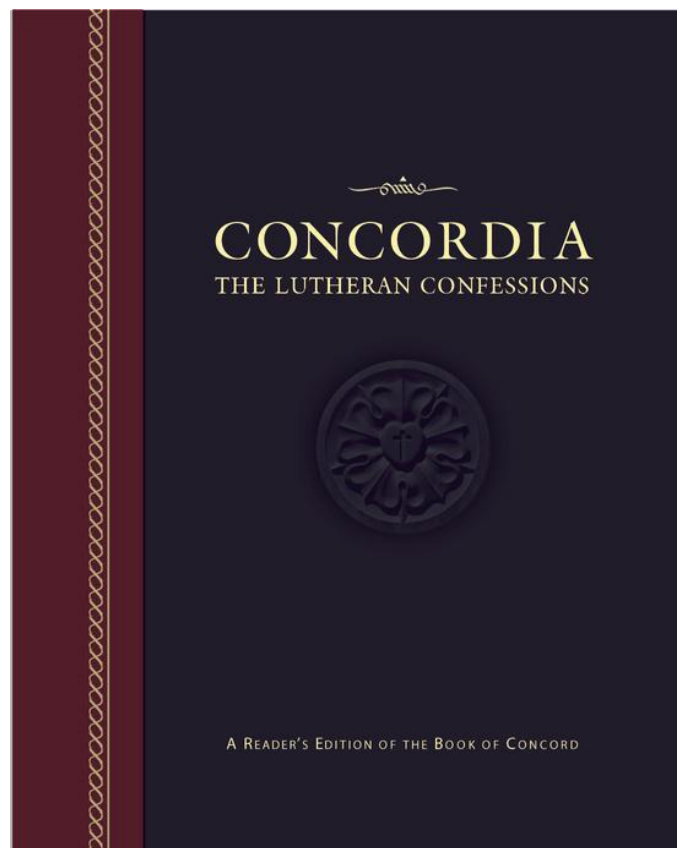
17 Bente, *Concordia Triglotta*, 951.

18 Gassmann, *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions*, 55–56.

19 Timothy Wengert, 'Forming the Faith Today through Luther's Catechisms,' *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. XI, (1997): 379–396, accessed 10 June 2024, https://lutherancatechism.com/pdb_single/?pdb=66

We encourage the reader to pick up their book of concord and to read it regularly. A good resource to use is the podcast <https://www.kfuo.org/category/concord-matters/>. They go through the Book of Concord week by week and talk through the sections as they read them.

If you don't have a copy of the Book of Concord, the Creative Word Fellowship Bookshop has for sale copies of 'Concordia – the Readers Edition of the Book of Concord', in stock. You can also use a free online version which can be found at <https://thebookofconcord.org/>.



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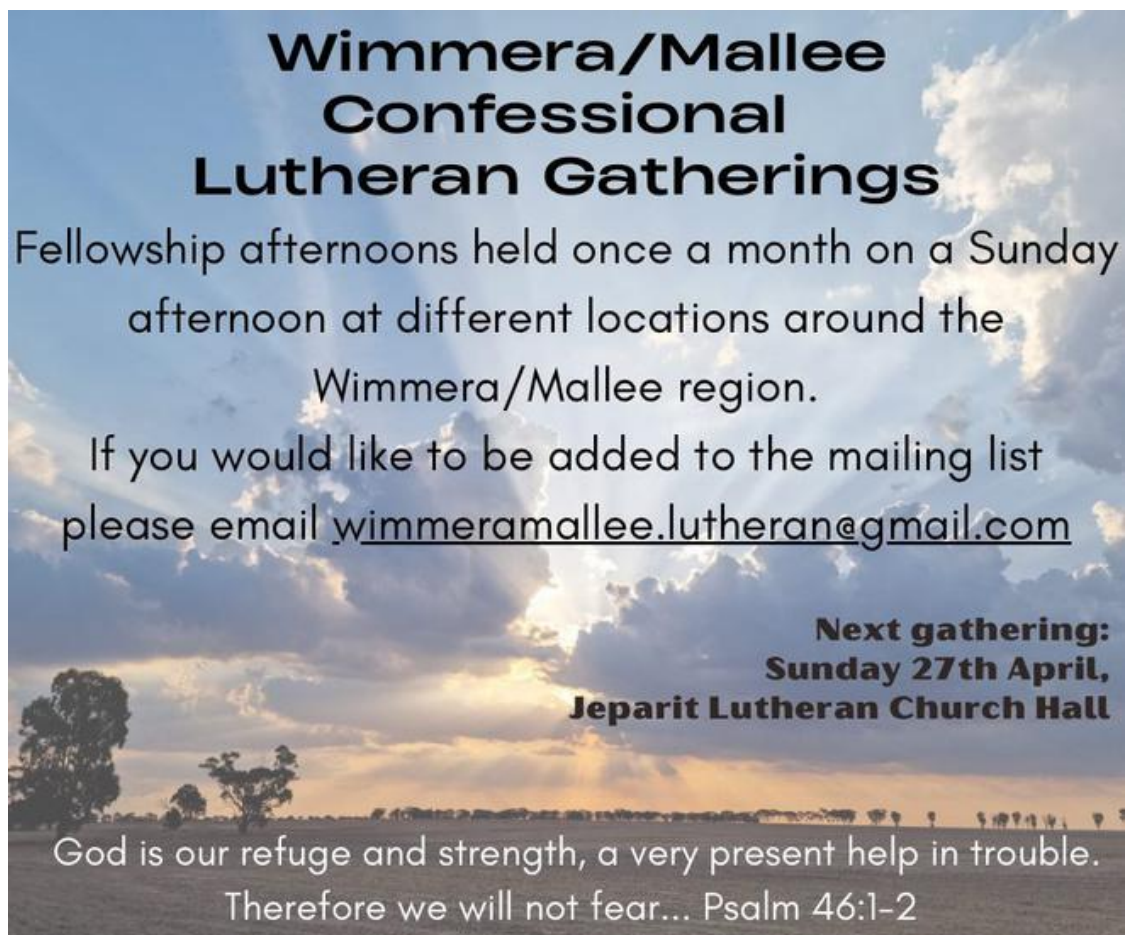
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Confessional
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God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear... Psalm 46:1-2



By Karl Jacobson
2025

God is eternal and unchanging. The writer of the book of Hebrews states clearly that, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”¹ However as we read Mark Noll’s, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, we watch the early Christians struggle to articulate this eternal truth, raising the question, assuming Jesus does not change, does our Christian dogma change?

Noll recounts the history leading to the adoption of the Canon of the New Testament (NT) and the early Christian creeds. The acceptance of a common NT Canon was a significant turning point for early Christians. In the NT they found a common authority regarding the life of Jesus, His person, and the teaching of the apostles. Even outside the NT, apostolicity and their teaching were acknowledged to be authoritative in the early church. The writers of the NT presented a teaching about Jesus, faith, and Christianity, which was consistent with the Old Testament (OT).

Heresies such as Marcionism, the claim that the OT God and the NT God were different somehow in teaching and revelation was unanimously condemned by the Church. Noll walks through the lengthy process of theological discussion, political posturing and eventual acceptance of the doctrine regarding the trinity and the two natures of Christ. As previously stated, we accept as truth that Jesus Christ does not change, and thus even after centuries of deliberation the dogma of the Church had not evolved, it had just arrived at the proper articulation of the eternal truth of God.

It is the teaching of the Lutheran Church in the Formula of Concord is that the will of God is eternal and unchanging. In the Formula of Concord we state, “that through it [the written law] believers in Christ learn to serve God not according to their own ideas but according to his written law and Word, which is a certain rule and guiding principle for directing the godly life and behavior according to the eternal and unchanging will of God.”²

EVOLUTION OF DOGMA

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

The common will of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a significant argument for the Trinity that was highlighted by Noll and is confessed amongst Christians. This eternal will, according to our confessions, is not distant, but is eminently useful and necessary for humanity. God does not change, and neither does His will. This is why recent heresies that attempt to rewrite the eternal will of God, and the consistent teaching of the Church are so disturbing.

From the argument for women’s ordination, to the cessation of the command, “[be] fruitful and multiply,”³ we run a great risk at falling into the grave mistake of altering the consistent Christian dogma.

Noll’s most significant insight comes through his exposition of the phrase, “lex orandi, lex credendi,”⁴ and how the people, through the liturgy, were knowledgeable of the truth regarding Christ and His two natures, apart from a conclusion by the Councils.

This insight is key in our time of various and questionable worship practices and the numerous arising heresies.

It is evident from our discussion that Christian dogma does not change, but the articulation of it in each age does. The Church needs to be careful as it navigates this articulation to not obscure or cloud the eternal will of God taught throughout the ages. Lord have mercy upon us as we navigate this difficult task.

Karl Jacobson

Article written by Karl Jacobson originally as course work for his studies in America. Karl was a seminary student at LCA before leaving to study to become a Pastor, at Concordia Lutheran Seminary St Louis in America under the sponsorship of Lutheran Mission–Australia.

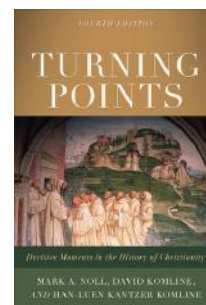
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1 Hebrews 13:8 NKJV

2 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis (Minn.): Fortress press, 2000), 587.

3 Genesis 1:28 NKJV

4 Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2012), 48.





By Pastor P. James Noble
15 Apr. 2019

God did not send the preacher to your congregation to make you happy.

Overview

Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey (TPSO) is an introductory Lutheran spirituality text that unpacks not 'how to be Godly' but in who to be godly and what it means to receive godliness from Christ. Hence, as a result such reception based spirituality produces godly spiritual habits and establishes a prayer life based on reception (Gospel), not one's own efficiency or ability to pray (Law) or to do godliness. Grasping this concept will set up the context and projection of the entire book in both practice and theory.

Weedon unpacks what it means to embrace 'piety' which is the older more archaic term translated today from Scripture contextually rendered 'godly' from the Greek word; εὐσέβεια (cf. Acts 3:12, 1 Tim. 2:2, 3:16, 4:7, 8, 6:3, 5, 6, 11, 2 Tim. 3:5 Tit. 1:1, 2 Pet. 1:3, 6, 7, 3:11).

The big theme is Weedon consistently contrasts is 'piety' (which fights against inward focus, looking to God and thus towards one's neighbour in service) against 'pietism' (which looks inwardly on oneself, obsessed with rules, to do lists, legalism etc.). With Luther's Small Catechism (SC) and the Book of Concord (BC), Weedon takes a Lutheran hermeneutic towards interpreting Scripture and applying it to help the reader develop a clear picture of Christ in the text, what He has done (Gospel), not what we can do (Law) and then showing through such a gracious gift of forgiveness and mercy found in reception of Christ through the sacraments, we are truly free to love God and therefore love our neighbours and serve them out of freedom—rather than legalism.

In other words he makes the necessary distinction between Law and Gospel, the paradox of the freedom of the Christian (cf. Luther's Freedom of a Christian² and Pauline Theology in 1 Cor. 9:19ff.) and how this applies to basic everyday spiritual disciplines such as; prayer, reading God's Word, one's vocation etc.

BOOK REVIEW

Positive

Weedon makes some admirable points about the reception of God's Word in the contexts of prayer, the Eucharist, confession and absolution, sacrificial giving, confessing Christ, good works and the Day of Judgement (eschatology). One example is the Word in preaching makes you holy. He writes tongue in cheek;

God did not send the preacher to your congregation to make you happy. God is not ultimately interested in your happiness and neither should you be. He sent the preacher there to make you holy by speaking the Word to you that alone can do that job.³

Discussing happiness verse holiness he continues, 'Happiness literally hangs on what is happening in a moment of time. Holiness is sharing in God's own divine life forever; and that is true, indestructible blessedness and joy.'⁴

Engagement with Luther and the Small Catechism

There are parts where Weedon quotes directly from Luther's Small Catechism (SC) and there is a cheeky facetiousness undertone in Luther's writing, which in some places lends itself to human reason and one's own sober self-reflection and sinfulness. It's as if to state the obviousness of sin and suffering from one's experience in relation to helping such a person who is considering their need for the Lord's Supper and closing the gap if they have any final doubts. For example when outlining practical questions for the preparedness of a person to receive the Lord's Supper, he runs through the basic confession of faith, i.e. The Ten Commandments, The Creed, Baptism, Lord's Supper etc. and when he comes the last question (no. 20) he writes (as if the first 19 questions weren't enough!),

'But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the sacrament?'⁵ Luther answers;

To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first he should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood. Then he should believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world, and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15-16 and in 1 John 2 and 5. Third, he will certainly have the devil also around him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace, within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; and 2 Timothy 2.⁶

It's as if Luther goes beyond the basics of catechesis questions and lastly turns to a 'fool proof' test of reason and self-observation, which appeals to the experience of the sinner to check his or her proficiency of sin and suffering. Such a self perception appears from Luther's angle as the final black and white checklist and balance to be sure beyond any shadow of a doubt that the person who hesitates in taking the Lord's Supper can be certain that they do indeed need Christ' gift of forgiveness of sins—for such a person without it will be noticeably plagued by the devil day and night, conscious smitten, and in constant trouble! In other words, Luther is saying, 'don't be foolish, but rather believe in Christ' promise, His Word and the benefits of what the Lord's Supper gives—forgiveness of sins!'

Table of Duties and Vocation

Discussing the SC Table of Duties estates (marriage, civil government and ecclesial orders), Weedon makes some excellent points in how all Christians in their vocations are doing holy works. He writes;

BOOK REVIEW

And that being a citizen is [also] a holy order; when he or she cheerfully pays taxes to and prays for government officials, it is a good work, well pleasing to God. Husbands and wives together live in a most holy order. marriage. When they sacrifice together for the good of their family, they perform a good work. To be a child is in itself a holy order and when a child cheerfully sweeps the floor at the parent's bidding, a veritable and precious work has been done."

How encouraging is this! The same is for being a young person, an employee, a student, a widow, etc. These are all holy vocations in which God calls his people and sanctifies them through their calling. In other words, God through His Word makes every vocation holy; again, the Office of the Ministry is not the only vocation that is "holy" but rather all vocations are equal in God's eyes. Such mundane actions to us in everyday vocations seem repetitious, but to God we are serving the world as his hands and feet in which he consecrates us by his Word through works that he has predestined for us to do (Eph. 2:10).

Negative

When referring to how the Word is received and experienced by our senses in the Divine Service, Weedon writes the Word is '...read, preached, tasted, and sung.'⁸ This is true. But there is more than this regarding our senses in experiencing God, the Word is indeed read, preached, tasted, sung—(but also!) seen, touched and smelt(!). For we receive the Word and it affects all our senses, not just one or two. I have written a paper about Incense and the sense of smell in the Divine Service, which argues for this. You can read that here.⁹

This book is readable for all audiences, however it is more specifically designed for an American Lutheran audience,

in specific, ones with American Lutheran liturgical resources (i.e. Lutheran Service Books or better know as an LSB), which no standard LCA member will have or have access to.

Theologically there are times when Weedon writes about 'universal forgiveness' and muddies the waters of the question "to what extent does the atonement of Christ' blood apply?" This is a complex and cosmic question that has divided many Christians and denominations through out the centuries. I think Weedon confuses the extent of the atonement by going too far in context of forgiveness received in the Divine Service through Confession and Absolution.

The other option is potentially Weedon may mean alternative definitions of these terms when he writes;

But can Absolution be so broad and so certain in scope? [i.e. to forgive the sins of the whole world. Weedon straightforwardly says] Yes! It is grounded in two truths. First, the absolution is solidly anchored in the universal atonement of our saviour, who by His blood has indeed won forgiveness for the entire world. The Absolution is one the Lord's methods of delivering that universal forgiveness.¹⁰

Firstly, the problem here is how Weedon does not articulate the atonement's scope and the theology of absolution. Existentially speaking the issue is that when forgiveness is pronounced in the Divine Service through Absolution, while the proclamation is universal, it is only received to the ones to whom it is pronounced, that is, the ones who repent and believe, confessing their sins to Christ Jesus and desire forgiveness in his name¹¹—hence, not the entire world and certainly not the unrepentant.

BOOK REVIEW

In sapiential terms, to them, forgiveness is offered, but it cannot be received unless they repent. Lutheran theology is clear in its confessions that those who continue in unrepentance (Christians!) will lose the Holy Spirit.¹² Lutheran theology is clear, accurately articulating in our liturgy drawing the necessary distinction between those who repent and those who do not, as based on Scripture alone. Such repentance and confession is necessary albeit a prerequisite to receive forgiveness (particularly in theology that supports the rite of baptism,¹³ admission to the sacrament of the altar,¹⁴ confirmation,¹⁵ private confession and absolution,¹⁶ etc.), whereas one who does not repent does not receive forgiveness. As the Lutheran Church of Australia's (LCA) hymnal rightly communicates this theology explicitly when the Pastor declares;

Christ gave to his Church the authority to forgive the sins of those who repent, and to declare to those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven [cf. John 9:41, 20:21-23, Matt. 18:18, Luke 18:23].

Therefore upon your confession, I, as a called and ordained servant of the Word announce the grace of God to all you, and on behalf of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Put simply, the atonement is indeed for the whole world, God does desire all to come to repentance, we as the Church should and do proclaim the Gospel to the world, forgiveness is proclaimed to all—however not all are forgiven. The ones who do not repent do not receive forgiveness of their sin. Such forgiveness is invisible and cannot be seen with human eyes (Ps. 44:21, Luke 16:15, Acts 15:8, Rom. 8:27), and yet God knows whom he forgives and whom he does not.

In other words the Church (not the world) both locally and universally¹⁸ are forgiven of sin when it repents and this is given through the Means of Grace (Baptism, Lord's Supper, the Word, Confess and Absolution).



Again, one can only receive forgiveness by faith alone

(Matt. 8:13, 15:28). A paper unpacking this further is available here.¹⁹

In short Weedon uses the following Bible verses to support these assertions; John 18:11, Romans 3:23-25, 1 John 1:9, 2:1-2, 2 Samuel 12:13. The problem is none of these verses carry the theological idea that forgiveness of Christ is for the 'whole world' or for 'all people' universally, this is not clear cut in the Bible. The Bible does say to proclaim the Gospel to 'all' but are 'all' forgiven? The question is not so clear. Forgiveness is never received by anyone who is unrepentant. The forgiveness given in these scriptures is given to individuals in each case. Weedon would do better to use verses that are explicit on the matter of God's love and desire for 'all' to be saved such as John 3:16 'for God so loved the world', or God 'desires all people to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:4), 'not wishing that any would perish' (1 Pet. 3:9) or make good use of the entire town of Nineveh when they corporately repented of their sin (Jonah 3:1-10).

BOOK REVIEW

While I do believe the atonement of Christ can save the whole world, or should I say it is possible that all can be saved, based on the entirety of the full breadth of Scripture, I would say the atonement's scope is best put:

Christ' atonement is sufficient for all yet only efficacious for some.

Such a better-rendered tightly packed sentence captures all of Scripture's extensiveness of language; not pitting one verse against another which is often done in Calvinism and Arminianism circles and is true to the Book of Concord. Such an idea allows God's Word to speak, no verse contradicts another, even if this appears to be so from our fallen sinful nature's perspective, moreover, navigating between a universal atonement theology (all people everywhere are saved, no one goes to hell etc.) and the 'frozen chosen' caricature (only God's elect are going to heaven, double predestination, defeatism theology, why bother with evangelism, or prayer. etc.).

Closing Remarks I would definitely rate this book and would say TPSO is up there with John Kleinig's Grace Upon Grace.²⁰ It is a book I would give to any catechumen, any Christian approaching baptism, any Christian who cannot remember the SC and/or a person simply desiring to be a better follower of Christ. I would give it to Christians who think they have their piety 'altogether'—or should I say their 'pietism'—and I would also give it to ones whose consciences are troubled by their lack of piety, ones that believe they are no good at prayer, don't pray long enough—or not at all! It is an excellent text (despite the occasional ambiguous term) that is easily accessible to any layperson that does not understand theological terms and therefore the ideas can be easily grasped into a clear understanding of piety that is received—not achieved.

By the end of the book any reader will have an introductory understanding of the SC, reception spirituality and a practical framework to help mediate on Christ, His Word flowing into and out of the Divine Service on Sundays. Such knowledge and reception of God's Word through the Divine Service, memorization and application of SC '...are a solid foundation...because none of these habits centre on human achievement; rather they are all about receiving from God.'²¹

Pastor Peter Noble

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- 1 William Chancellor Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).
- 2 Martin Luther, Luther's works Volume 31: Career of The Reformer I "The Freedom of a Christian" (ed. by. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann; American ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 343–77 Again, one can only receive forgiveness by faith alone
- 3 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 14.
- 4 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 14.
- 5 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 66.
- 6 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 66.
- 7 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 148.
- 8 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 14.

BOOK REVIEW

9 P. James Noble, 'He's Insensed and Nose it: A Liturgical-Theological and Historical Rationale for Incense, its Place in the Divine Service and the Employment of Smell For the "Sake of Good Order"' (2018), https://www.academia.edu/37629632/Hes_I_nsensed_and_Nose_it_A_Liturgical_Theological_and_Historical_Rationale_for_I_ncense_its_Place_in_the_Divine_Service_a_nd_the_Empl_oyment_of_Smell_For_the_Sake_of_Good_Order.

10 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 86, Emphasis mine.

11 Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ed. by. Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand; Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2000). 'Concerning repentance it is taught that those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. Now properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin, and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ. Such faith, in turn, comforts the heart and puts it at peace. Then improvement should also follow, and a person should refrain from sins. For these should be the fruits of repentance, as John says in Matthew 3[:8*]: "Bear fruit worthy of repentance." p. 44

12 Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Book of Concord. p. 579 . 'However, faith does not remain in those who lead a sinful life, lose the Holy Spirit, and reject repentance.' p. 579

13 Lutheran Church of Australia, Church Rites (ed. by. David A. Schubert; Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 1994), 1–14.

14 Lutheran Church of Australia, Church Rites, 19–23.

15 Lutheran Church of Australia, Church Rites, 24–31.

16 Lutheran Church of Australia, Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care (ed. by. David A. Schubert; Adelaide: Openbook, 1998), 27–32.

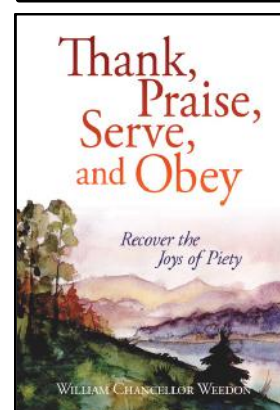
17 Lutheran Church of Australia, Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Pub. House, 1989), 7, Emphasis mine.

18 By universal I mean absolution given by Ordained Pastors all over the world wherever those Churches are who are part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church across the entire world, past, present and future.

19 David P. Scaer, 'The Nature And Extend of The Atonement in Lutheran Theology', Bull. Evang. Theol. Soc. (1967). While Scaer's paper is true of Lutheran Confessions, I think some statements made here make me uneasy and is language I would not use to describe the extent of the atonement and its relationship to election. Nonetheless a helpful paper.

20 John W. Kleinig, Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality For Today (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2008).

21 Weedon, Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey: Recover The Joys of Piety, 178



Copies of Pastor William Weedon's book Thank, Praise, Serve, and Obey are available from the CWF book shop.

CONFESSING IN HOSTILITY

By Pastor Shaun Manning
2025

¹⁷ *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"¹⁸ And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. (1 Kings 18:17-18)*

How these words ring true to the Lutheran situation in Australia.

Faithful brother Pastors and members of the LCA have been and continue to stand in the place of Elijah whilst being falsely accused. Pertinently, one of the core signs of a good confession is: false accusation and deceptive indictments against you.

You may recall our Lord's words to His disciples:

¹¹ *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12)*

Or similarly, in Luke's Beatitude account:

²² *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*

²⁶ *"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:22-23, 26)*
This is affirmation for Elijah, along with all true prophets who speak and confess the whole counsel of God. It is also a warning for those who do not.

The litmus test is clear:

If you're hated and falsely accused for Christ's sake, you are blessed. If you're spoken well of by the same crowd, be careful.

CONFESSING IN HOSTILITY

To translate and transfer this to our modern dilemmas, it is heavily related to our agreeableness, and the need and desire to be liked.

Often the modern (and historic) Pastor's dilemma is "keeping customers happy". This is reinforced by the witting or unwitting ecclesiastical hierarchy and misguided fraternal encouragement.

Too often Bishops and Pastors crumble under the pressure of declining numbers, societal expectations, grumbling un-catechised members. This causes them to go into survival mode, which is the root cause of people pleasing.

Unsurprisingly, this stifles the Pastor's ability to speak the clear Word of God, and if he should speak such truth, watch out. There has been a growing unwillingness to preach and apply the Word of God to any current issue inside or outside the Church.

It is as if the Word of God and the Confessions are in a vacuum and have no relevance to ecclesial or societal issues. Speaking out against falsehood that is found in the Church is then socially bound to the dinner table or campfire, if ever.

It is no secret that our flesh, and the evil one, love to distort truths by splitting them into half-truths. In this case, the famous "keep politics out of the pulpit" as well as the "breaking of the eighth" and "speaking the truth in love" with a sprinkle of "Matthew 18" are all manipulated to fit our agreeable and modern western cultural ideology.

I was speaking on similar matters here in Lutheran Church-Canada (yes, we have problems too) with a colleague recently.

He responded to my encouragement to confess Christ and speak out by saying "that's not the Canadian way". My response was not exactly family friendly. Perhaps use your imagination to guess how my rebuttal was expressed.

I knew what he was speaking about because boldly confessing Christ is also not the "Australian way", unless you want to have a bad reputation amongst some less than faithful brothers and sisters.

The point here is that we are unaware of how inculcated our generation is and how the evil one attempts to muzzle the Word even amongst confessional Lutheran people.

Our Lord reminded us that no servant is greater than his master. He was hated for being and speaking the Truth and we will be too, if we stand with him. This is a given.

***We are therefore
called to be at peace
amidst this fallen
reality yet to stand
faithful amidst it all.***

The ability to confess will come from the Spirit's prompting, found in the Word. By saying 'Amen', confessing our fear, repenting and being forgiven for such will strengthen us to be able to boldly confess.

CONFESSING IN HOSTILITY

Through the painful Confession and the freeing Absolution, the Spirit of God will enable us to put on the full armour of God.

***To stand faithful
amidst all current
pressure; we need to
let the Lord and His
Word increase whilst
we and our human
desires need to
decrease.***

Another temptation to not confess is the classic ‘tone-policing’ that one can be accused of. Tone-policing, if you’re not familiar, is the classic case of ‘I agree with what you’ve said, but I don’t like how you’ve said it.’ A form of this was thrown at our Lord Jesus in Mark 3:20–27. The scribes from Jerusalem liked that Jesus was driving out demons but claimed that He was doing it possessed by demons, ‘we like what you’re doing but not how you’re doing it.’

This tone-policing predicament again is a half-truth because it is a noble endeavour to confess with gentleness and love. But we are to remember that the Lord is Himself love and so He sets the parameters of what love and confession is and looks like (not Australian, Canadian or any cultural norms). Tone-policing can come from within and without the confessional Lutheran community.

The energy that such tone-policing requires should be spent elsewhere because it is another factor used by the Evil One to disable our endeavour to speak out. This energy needs to be refocused toward speaking out as fellow sinners yet we are also called to be voices in the wilderness.

The Lord Jesus always spoke what is true, in love, and yet offended many. We are to make way for the Lord and seek His forgiveness when we get the tone wrong, which we will.

In short:

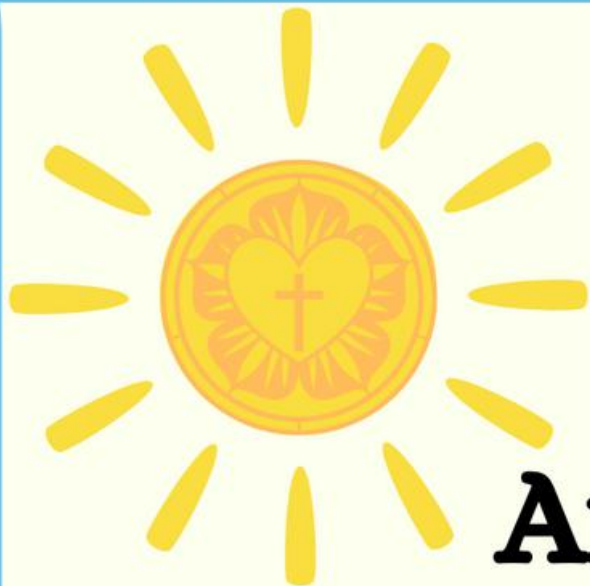
***Our unhealthy desire to
be smiled at, invited for
dinner and spoken well
of by laity and clergy
needs to be rid of.***

Instead, we are to solely desire the Father’s countenance, the Father’s invitation and affirmation as our Lord promises to those who confess Him (Matthew 10:32)

May the Lord grant us the desire to stand firm with Him for Christ’ sake.

Pastor Manning



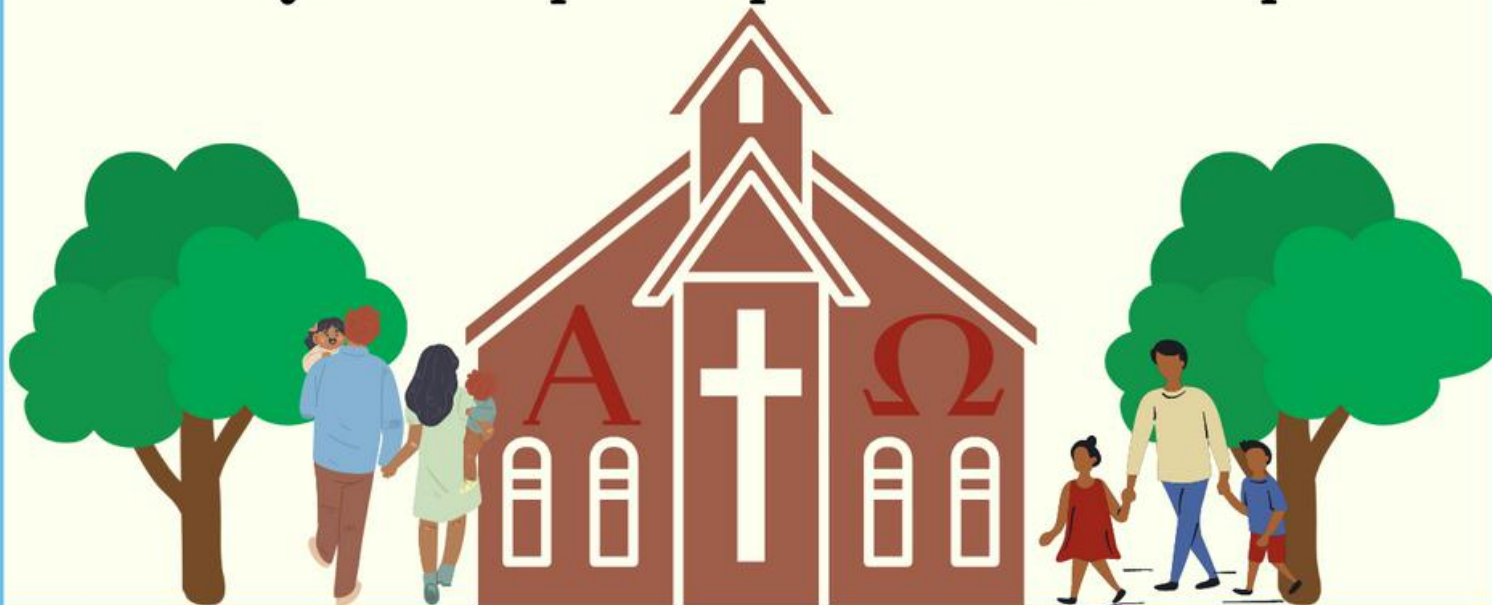


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By Rev. Dr. John Stephenson
25th Nov 2023

This article was presented at a “Confessing Christ” Conference held on 25 November 2023.

Introduction

During the generation between the end of the Second World War and around the year 1970 it seemed that the Lutheran Churches of North America were drawing closer together and that even if they would not come together in a single church body, they would at least be in communion with one another. The Missouri Synod had ‘loosened up’ while the other Lutherans still seemed solid in their profession of basic Christian doctrine. At this epoch drew to its close, the Lutheran Church in America (formed in 1962) and the American Lutheran Church (formed in 1960) began the practice of ordaining women into the pastoral office. The new measure reflected the mood of the 1960s and was defended not biblically but sociologically, in terms of the emancipation of women and their equality with men.

To begin with, most practising Lutherans, even in the Missouri Synod, had little idea of the long-term effects of this basic departure from historic Christian teaching and practice.

An aged pastor in Baltimore MD told me one year how he spoke with the renowned Missouri Synod seminary professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn on the topic of women’s ordination shortly before the latter’s sudden death. Piepkorn admitted he had not thought deeply on the issue but remarked, ‘If that comes in, it will change our understanding of human sexuality’.

***‘If that comes in, it will
change our
understanding of
human sexuality’.***

These were prophetic words from a famous historian.

CONFESSING CHRIST PRESENTATION

When I joined the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St Catharines, in January 1989, I related to the two middle-aged professors as a younger brother, but the two senior professors, one the president and the other the systematics professor of the institution, were old enough to be my father and I treated them accordingly. They both regarded it as possible, even foreseeable, that the Missouri Synod would one day ordain women; they would not campaign for the introduction of women's ordination, but they did not think it would fundamentally alter the nature of the Synod. Significantly, as products of their generation both men held to a 'functionalist' understanding of the office of the ministry, inclining to the view that the Lord Jesus commanded the performance of certain acts of ministry, leaving it to the church to decide by whom they should be carried out. This view was set forth in the highly (and disastrously) influential book published by Oscar Feucht around 1974 entitled *Everyone a Minister*. Those who hold to a functionalist understanding of the ministry are easy prey for campaigners in favour of the ordination of women.

“women’s ordination dramatically alters the deep structure and entire content of the Christian religion”

As the decades rolled on and the differences between the two major synodical formations in North America became ever deeper and more obvious, it became harder and harder to deny that women's ordination dramatically alters the deep structure and entire content of the Christian religion.

In light of this experience and on the basis of Holy Scripture and the entire orthodox Lutheran tradition, I lay before you the thesis, self-evident among confessional Lutherans and other traditional Christians of East and West but bitterly contested in many sections of contemporary Christendom, that the pastoral—that is, the presbyteral/priestly or episcopal—ordination of women wreaks such havoc in the Church as the household of God that it unavoidably suffocates Christian faith and life in all ecclesial bodies that adopt the practice, permitting them to survive here and there only as instances of Dr Pieper's famous *glückliche Inkonzsequenz*/felicitous inconsistency.

“the pastoral ordination of women wreaks such havoc in the Church as the household of God that it unavoidably suffocates Christian faith and life in all ecclesial bodies that adopt the practice”

And I would accompany this thesis with the observation that the introduction of women's ordination in churches that formally profess Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy does not happen until Scriptural authority is significantly diminished with the result that the dogmatic formulae of the patristic and later ages have themselves forfeited much of their original force.

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What is the Church?

New Testament mention of Vatican II's trademark language of the Church as the 'people of God' is scanty in the extreme (e.g., Heb 4:9). Conversely, robust scriptural support exists for the picture of the Church as the body of which Christ is Head and as the bride to whom He is the Bridegroom. Being Church involves the sheep in hearing and heeding the Shepherd's voice. As the Church goes against and seeks to reshape the cultures of all times and places, she contrasts with modern societies of the Anglosphere by being not a democracy but a monarchy and actually more of an absolute than a constitutional monarchy, a monarchy in which Christ the King has set in place an unalterable constitution and given firm directions about not only doctrine but also about the rites we practise.

“robust scriptural support exists for the picture of the Church as the body of which Christ is Head and as the bride to whom He is the Bridegroom”

When financial constraints obliged Lutheran Church—Canada to engage in a process of 'restructuring' some years ago, Tom Winger bade her eschew adoption of a business model but instead to think through the nuts and bolts of practical ecclesiology from the perspective of the Church as the household of God.

The orthodox remnant among Australian Lutherans would do well to get hold of and study the small volume *The Wittenberg Reformation and the Church as the Household of God in Ephesians*. As the St Catharines seminary publishes books on Lulu, these are printed and posted in the countries where they are ordered, thus offering you Australians a buyer's bargain. The starting point of the argument I shall set forth before you is that when she takes form in time and place the Church is recognisable as precisely a household. Mothers play an indispensable role in households, of course, but only in exceptional circumstances do they head them, this being rather a role the Almighty means for men to occupy.

There's something unsatisfactory about Francis Pieper's claim that the Church is essentially invisible and that only the equally invisible factor of *fiducia cordis*/the faith of the heart causes people to belong to her. For households are visible entities with perceptible structure and the unseen faith of the heart/*fiducia cordis* manifests itself in faithfulness, a behavioural factor that can be monitored.

Household alterations through the introduction of Women's Ordination

Three incidents stamped into my memory might help us think through our topic and test my bold claim, so permit me to recite them in order.

First, during the academic year 1982–1983 I taught in the Religion Department of the only North American Concordia College outside the Missouri Synod, namely, Concordia, Moorhead, Minnesota, then affiliated with the American Lutheran Church and already looking forward to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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The chaplains arranged for one liturgical service to be held each week for daily chapel, and I recall a beautiful girl serving as cantor up in the gallery, discharging a task during which she performed a solo chant of the psalm, which she ended with ‘Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.’

One day I was sitting with the chaplains in their office, when a young female pastor came in and lodged a complaint about the ‘sexist’ language of the Gloria Patri; women just couldn’t feel included or valued when such language was used. Accordingly, the next time Morning Prayer was used, glory was given to the Creator and to the Redeemer and to the Sanctifier, but not by the beautiful young lady who sat before me three times a week in one of my classes.

She, an ALC Lutheran of Evangelical, Pietist type, her Blessed Trinity unambiguously consisted of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the corollary that she declined to play the feminist liturgy-bending game.

The then President of the College sat on the committee superintending the formation of the ELCA, and I recall how, in the constitution of what they tellingly looked forward to as the ‘new church.

If and when you orthodox Lutherans of the LCA embark on an Exodus that will lead you into a continuing formation of your own, you must do as part of the Church that Christ founded, not as a ‘new’ Church, which would be a hideous oxymoron—the Blessed Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit survived on a vote of 33 to 30.

***Creator, Redeemer,
and Sanctifier are
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Themselves.***

Creation, redemption, and sanctification are undivided works of the one God—omnia opera Dei ad extra sunt indivisa—appropriated to specific Persons, but Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier are neither names of those Persons nor vocatives with which They address each other; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not relate in these capacities among Themselves.

Secondly, a few years later, although they wanted a loose Communion policy, most of my parishioners in Western New York had no problem with my indicating the wrongfulness of women’s ordination, but one forceful lady in late middle age would routinely push the envelope with me, so that when I remarked that women’s ordination would wreak havoc with the imagery of Scripture as it crops up in the life of the Church, she responded with, ‘But it’s just imagery.’

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A lengthy monograph could easily be written on this issue, which goes much deeper than dear old Win thought. Has it ever struck you that Sacred Scripture does not practise the academic churchly discipline of dogmatics? Dogmatics employs philosophically-rooted or -tinged technical terms derived from Greek and Latin, appealing thereby to a learned constituency while in the main bypassing the man and woman in the pew. From the first pages of Genesis onwards divine communication to man occurs through images, images in which Christ clothed Himself, images that burst into a great firework display or come together as instruments in a magnificent symphony as New Testament Scripture closes in Revelation.

Mess with the imagery and you mess with the reality it sets forth.

Dethrone God the Father and you're instantly back in paganism and/or Gnosticism. The celebrant of the Eucharist cloaks his own inner darkness and many shortcomings in an alb, and with his chasuble he steps forth dressed up as Christ glorious King and Priest, for when he speaks the almighty verba, to use the technical term for the Words of Institution, and distributes the Lord's Body and Blood the unworthy servant does so as the authorised ambassador of the Most High, as the ambassador and in the place of Christ, vice et loco Christi. Blessed Mary Mother of God is higher than the cherubim and more glorious than the seraphim, yet unlike the sinner Peter she is not tasked to perform official ministerial acts on her Son's behalf. When you think of it, a higher honour is given to Mary than to Peter. Only one who has stepped outside of Christ and has lost the Holy Spirit could ever say, as I heard once, that 'Paul was a nasty old misogynist.'

Thirdly, when scrambling in the early months of 1989 to teach a course in Theological Ethics, the students and I pondered a document released by the ELCA at just that time entitled Guidelines for the Inclusive Use of the English Language. The whole future trajectory of the ELCA was set forth in this set of instructions, and the class spent a while pondering the implications of the proposed rule that the Church should only be referred to as 'she' when being considered in her capacity as bride of Christ. 'When is the Church not the bride of Christ,' asked a youthful, still light brown-haired Tom Winger. Betty Friedan (1921–2006) was once asked:

'What would be the most radical change caused by women's movement?'

to which this professedly non-religious Jewish lady responded, 'It is theological.' I offer you the further thesis that words are not, in the end of the day and all things considered, adiaphora. At their best, human words reflect and attest our creation in the image of God, the imago Dei. If we humans reproduce, we are no better than animals or photocopiers, whereas, if we procreate, something sacred is going on in the marriage bed. Words must be suited to their object and a major prerequisite for writing or public speaking is the search for the right words to capture reality and to speak to the heart of one's listeners or readers. Moreover, the words in which we confess and expound the Faith should rightly be patterned on the vocabulary and speech patterns of Sacred Scripture, which come to us with a divine stamp of approval.

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In his essay for the festschrift in honour of John Kleinig, my good friend Gottfried Martens has laid out in depth and detail the process whereby women's ordination was introduced into the Lutheran churches of Germany and Scandinavia, and to my mind this topnotch scholar who has devoted his ministry to ardent and fruitful missionary toil has proved beyond reasonable doubt that those who must in conscience reject women's ordination as subversive of the revelation of God in Christ have no long term place of abode in their churches.

Assurances given at the time of the introduction of women's ordination that clergymen opposed to this innovation would continue to have an honoured place and even serve as bishops in these churches have proved to be mere pieces of paper reminiscent of the sheets waved by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain on his return from meeting with Hitler in Munich in 1938.

When the Church of England resolved back in 1994 to overturn two millennia of uninterrupted practice, her governing authorities promised that 'Two Integrities' would henceforth enjoy equal footing within her, and arrangements were made for the institution of several suffragan bishoprics whose holders would serve as 'flying bishops' to parishes that clung to a male-only priesthood. These bishoprics remain, with one of them now being held by a Conservative Evangelical, but they are shut out from the local Anglican mainstream and members of Parliament of both main parties have made it clear in the chamber of the House of Commons that accommodation of opponents of women's ordination in the established Church is intolerable where Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are the name of the game. Bishop Pohjola will tell us how State intervention in the affairs of the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia is even more overt than is the case in England.

To my best knowledge, the King of Norway used to be the Protector of the Church while the King of Sweden was her Senior Member, and my very rickety Danish tells me that Queen Margaretha is the Head (huvud) of the Church of Denmark, a church whose supreme authority is in practical terms the country's Parliament. A price has been and is to be paid for Tr 54's at the time self-evident acknowledgement of the princes as 'chief members of the Church,' *praecipua membra ecclesiae*. Hostile civil authorities can be resisted and even withstood, sometimes at the price of blood, but the huge majority of clergy and laity of the Church of England and of the wider company of what we may call the Canterbury Anglicans have willingly forsaken the historic Faith, so that just in the past several months the Church of England's General Synod has agreed to study the topic of the use of gendered language for God, which means that they are treading the same path as those ELCA Lutherans in Minnesota forty years ago.

Church fellowship is fellowship at the altar and vice versa: understanding the Church as Communion

Whether or not the governing circles of a Church will permit the ongoing service in her midst of clergymen who do not acknowledge the ordination of women, how could such clergy and the laity who rally around them continue to function in the long term in such a Church anyway? **For the bottom line of being in a Church is *communio*, and the regular, actually indispensable way of expressing *communio* is by celebrating the Eucharist and taking Holy Communion together.** A friend in Canada once remarked that a Synod, to use our North American parlance, is a Communion fellowship or it is nothing.

CONFESSING CHRIST PRESENTATION

A temporary, not yet final breach of communion, referred to in polite Anglican parlance as a 'state of impaired communion', describes what slowly happened in the decades following the promulgation of the Definition of Chalcedon in AD 451. The great majority of Christians in Egypt and a large proportion of those in Syria could not shake off the impression that Chalcedon's acknowledgement of the Lord as existing in rather than from Two Natures represented a retreat from St Cyril's achievement at the Council of Ephesus in 431, which defined the unity of the Person of Christ, into which He took a complete human nature. This conviction grew in force as they realised they were saddled with what the Armenian Church anathematises to this day as the 'vile Tome of Leo'. All of this is a long story, which is much worth revisiting.

For perhaps half a century fierce controversy raged within the one Church of the East, but once some opponents of Chalcedon were subjected to the death penalty after the turn of the sixth century and despite the best efforts of Emperor Justinian (a figure commemorated in the Missouri Synod's Lutheran Service Book) to repair the breach, the further we go into the 500s the more we find evidence of two mutually exclusive Churches that exist to this day, despite all the ecumenical rapprochement that has been achieved in recent decades.

But the doctrinal differences between Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy are dwarfed by the divisions set in motion within the several confessions of Christendom by the introduction of women's ordination. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Pope Pius X spearheaded a mighty campaign against 'Modernism', which he described in the encyclical Pascendi as the 'synthesis of all heresies'.

Anyone who wants to get a grasp of contemporary Roman Catholicism must remain bewildered until it dawns on him that the Modernism temporarily suppressed by Pius X reemerged in, with, under, and around the Second Vatican Council, achieving a spectacular victory with the election of Jorge Bergoglio as pope in 2013. Since the dogmatic-cum-theological issues surrounding women's ordination are located at the busy intersection of a good many articles of faith, I would update Pope Guiseppe Sarto's memorable claim by stating that

***principled and informed
advocacy of women's
ordination involves its
proponents in a
synthesis of all heresies
or at any rate of several
or a good many of them.***

Lutheran and Anglican Christendom began to fracture two generations ago when women began to appear in loco Christi at altar and in pulpit, but the secessions provoked by this innovation were few in number. In North America several tiny Anglican jurisdictions appeared that are still struggling to achieve full communion between themselves; as they move slowly to this goal, they are collectively referred to as The Continuum. A much larger exodus of traditional-minded Anglicans has taken place in the last two decades in both the United States and Canada as a stream of bishops, priests, and parishioners have been unable to accept the approval of same sex relations and even the awarding of sacramental status to same sex 'marriages'.

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Since 2010 the fledgling Anglican Church of North America has been a formal ecumenical partner of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Lutheran Church—Canada. ACNA is on the best of terms, mutually extending eucharistic hospitality to but not yet in a state of actual intercommunion with NALC, the North American Lutheran Church.

As their representatives have put it to me, both churches were forged in the same fire of being unable to continue in their old structures on account of their parent bodies' rejection of the Sixth Commandment and of the dogma in which it shines as a jewel in a ring.

The exodus from ELCA-ELCiC and TEC/ACC included a goodly number of ordained women, with the result that women's ordination is recognised and still practised within both churches, although according to a different protocol in each.

A minority within NALC rejects women's ordination, the contrary position of its majority being the major obstacle to closer relations with LCMS and LCC.

Within ACNA the situation is subtly different, with most bishops and dioceses holding to historic doctrine and practice, while a minority of bishops and dioceses with larger membership include women clergy ordained up to the level of priest.

To keep the peace in ACNA as a whole, it is agreed that only men may receive episcopal consecration, and that ordained women may not function at provincial level beyond the rung of deacon. Only Anglicans could live with a shaky compromise of this sort. But an ACNA bishop who is a good friend of mine once remarked that because of this uneasy compromise ACNA, while more than a federation, is less than a Church.

And lest anyone should point to the existence of NALC and ACNA in support of the view that two doctrines and practices on women's ordination can coexist peacefully within one Church, I would explain that these two churches have come out of severely heterodox, to put it bluntly even apostate bodies, and are happily moving in the opposite direction. At least in ACNA the current compromise is recognised as only a temporary solution. To be fully Church ACNA must purge herself of the practice of women's ordination, and in the long run the minority within NALC who cannot in conscience accept women's ordination would serve their present Church best by going over to LCMC/LCC. Two practices on this decisive matter necessarily entail two Churches.

Women's Ordination and Aberrations on Human Sexuality: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Permit me to lay yet another thesis before you in the assertion that **the issue of women's ordination and the whole rats' nest of Sixth Commandment-related issues are simply two sides of the same coin.** Since genital relations are divinely restricted to married heterosexual couples joined in a family relationship in which the man is the head and the woman the heart of a miniature social corpus, it makes sense that only a baptised man may be pastoral-cum-liturgical head of the household of God at the levels of parish, diocese, and archdiocese. The great issue whose surface manifests itself like the tip of an iceberg in the questions of women's ordination and human sexuality is most emphatically not a matter of mere positive law expressed in what might seem to be culturally outmoded prescriptions; no, this issue reaches down into natural law, definitive and unsurpassable divine revelation, and even the inner life of the holy Triune God.

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Disregard Sacred Scripture and unanimous tradition by going soft on either issue and you start to slide down a slippery slope into a place where you cannot prevent the LGBT Sparkle Creed of summer 2023 from being professed at an altar with which you are in communion:

"I believe in the non-binary God whose pronouns are plural. I believe in Jesus Christ, their child who wore a fabulous tunic and had two dads and saw everyone as a sibling-child of God.

I believe in the rainbow spirit who shatters our image of one white light and refracts it into a rainbow of gorgeous diversity. I believe in the church of everyday saints as numerous, creative, and resilient as patches on the AIDS quilt, whose feet are grounded in mud and whose eyes gaze at the stars in wonder. I believe in the calling to each of us that love is love is love is love, so beloved let us love. I believe glorious God help my unbelief."

The Bottom Line of being a Pastor is to be a Spiritual Father in the Household of God

Four years ago, as I sat jetlagged but attentive to the lively teaching of a great scholar in a four-hour seminar presided over by N. T. Wright in the Scottish university city of St Andrews, it did not seem appropriate to contradict a professor more eminent than myself when he based his support for women's ordination on the contention that the core and basically the only task of the Church's ministers is to announce the Good News, which—and this is my opinion and my wording—every fool knows that a woman can discharge as well as a man.

No, Bishop Wright, for while the Israelite slave girl taken into Syrian captivity could and did inform Naaman's wife that a God and a prophet in Israel were able to help her stricken husband, and while in Bo Giertz's Hammer of God the elderly peasant woman Katrina could console a conscience-smitten dying old sinner with the Gospel as the learned clergyman Dr Savonius sat tonguetied in rationalist error, neither of these estimable confessor ladies was either capable or desirous of assuming liturgical presidency as spiritual fathers in the household of God.

A generation or so ago many North Americans used the horridly ugly language of the 'functions' of the office of the ministry, as though the ministry were an impersonal contraption that works like a machine or as though it may be compared with the bodily acts that enable us to expel excess food and drink.

The Confessions speak much more beautifully of the mandates laid on office-bearers to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments (Tr 31 and 60). Of course, a Christian of either sex may and should administer emergency baptism when necessary, as midwives used to do as a matter of course, and many devout women's expression of the Gospel and articulation of Christian truth oftentimes put those of a man to shame; I recollect how my female students have almost invariably been better and more diligent students than their male counterparts, and I think of one young woman in particular whose competence in the sacred languages exceeds mine and whose only restraint from publishing her student essays as learned papers is her current calling of raising four young children with a potentially grave health problem of her own in the background.

CONFESSING CHRIST PRESENTATION

You will remember how Melanchthon approved the medieval distinction between the power of order and the power of jurisdiction. The ministers of the Church in their spheres of responsibility do enjoy a certain jurisdiction, an authority that is not at all the same thing as power. Fellow pastors here present know how little power we have in the exercise of our office; on a good Sunday it extends to the power to choose the hymns but not a whole lot further. Being authorised by Christ through His Church composed of clergy and laity to preside over His household in His stead and at His bidding is something entirely different from the brute power exercised by Gentile kings and rulers over their subjects.

When John Paul II upheld unbroken tradition in his apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* of 1994 and received for his pains a thank you letter from Missouri Synod President Alvin Barry, he emphasised a point that has been repeated by our own Dr Kleinig, namely that the Church is not authorised to ordain women. We need to be careful about glib appeal to the slogan *sola Scriptura*; in the context of the ILC's recently concluded dialogue with the Vatican I recall the SELK's professional woman theologian Dr Andrea Grünhagen, who serves as assistant to Bishop Voigt, writing that it would be better to speak of the supremacy of Scripture among theological authorities. The Formula of Concord appeals to 'pure antiquity' and Martin Chemnitz and John Gerhard were among the foremost patristics scholars of their day. On at least two occasions Luther himself brought the weapon of the Vincentian Canon—what is believed everywhere, always, and by everybody/*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*—out of his armoury, first in the Large Catechism to justify the practice of infant baptism, and secondly in a letter of 1532 to Duke Albrecht of Prussia written to appeal to this laicised former Grand Master

of the Order of Teutonic Knights to hold fast to the dogma of the real presence: 'This article ...has been unanimously believed and held in all the world from the outset of the Christian church to this hour. This testimony of the entire holy Christian church (assuming we had no more than it) should alone suffice to attach us to this article and to move us neither to hear nor to tolerate any factious spirit on this matter.'

For it is a perilous and dreadful thing to hear or believe anything against the unanimous testimony, belief, and doctrine of the entire holy Christian church.

' The weight of argument would tell against women's ordination even if Holy Scripture contained no implicit or explicit indications against the practice. Holy Scripture itself would lean most firmly against the introduction of women's ordination even without the two Pauline texts, from 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 3, that stand at the centre of discussion among ourselves. Since the bishops and presbyters aka pastors of the New Testament Church are entrusted with a teaching and cultic-ritual role within the Church, it makes sense to view them as antitypes to the Old Testament priesthood, and all the more given that Isa 65:21 pictures Gentile converts of the messianic age being recruited as priests and Levites.

CONFESSING CHRIST PRESENTATION

Pagan cults were oftentimes staffed by priestesses, and this without their surrounding societies being stripped of thoroughly patriarchal features, whereas the divinely established worship of the Old Testament was conducted by a male-only priesthood, Israel being not only the chosen nation but also the chosen culture. Only overwhelmingly weighty considerations taken from Scripture and Gospel could overturn this rule.

Women's Ordination intensifies today's Catastrophic Plunge into Apostasy

As the Church throughout the world now observes the last Sundays of the Church Year, our focus is very much on Christ's discourse on the Tuesday of Holy Week, which is found in the chapters of the three synoptic Gospels often referred to as the Little Apocalypse. In Mt 24, Mk 13, and Lk 24 Jesus tells us to be aware of and properly to discern the 'signs of the time'. That phrase, in the form *signa temporis*, occurs four times in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and in one of those documents in particular it is understood in an optimistic sense of the indications of progress in the modern world.

"Perhaps they should have focussed on the increasing biblical and catechetical illiteracy of many clergymen and laypeople"

O fellow hoary-headed persons of both sexes, do you remember the 1960s, that epoch of enormous societal change of which we are both the products and the victims? As we look back on the sea change or paradigm shift initiated during that decade, we can now surely recognise that all is not gold that glitters.

The promised paradise has in many respects turned into a living nightmare, with the slow collapse and now almost total destruction of marriage leading to close to a majority of children in some places growing up in broken homes (euphemistically referred to as one-parent families), not knowing what a father is, reaching adulthood in bondage to all manner of addictions, whether these be drugs, alcohol, or the mixed blessing known as the Internet or social media.

Those bishops assembled in St Peter's Basilica in the early 1960s had a very faulty grasp of the so-called *signa temporis*/signs of the times. Perhaps they should have focussed on the increasing biblical and catechetical illiteracy of many clergymen and laypeople, on the temptations that arose with increasing prosperity, on the perils of breaking the Sixth Commandment, and on what all comes with regarding the world as a chance occurrence rather than as a divine creation and with throwing the moral law written in the heart and republished in Scripture out of the window.

The major sign of the times that should be discerned by the Church of today in all parts of the world is the phenomenon of apostasy, that is, the massive falling away of many, many Christian people from One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

CONFESSING CHRIST PRESENTATION

Of course, the sign of apostasy has accompanied the Christian Church from her very beginnings, being a sin into which both Judas and Peter fell during Holy Week. The end times and the last days began with the Incarnation itself, with the Enfleshment of the Eternal Word in the Man Jesus of Nazareth. 'It is the last hour', said the Beloved Disciple at the end of the first century, and 'These are the last times' cried out the charismatic martyr Bishop Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second.

But this last hour and these last times or days intensify as we approach the unveiling of our Lord in glory upon His return to judge the living and the dead.

We are living through a mounting, worsening apostasy which can be seen most spectacularly in the current papacy of Jorge Bergoglio, a pope who differs from his predecessor Joseph Ratzinger, who was arguably the most biblically based and Lutheran pope of all history, in his blithe disregard of Jesus, Scripture, and the sound church tradition of all ages.

And with all love for some of my friends in the NALC and the ACNA who likewise see things differently from myself, I would submit that, as it scrambles up the terms and images of God's Self-Revelation of Himself in Christ

and plays loose and free with Creation and Law, the practice of women's ordination both expresses and accelerates the phenomenon of apostasy in Holy Christendom.

"mutually strengthen each others' faith, imparting spiritual gifts to one another."

As a minister of Lutheran Church—Canada, which greatly prizes and cherishes the gift of full communion that she has enjoyed with our brothers and sisters of the Lutheran Church of Australia over the past three decades, I would hope that your Church will pull back from the brink, joyfully and with conviction reaffirm what comes to us in Sacred Scripture as unanimously interpreted over twenty centuries, so that we may, to apply the words of St Paul in Rom 1:11-12, mutually strengthen each others' faith, imparting spiritual gifts to one another.

Rev. Dr. John R. Stephenson

JOHN R. STEPHENSON taught historical theology and was director of the library at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, Ontario.

He is a regular contributor to the Gottesdienst journal. We suggest you read his article ["Hermann Sasse, a liturgical theologian even as he arranged for the inscription on his tombstone"](#).

www.gottesdienst.org

You can watch Dr Stephensons presentation here <https://youtu.be/xWnqNipmzng>



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Stepney (enter the beer
garden via Ann St)

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200m walk

When: First Thursday of every Month from 6:30pm

Who: All Confessional Lutherans (kids welcome too!)

What: A time of fellowship, support and
encouragement, meet new people, and enjoy a
good drink and a toasted sandwich

Ephesians 1:15-23



Wall of Encouragement

Do you have a photo of your family reading devotion together? Opening your latest boxful of goodies from CPH? Your children's drawings of a Bible story or playing dress-up? Watching a live-stream worship service with a housebound relative? We would love to show them!

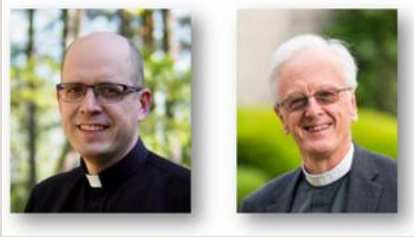
info@cwfellowship.net



May the God of hope fill you with
all joy and peace in believing, so
that by the power of the Holy
Spirit you may abound in hope.

Romans 15:13

Noticeboard



CWF Events

We hope that you have been encouraged by the calibre of events that CWF has been organising.

These events would not have been possible without your financial support, please consider donating to help us cover the cost of getting presenters for these events:

Creative Word Fellowship
Acc# 10950226
BSB# 065005



If you are a farmer and wish to donate to us with your first fruits, please consider using this National Grain Card. If you would like your donation to go to a specific ministry, please email us at accounts@cwffellowship.net

Magazine Content

Would you like to be involved in helping with content and/or publish the Standing Firm magazine? We would love to hear from you!

<https://cwffellowship.net/join-us/>

Young Adults Sponsorship

Can you help send a young adult to our retreat?

The advertised costs for 2025 (\$280 adult, \$250 student, \$110 child) are heavily discounted so that we can make the retreat accessible to everyone.

Please consider this opportunity to donate and help make a difference in the life of a young person.

Creative Word Fellowship
Acc# 10950234
BSB# 065005
Use reference: 'YA Sponsorship'

How You Can Help?

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- Join the Creative Word Fellowship Mailing List so you don't miss out on any upcoming events or news! Visit <https://cwffellowship.net/>
- Become an Ambassador in your local congregation to keep them informed of updates and news. Visit <https://cwffellowship.net/join-us/>
- Pray for the work of Creative Word Fellowship – the Board, the Pastors and the volunteers who make all this happen
- Pray for your church, your own pastor and his family, your congregation and church council
- Pray for the leaders of your church – local and national. That they remain faithful, steadfast, strong and courageous in the face of a world hostile to the Gospel and its attacks
- Where possible, contribute financially, so CWF can continue to hold events and invite guest speakers to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ and encourage and support one another
- If you think you have gifts and talents that can help CWF please get in touch



