

STANDING FIRM

*FAITH AND HOPE
ANCHORED IN
CHRIST JESUS*

*RRP \$20
Issue 2
August 2025*



A PUBLICATION BY CREATIVE WORD FELLOWSHIP

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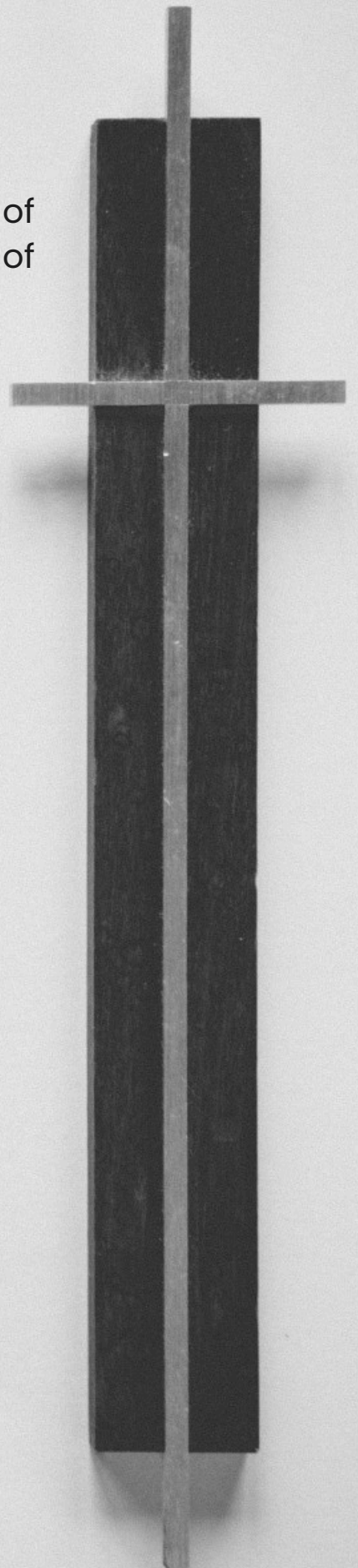
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FAITH AND HOPE ANCHORED IN CHRIST JESUS

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Photos by Peter Wittwer

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Letter from the Editor



In the sleepy, little railway town of Wynarka in the Murraylands is a plaque dedicated to the first Methodist Service in the area in October 1911. Reading the history of the district, the service was not planned but from the “hastily arranged impromptu” description, the local people wanted to worship. They did not have a building, maybe they didn’t have a makeshift altar or a Cross either? We don’t know. While at the library, I also picked up a Pfeiffer family tree book and read a little about their history. People who wanted to worship and teach their faith freely, began to gather for open-air worship under a gum tree by a creek in Hahndorf. Did they have paraments? Or handcrafted pews? Again, such was their desire to worship God they faithfully gathered wherever they could.

In our congregation, we started with what we could. Loaned paraments and altar cloths, donated Communion-ware, a Cross that was on sale from Koorong mounted on a tripod, and a laser cut hymn number board. While we started gathering in a Scout Hall, Library and now worshipping in a community center, none of which are designed to look like a church,



we used what we had available to ensure we had an altar at the center, and our focus on the Cross.

While we could have worship without these things, they help remind us that in worship we are in the presence of our Holy God.

We stand, we sit, and we kneel reverently before a Him whose Son redeemed us through his blood. We no longer have to fear being in His presence.

***“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling”
Rock of Ages LHS 330***

It has been a very busy couple of months. The LM-A conference “Before Christ and the World - What it means to be a confessional Lutheran” with Rev. Dr. Stephen Pietsch, Speak Lord “Defending the Faith” with Rev. Dr. Kirk Clayton run across 3 states over 3 weekends, a pop-up Speak Lord in Adelaide with Rev. Dr. Geoff Boyle and also the Men Led by God camp in Halls Gap.

Lots of opportunities for learning and strengthening our faith.

Praise God for our wonderful speakers and events, and the fellowship we have enjoyed, and the events to come.

We hope you are blessed by the second edition of Standing Firm.

Karl Jericho
Editor

Letter from the CWF Chairman



This year has been extremely busy for the CWF team and the other volunteers who really make our events possible. We have held our annual Young Adults and Young families retreat with three international guests, helped LM-A by live-streaming their Book of Concord Seminar and bringing along our book stall, held our annual Speak Lord Conference (which for the first time was completely different topics in each location as well as being in three locations), and helped Lutheran Men Victoria to bring an international guest for their 'Men Led by God' retreat. We are also involved with planning the 'She Prays' women's conference on top of continuing to import CPH materials and launching our own magazine.

It has been an absolute blessing to be involved in all these different ministries. To see all the benefits that they have brought to the Lutheran community has been humbling. And personally, being directly involved in the organisation and running of all these events gives me unique insight into the struggles and joys of Lutherans in Australia.

Being honest, I believe that the difficulty of organising these events this year is quite parallel to the difficulties that local churches are facing. Churches are broken after the LCA's Convention of Synod in 2024. They are finally having to contend with the ordination issue on a local level rather than it being an abstraction, something happening far away. Church communities are realising that the women's ordination issue was never really about women

being allowed to preach, it was and always will be about the authority of God's Word and how we as Lutherans, and Christians, interpret it.

When I was in Wittenberg, Germany, last year for the Corpus Christi conference, a group of four of us Australians made up a group of nearly 20 that met outside a pub to discuss the goings on in our respective synods. We spoke together, taking turns as a country block to discuss the history and turn of events in our respective synods regarding women's ordination and pastoral formation up to that point in time. After each country had represented itself, a few things became clear to me.

Within synods looking at bringing in women's ordination:

- There was a clear denigration of scripture's authority.
- Scripture was being viewed in a ministerial sense and not a magisterial one.
- Eisegesis was used and not exegesis.
- The worldview used to push the change was not a Christian worldview but a pagan and secular one.
- An anti-liturgical and anti-hymnody sentiment was traced to some of the core reasons for the decline in biblical knowledge in congregations.

-
- That confessionals are overly anti-confrontational, too careful not to break the 8th commandment (except in private circles), and had lost the will to fight for the truth within congregations due to the risk of losing friends or how it may look to outsiders.
 - An attachment to physical property.
 - Confessionals within seminaries were being silenced. Whether at the Lecturer level or at the student level. There was a clear repeat of what happened at St Louis Seminary (Seminex) at play.
 - It was clear that confessionals had lost any real powerful influence in those synods and seminaries and things were looking bleak.

Synods that had formed out of the ashes of the old:

- There was great joy that came from being free to believe the clear simple Words of Scripture.
- There was great freedom in the congregations to preach and teach the Word of God, without shame or risk of offending people.
- People wanted to be there, to invest in their congregation, to attend church-wide Bible study before or after church as well as during the week.
- A rediscovery of the richness of the liturgy and the use of hymnals in that process.
- The rediscovery of personal piety and reverence for the divine.
- Congregations were growing, and the number of congregations were growing, and the number of pastors and pastoral students were growing.
- Rediscovery of the divine. Even when meeting in Halls or homes with makeshift altars and vestments.

- The willingness of young men to step up to the plate to become pastors, knowing full well that they would never be able to support their family from the office of the ministry, with many of the young men holding second jobs.
- A willingness of members in the congregation to assist pastors with visiting and real hands-on pastoral care.

This specific experience along with many others are ones that I and others will forever cherish from our Young Adults conference tour. It opened our eyes to the facts that:

- We are not alone; others are going through the exact same issues.
- We are not the first and won't be the last.
- We are loved and prayed for by confessional Lutherans all over the world.
- The devil uses the same playbook over and over again. His playbook uses one wedge to drive open the door to use many other smaller wedges to drive congregations and synods apart. It's the first and only real play that he has: "Did God really say?"

Why do I mention this story / anecdote? I think it is useful to learn from and to reflect on. It and the other experiences are what have spurred me on to organise the conferences, retreats, topics, and guest presenters in the way that we did for this year. We had key learnings from our time away. Some were realisations of those listed above, some were the richness of teaching that we miss because of the combination of us using lectionary readings for sermons along with not having a culture of church Bible study or private Bible studies (we are often encouraged to read devotional, for daily meditation, as if we are unable to read and apply Gods Word faithfully).

For our Young Adults retreat, we chose to focus on church music and the liturgy. You might wonder—since our second YA retreat also centred on worship—why revisit the topic? The difference lies in the approach: while the previous retreat provided an overarching perspective, connecting worship with vocation and daily life, this one delved into the historical context and practical application, especially in regard to liturgy and hymnody.

I won't give too much away, though, as Darcee Anker's article delves into it in greater detail. The other thing from our YA conference tour that stuck out to me (from the very start of the first worship service at the Institute of Liturgy Psalms conference to the end of the final service at Corpus Christi) was the outward reverence that was apparent. This is the reason I explored the possibility of getting Pastor Geoffrey Boyle to present at the Lutheran Men of Victoria 'Men Led by God' retreat.

The reverence was so profound that with no explanation of why the outward signs were done, I was following along. Not because I felt awkward not doing them, but because the signs themselves spoke to the reason for doing them.

Bowing at the invoking of the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - God is God almighty, we should bow - He is our King, redeemer, and sanctifier. Making the sign of the cross regularly during the service - to remind us of our baptism into Christ's death, resurrection, and our ongoing sanctification. Kneeling during confession - reminding us that we are not upright before God apart from His forgiveness that comes from Christ's sacrifice on the cross through the Holy Waters of Baptism.

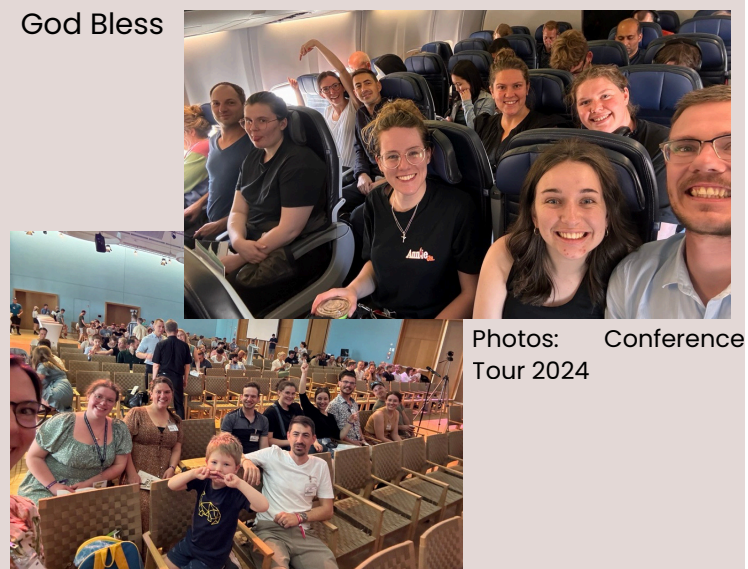
Genuflecting (taking one knee) when we read the words 'and Christ became man and dwelt among us' in the creed, remembering that God lowered himself to dwell among us. As Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Boyle said in his presentations, reverence comes out of a place of fear of the Lord.

The livestreams of Dr. Boyle's presentations at Glandore for our pop-up Speak Lord are available on our YouTube channel, if you wish to learn more about Reverence in the Divine Service.

Our Speak Lord conference tour focused on the authority of scripture and apologetics. The authority of scripture was also a topic covered by Guntars at one of our first Speak Lord conferences, but it needs to be covered again when talking about apologetics. Because if you don't believe that scripture is true, you cannot proclaim the hope that is within you. And it's pretty hard to defend something you don't believe is true and you will wrap yourself up in your own words.

It is my prayer that you are blessed by the exposition of Scripture that is within the pages of this magazine.

God Bless



Photos: Conference Tour 2024

Peter Wittwer
CWF Chairman



By Kathleen Mills
2025

A reflection on “The True Deaconess Spirit” by Wilhelm Löhe

The office of Deaconess is one of service. Indeed, the title comes from the Greek word diakonos, meaning “servant”. Since the earliest days of the Christian Church, women have shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their homes, families, and faith communities by giving of themselves in service to others.

As part of my vocational formation, I was introduced to the poem “The True Deaconess Spirit” by Wilhelm Löhe. Löhe was a Lutheran pastor in the 1800s who is credited with the advancement of the diaconate both in Germany and in North America. Many Deaconess communities use this poem as a sort of motto, and a guide for their work. The poem lends itself to being catechetical in nature, with questions and responses. Frequently it is read antiphonally between deaconesses for consecration rites.

In my own ministry I reflect often on these words and cherish the way Löhe’s thoughts have shaped my work and my identity as a servant in Christ’s Church.

Each line is simple but rich, with echoes of Scripture to inform and lead. The very first lines define the work of the Deaconess at its simplest:

What is my want? I want to serve.

***Whom do I want to serve?
The Lord in His wretched ones
and His poor.***

How do deaconesses serve the Lord? The church’s ministry of service has always been to the poor, the outcast, the most vulnerable members of society.

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.

Victoria:

Araluen Lutheran Camp
17th - 19th October, 2025

South Australia:

Nunyarra Conference Centre
24th - 26th October, 2025

Guest Speakers:

Sandra Rhein, LCMS Deaconess &
Sacred Music Educator

Kimberley Pfeiffer,
Here She Stands Writer & Blogger

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or go to: cwfellowship.net/she-prays/
or call: 0423209201



READ YOUR CATECHISM!



By Pastor Lee van Rossen
2025

Here we are again! A few months ago, I had the privilege of writing an article on what I personally think that those of us who are in a new church organisation should be focusing on as we build congregations. It certainly wasn't the most academic article, neither was it the best written, but it was a joy to speak from the heart and encourage my fellow Lutherans (and anyone else who might listen) to read the Luther's Small Catechism. I tried my best to explain what led to my appreciation of Luther's Small Catechism, what it is, and why I think that we should all be digging back into it. I ended with the encouragement (if not a challenge) to get reading. Now, I personally haven't read it as much as I could have, so if you only tried a bit, or didn't get around to it, don't worry; we aren't focused on performance here. I won't give you gold stars for succeeding, and neither will I give you demerits for failure. I encourage you to join me in trying to read the catechism more than we currently do, and let God work through it.

So, let's start by getting our Catechisms out. If you don't have a physical one, you can find it online with a Google search for "Martin Luther's Small Catechism", or better yet, contact CWF to get a copy!

What we find first up (after the front cover, publishing details, table of contents, and any prefaces,) is the Ten Commandments. Different printings and translations of the Catechism might vary a bit in wording and layout – but the structure is always the same: The Ten Commandments are first up, and what we'll have a look at this issue.

Interestingly, before it gets to the First Commandment, most versions have an extra line: "As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household." or something to that effect. If your catechism doesn't have this line, don't worry, it's still a valid catechism!

It is an interesting line however, which shows us a bit of Luther's intentions when he put this whole thing together; the whole idea of the catechism is for regular Christians to be taught the faith – at home! It was never meant to be relegated to confirmation classes! (So, let's read it regularly!)

So then, how should the head of each household teach the Ten Commandments? Well, we see that Luther has broken each commandment up into a format. First, it gives the wording of the commandment from Exodus 20. Following that, a variant of the same question; "What does this mean?", is asked each time, then Luther explains each commandment. Simple, right?

For the extra credit students among you, you may also notice that the Ten Commandments' explanations have a pattern as well – each says that 'we should fear and love God'. I think this already gives us a glimpse into how we should be reading all of the commandments. It isn't just 'fear God'.

We don't look at the commandments as a list of things that we have to obey or God will smite us. Indeed, that was never their intention. Neither do we make the mistake of thinking that Jesus' love means we can go ahead and sin, but rather, part of loving God is trying to obey His commandments. Fear and love – both go hand in hand when we're talking about an almighty and loving God, much in the same way children should fear and love a good father. That doesn't mean being scared of him, nor does it mean treating him like a doormat – it means respect, reverence, trust, and love. (page 1001 of your Lutheran Study Bible has a further explanation of this).

So, let's hold onto that thought – God is almighty, and God is love. What He commands has ultimate authority and should absolutely be obeyed, but we can also know and trust that everything He commands is ultimately loving. It seems clear to me that that knowledge is like a key to unlocking how amazing the Ten Commandments are. When I was first introduced to the idea that 'the Ten Commandments are actually awesome', I think I gave a record-setting disbelieving look to my confirmation pastor. But, I am now certain he was right. Let me show you what he showed me.

Each commandment prohibits us from doing something, but as I've learned, it is more accurate to say that each commandment guides us to prevent us misusing something. Each commandment is based on a gift that God has given, and He is guiding us to use it rightly. This means they have twofold functions – indeed they show us where we have sinned and fallen short of God's standard, showing us how desperately we need Christ, but they also help us to appreciate and use what God has given us! In a way, they are a kind of cheat sheet on how to best be a human!

Now, if you don't believe me, or if my rambling has made absolutely no sense to you, let me try to show you.

Each commandment is based on a gift. Let's have a look through one by one and see if we can identify them. The first commandment:

I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other Gods before me.

The 'you shall not' sticks out to our guilty consciences, but the gift is incredible! Easily the greatest gift of any of the commandments – God Himself! You know, we aren't doing God a favour by worshipping Him. Contrary to many non-Christian mythologies and modern movies about false gods, the one true God is not empowered by our prayers and worship. There is nothing we could offer Him that He couldn't do for Himself far more easily. Even our best efforts at good works are completely dependent on His gifts – our minds, our bodies, everything we could use to serve Him was given to us by Him. He doesn't profit from this arrangement – especially as 'there is none who does good, not even one.'¹ We have no right, no entitlement, nothing in us that deserves to have God be our god. For Him to take on the responsibility of being our God, of caring for and loving and guiding and saving us – we haven't earned that! It is a gift. Just as He mercifully saved Israel from Egypt and made them His own, He has made you and me His own, purely as a gracious gift. He is our God! He has taken on the responsibility of being our God, and He does it faithfully. All He commands in this commandment is to... let Him! Let Him be God, and don't replace Him! Don't misuse this gift! Don't turn to false gods who can't help, don't trust in your money or your strength or your own mind, or anything else, let Him be God! Rely on Him, trust Him, receive His gift of... Himself!

Commandment 2. God commands;

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

Again, we think of the casual expressions of 'oh my god' and 'Jesus Christ' that get thrown around, possibly from our own mouths.

Yet, when we understand the gift, we see what God is really getting at. What has He given us? His name! The ability to call on His name! I don't have the Prime Minister's phone number. If I sent a letter to King Charles, I doubt I'd get a personal reply. Yet the almighty creator of the universe has given me, and you, a direct line! It's active 24/7! He has given us His name – access to Him. He just commands that we don't misuse it.

I remember that in Lae, Papua New Guinea, many people knew my dad. With a bald head and long goatee, he stuck out from other whiteskin (the politically correct term over there) missionaries. We would walk down the street and people would call out 'Mark!' and come and stroke his beard. Yes, I'm serious, apparently stroking another man's beard is (mostly) normal there. However, one day, a man came to the office where he worked (which was surrounded by a 24/7 guarded corrugated iron fence topped with razor wire, as Lae city has a very high crime rate, to say the least). When he was confronted by the security guard, he simply said he was there to see 'Mark'. The guard let him through without further questions, and he went straight up and started asking for a job. Now, my dad had never met the guy, and in great confusion we had to turn him away as there were no vacancies and he had no training or experience, but it demonstrated to me the value of having a name. My dad's name gave that man access through security, and God's name gives us access to Him. God calls us to use His name rightly – call on Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. We misuse it when we use it selfishly – using it to gain money, power, access to things we shouldn't. We misuse it when we use His name to hurt people. God calls us to receive the gift, and not misuse it.

So, hopefully you start to see a pattern here, but let's keep going. Commandment 3 –

Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.

What's the gift? A sabbath rest! God gives us a day to rest! Long before unions and workers rights, God established a rest day for us. He even went to the effort of structuring the creation of the universe to include a rest day! Of course, He is omnipotent, and could have done it all in a single moment – but as Jesus said, the sabbath was made for man. God made us a sabbath day, and He calls us to use it rightly. That means resting – but not just putting our feet up. To use it rightly means to rest in Him. Come to His house! Come and receive His forgiveness, His Word, His body and blood, His comfort and peace! Rest and receive His help, so you may recover from the last week and be strengthened for the week ahead. Don't misuse it – don't spend the whole time working, don't neglect the help He gives in His church, don't stay at home because you know your pastor's sermons are boring, or you don't like the music choices – just trust that God will give you rest, and make the most of it! Receive the gift, and don't misuse it.

Commandment 4 –

Honour your father and mother.

The gift? Mum and Dad! Not just that, but all the good authority structures God has established for our care, and for us to care for others! Many people today don't seem to realise that God is a big fan of hierarchy (by His design it is the very best way!)

By God's design, those in authority use their authority selflessly, working toward the good of those in their care.

God has given us mums, dads, grandparents, uncles, and aunts, but also government, police officers, teachers, employers, many people with roles of authority! Rather than being on our own from the moment of birth, having to fight for every scrap of resources all our lives, God established authorities to care for us as He does. His command? Don't misuse this gift! Honour those in authority, treating them with respect. Love them, serve them, and insofar as they do not command us to disobey God (we always obey God first), obeying them. In doing so, we are trusting God's system of authority, and being thankful for what He has given – we are fearing and loving Him. Of course, human beings are sinful, and those in authority will always let us down. What God calls us to, though, is to see this gift as good – as an absolute treasure. Treating our mums, our dads, even our bosses at work as valuable and given by God. We receive and use the gift rightly when we love them, serve them, pray for them, and make their role of caring for us a joy and not a burden.

Commandment 5 –

You shall not murder.

God has given us the gift of... life! He has given us incredible bodies that live and breathe, and He commands us not to misuse life. He commands that we do not murder. This one is interesting, as many translations say, 'you shall not kill'. It's one of the situations where we can thank God for Hebrew scholars. While Hebrew has a few words for killing, the meaning here is 'to kill another human for selfish gain'. Do not murder, do not hurt someone else for selfish reasons.

Whether physically, or treating them as though they were dead, don't harm them! Rather, He calls us to uphold life – take care of those around us, rather than harming them. He calls us to be selfless – like the Good Samaritan giving of his own resources to care for the injured man. We misuse this gift when we harm others for selfish gain. Rather, God calls us to do unto others as we would have them do to us. Receive the gift of life, uphold it, protect others, and don't misuse it!

Commandment 6 –

You shall not commit adultery.

The commandment you were probably bracing for, and perhaps considered skipping this paragraph. What a shame it would be for us to miss out on understanding this gift! God has given us marriage! The very basis of all human society, God has made man and woman as two parts of a whole. Even in the perfect garden of Eden, before sin and death, God declared that one thing was not good: for man to be alone. God made a helper fit for Adam – but how He did so speaks volumes. He didn't make Eve from the dust as He did Adam, as though she was meant to be independent of him. He didn't make Eve from Adam's head as though she should be over him but neither from his foot, as though she should be under him. God took from Adam's side, part of his body, and built her as the perfect helper for him. God made Adam incomplete – missing part of himself, and made Eve that part. Now, Adam is only complete with Eve at his side, and Eve is only complete when by the side of her husband. God gave us marriage, through which He gave us children, holy sexuality, and all of human society!

God calls us to use this gift rightly – enjoy marriage! The union of husband and wife is a holy and wonderful thing! It is at the core of our very design! For us to do anything other than that design is for us to misuse this gift. When we go against God's way, we miss out on the gift. Whether it is sexuality on our own, or outside of marriage, or with any combination that is not one husband and one wife, we misuse the good gift that God has given us. When we are selfish with our sexuality, when we harm ourselves and others, when husband or wife harms each other instead of being selfless, we misuse the gift. God calls us to receive the gift, and not to misuse it.

Commandment 7 –

You shall not steal.

Everything that exists was made by God. Nothing exists that was not made by and through Him. We cannot take any credit even for the things we have invented and assembled – He made the elements themselves, and even made our brains that we use to be inventive. Everything we own is from Him – so God's amazing gift for us is... stuff! God gives us stuff! Food, shelter, clothing, even the fun stuff! What He calls us to is to receive the stuff He provides, be thankful, and don't greedily take it from others. That means not stealing, but also not manipulating or cheating or tricking others out of their stuff. When we take others' stuff, we aren't trusting Him to provide the stuff we want and need, and we are choosing to selfishly harm others to get what we want. (Selfishness seems like a bit of a theme in misusing things, doesn't it?) He calls us to receive the things He provides, to be thankful, to help others receive and use their things rightly. He calls us to ask Him for what we want and need, just don't misuse the gifts, and don't take them from others.

Commandment 8 –

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

God's gift here is one that surprised me – the gift of reputation. God wants us not just to be right with Him, but to have right relationships and good reputation with each other and in our societies. Indeed, many people know the pain and suffering that can be caused by their reputation being damaged. Friends and even family members can turn away, leaving people broken and alone. God gives us a good reputation – that we are all His children who have been forgiven and redeemed by Christ! He washes us clean of our sins and gives us Christ's perfect record! What He calls us to is to receive this great gift, and then uphold it with others. Just as we don't want our reputations damaged, we are to help uphold others. Now, this isn't to say that we hide people's sins and pretend they didn't happen. It does mean that we don't make false accusations, and anywhere we can we should speak well of people. We don't gossip, spread rumours, or slander each other. If there is sin to be dealt with, God has given us a full system of reconciliation to follow; calling us or them to repentance and forgiveness, but at no point is that designed to damage their reputation. God calls us to receive the good reputation He has given us, and not misuse it or damage others', especially falsely.

Commandments 9 and 10 we can combine, both to keep the word count short, and because they deal with very similar gifts and guidance –

You shall not covet your neighbours house, and you shall not covet your neighbours husband or wife, manservant, maidservant, cattle, or anything that is your neighbours.

In short, do not covet! Covet is a specific word – it's not just desire. Desiring something can be a wonderful and holy thing. It is well and good for me to see my neighbours house, appreciate the beauty and fine craftsmanship, and hope to have one like it some day. It is another thing entirely for me to want my neighbours house – for me to have it and him not have it. A single person can have a good and holy desire for a spouse, but to desire a specific person that is already married is very different. To covet is to want to take something from someone else – their spouse, employees, possessions, whatever. God has given us the gifts of... all of those things! Spouse, employees, animals, possessions – all the stuff that we shouldn't be stealing – we should not be even desiring to take from our neighbour. To covet is the sinful motivation that sits behind sneaky and manipulative actions aimed at finding a way to get the object of our coveting. It is what leads us to manipulate marriages to divorce, to make employees dissatisfied with their employer so we may take them, to do nothing when our neighbour falls to bankruptcy so we can sweep in and get their nice house at a discount. God calls us to receive and be thankful for all we receive, and to encourage our neighbours spouse and employees to be faithful, to help our neighbour keep his nice house and stuff. Receive what God gives, and don't misuse it or selfishly hurt others.

CATECHETICAL STUDIES

I hope you can see that each commandment starts with a gift, and that changes things, doesn't it? No longer do we have to see it as a list of 10 'you shall nots'. God has given us great gifts, and guides us on how to rightly use them and avoid misusing them.

However, we all misuse them, don't we? Going through this list, I had multiple times when my conscience was pricked. I have trusted in myself and my money more than God. I have failed to call on His name when I should. I have rushed home from Sunday services to get to work. I have dishonoured those in authority over me, especially when talking politics. I have harmed others with my words and actions, especially when getting grumpy in online video games. I have been selfish and unloving toward my wife. I have stolen, I have borne false witness against my neighbour, I have coveted. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and I have never once read these commandments and felt that I had kept them all. That is the other function of these commandments – they show us not only God's gifts, but how we have misused them, and how we deserve punishment for being unfaithful to our God.

The good news is that God has already dealt with our sinful misuse of His gifts. Jesus came to suffer and die for us, paying the full price, and rose again in victory! No amount of failure on our part can out-sin the power of His precious blood shed for us. He has forgiven me, and He has forgiven you.

So, you don't need to feel guilty as you read these. At least, not when you repent. He comes to you, forgives you, and takes away all your guilt and shame. It is an objective reality, enacted by the almighty God of the universe – your sins are gone.

With a clean slate, sinless and free, you can receive these gifts as He always intended. Let God be your God, call on Him, rest in Him, receive His gifts and ask for His help in using them rightly. Turn to Him in your failures, and trust in Him.

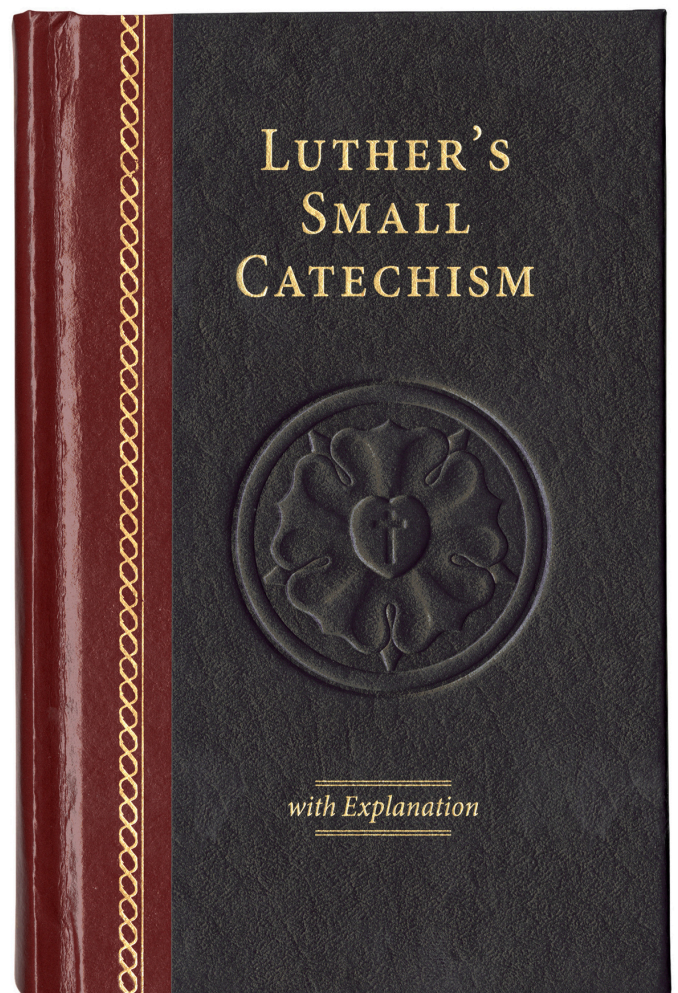
And, read your catechism! If any of this was a bit more than you expected, just imagine how much good the rest of it must have!

May the peace which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Pastor Lee van Rossen

References:

1 Romans 3:12



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By Darcee Anker
2025

Songs of Deliverance: Psalms in the Great Congregation.

In June 2024, nine young adults (plus an additional attendee in Germany) were exceptionally blessed by being able to attend three international church conferences with CWF.

The first of our conferences, which is the focus of this article, began on the 9th of July 2024 with the Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music, in Seward, Nebraska. Returning post-covid, and following a seven-year break, this conference was organised by LCMS Worship and headed by their director Rev. Shaun Daenzer (check out some of his sermons on KFUE radio, 'Daily Chapel Sermon').

The theme of the conference was "Songs of Deliverance: Psalms in the Great Congregation".

As the name suggests, our focus was on the Psalter and the influence it has on our church music, leadership, preaching, pastoral care, art, and spiritual growth. Though all regular church goers are undoubtedly familiar with the Psalms; hearing, speaking, or singing at least one during Divine service, the Psalter is rarely studied as an entire book outside of seminary classrooms. As such, this Institute, which covered all 150 Psalms over the course of four days in its plenaries, breakout sessions, and worship services, provided many attendees with a unique opportunity to explore this book of prayer in its entirety.

The four days of the Institute featured presentations from keynote speakers, elective study sessions, opportunities for musical workshops and lessons, concerts, various social activities, and of course, worship.

HOW CAN DAILY FAMILY DEVOTIONS HELP US PREPARE FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP?

By Pastor Sam Modra
2025

Introduction

When I was a teenager, I recall that during youth group Bible studies, some of the leaders would discuss 'submarine Christians.' The definition given at the time was a person who professed to be a Christian and appeared at church on Sunday, but during the week, they were under the surface. They didn't express their faith in their daily lives and certainly didn't have any spiritual or devotional practices in place to sustain their faith. Certainly, their measure was likely outward works, but for those who were diligent in their faith, we understood that outward works only flowed from an inner renewal.

Martin Luther made similar and, to our mind, abrupt observations when he visited pastors and congregations in his day. He summarised it thus:

1 The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching.

2 Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching.

3 Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.¹ (Small Catechism, Preface)



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

Ephesians 1:15-23





JOY, PEACE AND THANKSGIVING

By Libby Krahling
July 2025

As Lutheran Mission – Australia (LM-A) approaches the end of its first year “in operation”, it’s timely to look back on the last twelve months and look forward to what is to come.

Lutheran Mission – Australia emerges

LM-A was first announced at the end of June 2024. In the leadup to the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) Synod in October 2024, an enormous amount of planning took place to prepare a home for confessional Lutherans. In these early months, LM-A sent two seminary students to the US to study in Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) seminaries, and appointed Pastor Matt Anker as the president of the fledgling organisation.

Following the decision of the LCA Synod on 5 October 2024, Pastor Matt and others worked tirelessly to support pastors and lay people struggling with grief over the change in church teaching. It soon became clear that many people were unable to remain in the LCA, and we experienced a huge demand for forums to provide information about LM-A.

By the formal launch of LM-A on 23–24 November 2024, it was clear that there was a great deal of interest in establishing new congregations. The launch dinner in Hamilton was attended by people from all over the country, and the installation service the following day saw the Hamilton Lutheran Church filled to capacity. Pastor Matt Anker was installed as President of LM-A by Rev. Antonio Reyes, President of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, and Asia representative on the International Lutheran Council (ILC).



CORPUS CHRISTI 2024 — WITTENBERG, GERMANY

By Tim Bayha
2025

On the week of the 22nd of July, 2024, over 300 Lutheran young adults gathered in Wittenberg, Germany, for the 14th annual Corpus Christi Conference. Corpus Christi (now an accepted member of the International Lutheran Council) seeks to promote churchly and biblical renewal among young adults in Europe. Eleven Australians were blessed to receive funding through Creative Word Fellowship to attend the event, and ‘experience the reformation’ through participation in daily services, plenary sessions, discussion groups and presentations. There was also plentiful opportunity to share fellowship with our international brothers and sisters, enjoy meals together, attend guided tours, and compete in a fierce (but collegial) international soccer tournament.

The theme for the conference was The Body of Christ – a somewhat fitting topic for the diverse gathering of believers who found themselves together for the week.

The plenary speaker was the Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann, who is the Waldemar A. and June Schuette Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Over the course of four sessions, he unpacked the different aspects of The Body of Christ, including the body of Christ in the manger (the incarnation), the body of Christ on the cross (redemption), the body of Christ on the altar (the Lord’s Supper), and the body of Christ in the pews (the Church). He highlighted that the Eternal Word of God became incarnate and took on a real human body, and that because of this, we cannot dismiss the material world or our own physical being. From this foundation, he considered what Jesus’ death and atoning sacrifice truly means for us: that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone. It is this same Jesus that comes to us in the Lord’s Supper, ‘in, with and under’ the bread and wine, to be received by those communing in unity of confession.

We should be proactive in seeking out further opportunities to support our international Lutheran family and continue to build on such relationships as we navigate what seems to be a crucial point in our Church and society.

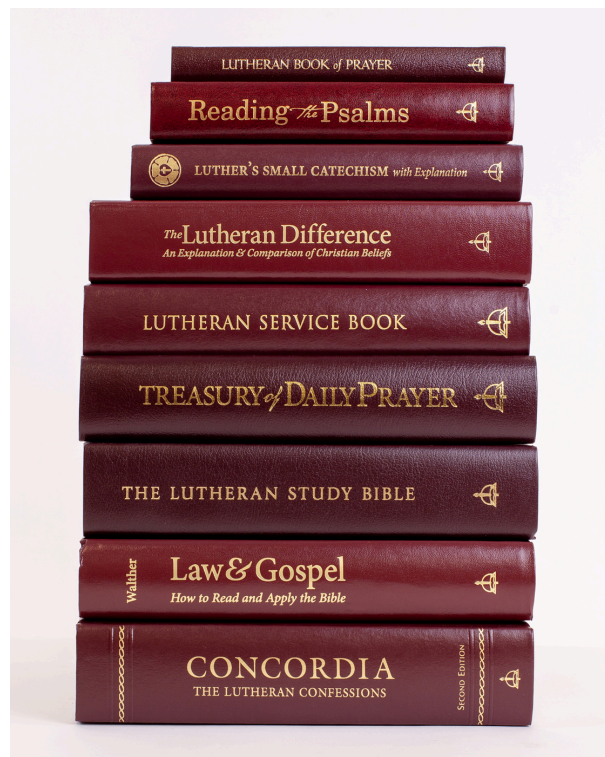
The Church asks for no more space than she needs for the purpose of serving the world by bearing witness to Christ. As the body of Christ in the pews, we are not a human institution. The relationships formed over the week at Corpus Christi bear testament to this.

In this knowledge, we can take great comfort and be assured that the gates of hell will not prevail over Christ's bride, the Church. He will continue to sustain her for all eternity, just as he has promised to. As members of this one body, we go forward not in fear, but in faith – to love, to serve, and to be the living witness of His presence in the world.



Photo by Peter Wittwer.

Tim Bayha



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Creative Word Fellowship stocks all of the essentials for Lutheran theological studies, from Luther's Small Catechism, Book of Concord, The Lutheran Study Bible, to Walther's Works and many more. We currently don't have an online store, but you can email to request a copy of our stock list or with an order at bookshop@cwfellowship.net.

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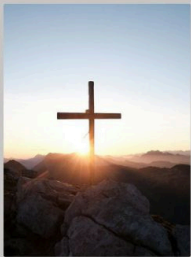
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God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear... Psalm 46:1-2



Lutheran Mission

A U S T R A L I A

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By Tasmin Bourne
2025

For Issue 1 of Standing Firm, I offered an article entitled The Theological Keys and Themes of the Lutheran Confessions. In this article, I will be focusing in on one of the points I highlighted in that first article, being the use of the Confessions as a pedagogical tool; how they can be used in teaching the Christian Faith. Though I will at times address the content, the what of the Faith which the Confessions teach, I will primarily be considering the how; what were some of the methods that the sainted Confessors used to defend and teach the Faith. What can we learn from them and their attitude towards this great task so that the eternal Truth they proclaimed is inculcated in ourselves and our children?

Part 1

The Catechisms

The first place we will turn to in the Confessions for their pedagogical use are the Small and Large Catechisms.

This is quite an obvious choice as these documents were written for the express purpose of teaching the faith.

First published in 1529, the Small and Large Catechisms were based on sermons and tracts that Dr Luther had preached and published from 1515 onwards. Work had begun on a children's catechism in 1525, but what finally pushed Luther to publish the catechisms was what he witnessed during his visitations of the Saxon churches.¹ He writes in the preface to the Small Catechism,

The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered recently 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! Dear God, what great misery I beheld! The common person, especially in the villages, has no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine. And unfortunately, many pastors are completely unable and unqualified to teach.

This is so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it. Yet everyone says that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the Holy Sacraments, even though they cannot even recite the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments. They live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs. Now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all freedom like experts. (SC Preface; 1-3)

And so the catechisms were written; the Small Catechism (SC) containing the essential teachings of the Christian Faith in eight parts: the 10 Commandments, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, the Sacrament of the Altar, Daily Prayers, and the Table of Duties, was primarily for the instruction of children and unlearned people.² The Large Catechism (LC) was intended for further instruction of pastors, teachers, and those who had previously learned the SC.

Catechesis

The first method we will look at is catechesis. This word comes from the Greek *katecho*, which essentially means to say or echo back and forth. This was an important part of classical Greek education and consisted of the teacher asking questions and the students responding with the answer. This repeated echoing back and forth of question-and-answer resulted in a high level of memorisation and recall.

Dr. Luther writes in the preface to the Small Catechism,

Teach them, first of all, these parts: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and so on, according to the text, word for word, so that they, too, can repeat it in the same way after you and commit it to memory. (SC Preface, 10)

We see this play out in the first three sections of the SC as a commandment, article of the creed, or petition of the Lord's prayer is recited, followed by the catechetical question 'what does this mean?' or 'what is this?'.³ The student then responds with the set answer.

For example,
The first commandment: You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean?

Answer: We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Sections 3 through 6 are structured a little differently, with there first being a question about the article at hand, followed by the answer.

What is the sacrament of the altar?

Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ himself.

Repetition and memorisation in education have come under criticism in recent decades, and this is also the case within our Lutheran churches. I have had lifelong Lutherans in their 60s complain to me about the rigorous memorisation that they went through for their confirmation, and express gratitude that their children did not need to go through the same, stating that being able to recite the answers in the Catechism is not the same as knowing it in your heart.

LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Linked to this is the general sentiment that you will find among the average Pentecostal, Evangelical, or otherwise non-denominational churches; that recitation of pre formulated liturgy, prayers, and creeds, either from memory or from words on a page is somehow less sincere or effective than that which you could muster up in your own words (this erroneous attitude requires a dedicated refutation at a later time).

To be true, this could be the case; someone could go through the motions, saying the words that they have memorised or read without sincerity or faith to believe and trust in those words, but this really misses the point of the catechetical process and the memorisation of creeds and prayers, etc. It is not designed to only teach the set answers contained in the book, but rather to be a clear outline and starting point for continued and lifelong learning and growing in righteousness.

Doctor Luther writes,

In the second place, after they have learned the text [10 Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer] well, teach them the meaning also, so that they know what it means...In the third place, after you have taught them this short catechism, then take up the Large Catechism and give them also a richer and fuller knowledge. Here enlarge upon every commandment, article, petition, and part with its various works, uses, benefits, dangers, and injuries, as you find these abundantly stated in many books written about these matters. (SC Preface; 14,17)

It is not enough for them to understand and recite these parts according to the words alone. The young people should also be made to attend the preaching, especially during the time that is devoted to the catechism.

Then they may hear it explained and may learn to understand what every part contains, so that they can recite it the way they have heard it. Then, when asked, they may give a correct answer, so that preaching may not be useless and fruitless." (LC Short Preface; 26)

The catechisms are meant to entrench and cement in the catechumen's mind and heart the teachings of the Faith in clear and concise terms so that when faced with temptation, challenges to their faith, or anguish of conscience, they have a foundation to return to. Much like a table of contents in a book that directs the reader to the appropriate place to find more information, each section of the SC committed to memory reminds the Christian of everything they have been taught about that article of Faith.

It orients him toward the Word since most of the Catechism is Scripture, either in the form of Commands, Creed, or Lord's Prayer, or referenced in the explanations.

For example,
What is baptism?

Answer: Baptism is not simple water only, but it is the water included in God's command and connected with God's word.

Which is that word of God?

Answer: Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" Matthew 28:19.

This equips the catechised Christian to follow the example of Christ, who, when tempted in the wilderness by the devil, responded with, 'It is written...'. We can only respond with the Word if we have learned it, and the Catechism does this well for these primary doctrines.

A Handbook for Daily Life

Think, if you would, about how you have used your catechism throughout your life. Has it been a daily companion in your devotions or prayers? Have you pulled it out to find an answer when you had a question about baptism, or when you were uncertain about whether your actions or inactions were a violation of a particular commandment? Has it sat unused on your bookshelf since your confirmation? Or have you learned it so well that you use it daily without picking it up?

The experience for many in the Lutheran Church is that the catechism was used as a textbook for confirmation, and once the rite of confirmation was complete, the textbook was put on a shelf or donated to the local op shop or church library like a Grade Ten English textbook, once no longer needed. This isn't an entirely 21st-century problem, as Dr. Luther lamented that 'many see the catechism as a poor, common teaching, which they can read through once and immediately understand. They can throw the book into a corner and be ashamed to read it again.' (LC Preface, 5)

The above is far from how the catechism was intended to be used. Dr. Luther took to heart Moses' exhortation to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 6:6-8,

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The catechisms were not designed only to be textbooks or theological encyclopaedias containing the teachings of the Christian faith. They certainly are these things, but more than this, they are daily prayer and devotional books, especially so in the case of the Small Catechism.

Let us consider the section on the daily prayers. The Catechism instructs the Christian to rise from his sleep and bless himself with the sign of the Holy Cross while invoking the name of the triune God (thus reminding himself of his baptism) before reciting the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, followed by a morning prayer. Luther then suggests he go about his work singing a hymn, like one on the 10 commandments. The evening prayer is similar, minus the hymn.

If we were to follow the Catechism's instructions, we would begin our day with no less than six of the Catechism's eight sections. How does this help teach us the faith?

In remembering our baptism (by marking ourselves with the triune Name), we remind ourselves that we daily receive the forgiveness of our sins and that we have been delivered from death and the devil. We are encouraged to, by daily contrition and repentance, drown the old Adam with all sins and evil lusts and, living in this forgiveness of sins, we can go forth in purity, living holy lives and doing that which is pleasing to God and of service to our neighbour.

Confessing the Creed, we enter into our day of work knowing that God has given us all that we have and daily provides for us and protects us.

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We contemplate the great love of Christ who deigned to suffer and die for us, redeeming us with His holy, precious blood, so that we might be His own, live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. We are confronted by the reality of the weakness of our reason and strength to do what is right and pleasing to God. Yet we rejoice in the fact that the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened our darkened minds and hearts with His gifts, and daily sanctifies us despite our meagre efforts at holiness. We give thanks that He preserves us in the true Christian Faith so that, regardless of what trials and temptations come in this day ahead, we can have confidence that He will keep us from the evil one.

We pray confidently in the Lord's Prayer for that which He has told us to pray for, knowing that He wants to hear us and provide us with every good gift. If we keep in mind the Catechism's explanations, each petition gives us a gift to seek, a blessing to give thanks for, and an exhortation to live holy lives (3rd use of the law).

Singing a hymn like Martin Luther's These are the Holy Ten Commands⁴ or another similar hymn that teaches on the Commandments, or by simply reciting the Commandments, places at the front of our minds the Law, operating in its third use, which informs us as to how we are best to fear and love God and serve our neighbours as we go about our various vocations that day.

Luther speaks of the daily use of the catechism in this way,

Catechism study is a most effective help against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts.

It helps to be occupied with God's Word, to speak it, and meditate on it, just as the first Psalm declares all blessed who meditate on God's law day and night (Ps 1:2). Certainly you will not release a stronger incense or other repellent against the devil than to be engaged by God's commandments and words, and speak, sing, or think them (Col 3:16).

God knows our danger and need, as well as the constant and furious assaults and temptations of devils. He wants to warn, equip, and preserve us against them, as with a good armour against their fiery darts (Eph 6:10-17) and with good medicine against their evil infection and temptation. (LC Preface; 10,14)

In this first section we have looked at the catechisms and have observed that by repetition, memorisation, and daily use, they can implant God's Word and Christian doctrine in the heart and mind of the Christian so that he can resist the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh; and be called to daily live in the confession of his sins and the forgiveness that is his for Christ's sake. In this second part, we will take a look at two other aspects of the Confessions that promote the learning of the Faith and confidence in Christ.

Part II

Affirmation and Condemnation

We live in a society today in which people are generally comfortable saying what they agree with, but are less inclined to come out and condemn a point of view that they reject. The flip side of this is that people won't usually get mad at you for expressing your own personal feeling or opinion, but if you dare to criticise the opposite view, then you can land yourself in a lot of hot water.

This has been exacerbated by the rise of “cancel culture”, which encourages ideologically driven individuals to demonise and persecute people for stating an opinion which disagrees with the mainstream narrative. Even within the church, many laymen and clergy alike are reluctant to call out clear theological or moral errors and condemn them, favouring instead to take a more neutral “nonjudgmental” stance.

Consider, if you would, our Lutheran doctrines of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper and how often these are spoken about and taught in the Lutheran church. How often have you heard someone publicly call the opposing views of the Baptists, Catholics, Reformed, or Pentecostals clear false teaching that is leading people away from the gifts of God? Probably not very often, and understandably, no one wants to get into conflict with other Christians. Some might even think that these topics are relatively benign and not worth anathematising each other over.

How about the far more in-your-face issue of homosexuality? It seems to be taken as an unavoidable fact of life now. Take as examples of the reluctance to speak boldly on matters of error, the two LCA DSTO's Vol 3, H: Human sexuality: three key issues (summary) (2015), and Human sexuality: three key issues (background paper) (2014).⁵ Both do a good job of affirming the biblical definition of marriage and godly sexuality, and that homosexuality is out of step with God's design and Scripture's commands, yet, in my opinion, stop short of clearly and directly condemning homosexuality as sinful. The blog post, Homosexuality: what the LCA says, outright refuses to call homosexuality sinful and instead states,

Some have viewed homosexuality either as a disease or a perversion and have attempted to change people's sexuality by psychological or spiritual programs. Such attempts might be (sometimes) well meant, but they are abusive and can contribute to incidents of self-harm and suicide.

All Christians need to seek God-pleasing choices about the way they live their lives. Homosexual Christians will seek God's guidance for their life choices.

Some are convinced that God's will is that homosexuals live a celibate life and seek their life fulfilment without a life partner... Others believe that God's will allows them to express their sexual feelings in some form of intimacy, and may form a friendship in which they can do so.

It is important to remember that there are many dimensions to intimacy and commitment, including care and support. There is spiritual and mental, emotional and social intimacy, as well as physical intimacy, and there are different expressions of physical intimacy. All of us should make responsible judgements about our sexuality, and be careful about making judgements regarding each other.⁶

The blog post is full of ambiguities like the above ‘some are convinced...others believe’ and fails to clearly articulate “what the LCA says”, contrary to the subtitle of the blog. There is also no clear guidance offered to the readers regarding what are the God pleasing choices they should make about the way they live their lives.

LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

This widespread reluctance to clearly state what we believe and boldly condemn what is false spreads confusion and uncertainty and does not clearly teach the Faith once delivered to the saints, but instead teaches a DIY faith that picks and chooses whatever feels appropriate. If I may use an analogy that is, by my own admission, weak; it is akin to teaching our children that milk, tap water, and apple juice are all good to drink, yet never telling them not to drink bleach, ant poison, or toilet water. It is not enough to simply speak positively of the good and true, yet not speak against what is evil and false. .

By contrast, the Lutheran Confessors desired both to proclaim clearly what they believed and to unapologetically condemn falsehood. In the first 21 articles of the Augsburg Confession, in which a summary of the Lutheran teachings is presented, more than half of the articles contain a condemnation against a group or false teaching. Of the ten articles not containing a condemnation, only four state the Lutheran position positively without also correcting an error. In other words, 81% of the time when the Lutheran Confessors were stating what they believed, they also contradicted the opposing position in the strongest of terms.

It is vitally important for us to speak **for** the truth and **against** the error. As we are proclaiming the truth of God's Word, as we are delighting in and explaining the riches of the Christian Faith as explained in the Lutheran Confessions, we must also strongly and boldly contradict that which is false, just as St. Paul instructs regarding an overseer, that *'he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.* (Titus 1:9)

I do not believe it is sufficient to teach positively that we receive Christ's body and blood in the Supper without also being prepared to say that our brothers and sisters in other traditions are in error when they state that it is just a memorial meal (AC X). It is not enough to say baptism saves and not be able to say that our Baptist brothers are in error and are withholding the grace of God from their children (AC IX). We must continue to assert that 'through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given' and we must also contradict the Pentecostals who teach that the Holy Spirit comes and works not only apart from the external Word but even contrary to it (AC V). We must continue to proclaim justification by grace through faith for the sake of Christ alone, yet we must also contradict both Rome, which continues to teach that good works merit justification, and the Reformed, who ultimately look to the fruit of a holy life for their assurance of salvation (AC VI).

This method is important for teaching the Faith as it makes clear delineations between what is true and what is false. It highlights the boundaries of right doctrine and avoids confusion, especially for the young and those immature in the faith. It illuminates the error and contradicts it, so that when the individual Christian inevitably encounters a false teaching they will not be surprised or taken unawares but will be able to recognise the error and confess what is true.

Wisdom is required to know when, where, and to what extent this should be done, depending on the audience. The purpose of refuting error is not to cut off and alienate the person in error but is always to winsomely speak the truth in the hopes that they will recognise the error and come to agreement in the truth. As St Paul tells Pastor Timothy,

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

Scripture as the Rule, Reason as the minister

There is a great divide in the world, on one side you have those who accept the Scriptures as true and an authority in matters of faith, history (insofar as it is addressed), and morality; and on the other side you have those who either reject the Scriptures outright or who recognise them as fallible and a lesser authority in these matters.

Everyone, and our children especially, are being bombarded constantly with messaging that says Christianity is outdated, there is no absolute truth, there is no moral standard, and you can determine for yourself what is good, true, and beautiful. Again and again, we see church bodies turn aside from what the Scriptures teach in favour of that which is politically correct, less culturally offensive, or is compatible with evolutionary science.

The Lutheran Confessors, however, in line with our first group above, had a strong and clear commitment to the Scriptures being the foundation and source of their theology, saying: *"This is the case: being instructed from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, we are sure about our doctrine and confession."* (Preface, 22)

The Formula of Concord states,
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 New Testaments 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. (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)

The Lutheran reformers believed that the Scriptures were the highest authority and submitted all things, including themselves, to it. This is what we call the *Ministerial use of reason* vs the *Magisterial use of reason*.⁷

LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

The Magisterial use of reason elevates our reason (which, this side of the fall, is darkened and corrupted by sin) over the Scriptures in the position of a judge. In this capacity reason can say ‘bread and wine cannot possibly be Christ’s body and blood’ or; ‘in light of how I’m reading the scientific evidence, God mustn’t have created the world from nothing in six 24 hour days, roughly 6000 years ago, rather, it was millions of years of evolution’ or; ‘St. Paul says that the office of pastor is reserved for men, but society has progressed and we know more about gender roles today’ or; ‘I know the Bible says God made mankind male and female, but I want to be able to define myself.’

The Ministerial use of reason, on the other hand, submits reason to the Word as a servant of the Word. When confronted with the same examples above or claims of Scripture which seem impossible, like bodily resurrection, the watery rescue of Jonah by a great fish, or God being both three and one as we confess regarding the doctrine of the Trinity; Ministerial reason responds with ‘I may not understand it, it may seem impossible, but God says it so I believe it.’

The authority of the Scriptures and the Ministerial use of reason are just as important today as they ever have been. Far from being oppressive, submission to the Word of God as the highest authority is profoundly freeing. It frees us from the uncertainty and anxiety of a world in which definitions and standards are constantly changing with the whim of the day.

When the Scriptures are your foundation, you know what to expect; the next discovery, breakthrough in human psychology, or shifting social norm doesn’t leave you flailing, trying to understand this “new reality”; instead, you can confidently apply the word of God to the situation and know where you stand. If this is inculcated in our children, then when the world says that their value in society is determined by whether they identify with the right group, they know that their identity and value come from being in Christ through their baptisms (Col 2:9-15). When your child’s peers tell him that his sex is not absolute but he can decide what he wants to be, he can be confident that in the beginning God made them male and female (Gen 1:27), and that he was knit together in his mother’s womb (Ps 139:13). When a young mother is told that she should do what’s “best for her” and have an abortion so that she can pursue her career, she will know instead that it is God who opens and closes the womb (Gen 20:18; 30:22) and that he is calling her to the high vocation of motherhood (Ex 20:12).

Most importantly, trusting in the authority of God’s Word means that when the world, the devil, and our sinful flesh attack us, we can have confidence in His Word of forgiveness, knowing that for Christ’s sake we are forgiven and granted life and salvation (Eph 1:7).

A Tether to History

How often do we hear it said that we are living in unprecedented times, that the world is rapidly changing, that we need new solutions to new problems; that, perhaps, the world has matured and progressed and so the expression of our faith also needs to come of age and reimagine itself.

Looking back on the Reformation, it could be easy for us to think that the Lutheran Fathers were doing something new; that since the church had been corrupted, they were starting again to get it right this time with a fresh Christianity better suited to the age they were living in. But we would be mistaken.

Neither Martin Luther nor his reformation companions set out with the intention of creating a new church; it was always their desire to affirm the historic catholic Faith and reform the Roman church. They hoped that through clear and careful discussion, and argumentation from the Scriptures, unity and faithfulness could be restored. This was demonstrated by their willingness to present their confessions and defences of the Faith before the Roman church and Emperor Charles V on multiple occasions, even under threat of persecution. They did not want to “create trouble or danger” (Preface, 20) but wanted to promote the “peace and tranquillity of the churches” (Preface, 22).

In the preface to the Augsburg Confession, the Confessors write regarding their hopes for the Diet of Augsburg:

This meeting is also to consider disagreements in our holy religion, the Christian Faith, by hearing everyone's opinions and judgments in each other's presence. They are to be considered and evaluated among ourselves in mutual charity, mercy, and kindness. After the removal and correction of things that either side has understood differently, these matters may be settled and brought back to one simple truth and Christian Concord. Then we may embrace and maintain the future of one pure and true religion under one Christ, doing battle under him (Psalm 24:8), living in unity and Concord in the one Christian Church. (AC Preface, 2-4)

The writers of the Book of Concord repeatedly state that they are “not introducing any new confession” (Preface, 21) nor creating any new doctrine but only reaffirming the teachings of Scripture, and the Faith of their ancestors and the Apostles (Preface, 23).

In the first place, the Confessors express the historicity and catholicity of their teaching by including the three ecumenical Creeds. Through these, they clearly affirm that the Faith they are confessing is the same Faith confessed by the early Church and by the faithful Saints in the Councils that produced these creeds.⁸

Secondly, the historicity of their doctrine is expressed by the regular quoting of and referencing to early Church Fathers. For example, while defending the doctrine of salvation through faith alone apart from works in article VI of the Augsburg Confession they say, “The Fathers teach the same thing. Ambrose says, ‘It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving forgiveness of sins, without works, through faith alone.’” (AC VI, 3) And in another place, “The custom still remains in the Greek churches, and was once also observed in the Latin churches, as Cyprian and Jerome testify. For Jerome says on Zephaniah: ‘The priests who administer the Eucharist, and distribute the Lord's blood to the people,’ and so on.” (Ap XXII, 4)

Why is this historicity important for us and the formation of our faith today? Firstly, there is the great spiritual significance of seeing evidence that the faith we are professing is the true Faith of the Christian Church throughout time; we don't want to be confessing something new! (Eph 4:4-6; 2Jn 8-11; Gal 1:6)

Secondly, many churches today, particularly those of a non-denominational or Pentecostal sort, are almost entirely divorced from Church history. They do not use the Creeds in their worship; they do not learn about the various heresies that have plagued the Church and how they have been refuted; and they often do not learn of the differences between denominations today and what historical events led to their formation. Without the doctrinally stabilising function of the Creeds and a knowledge of how the Church has defended and protected her doctrine over the last two millennia, members of these churches are left dangerously vulnerable to falling for these same heresies and false doctrines.⁹

Lastly, it is important for connection. As stated above, Christianity is under attack and in the West it seems to be in steep decline. This is concerning for any of us, but a Christian who is disconnected from church history will find this far more confronting and isolating and may feel despair at what seems like the beginning of the end of Christendom. If, however, we have a knowledge of Church history we will understand that the Church has gone through growth and decline, has had golden years of peace and has had periods of tribulation and persecution. Through it all, we see God's providential hand guiding His Church through trouble and strengthening the faith of those who made the good confession even unto bitter death. This is the same strategy used by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews in chapters 10:32 to 12:17. He shows that by meditating on the faith and courage of those who have gone before us, our own faith is strengthened. And ultimately, by considering the Faithfulness of Christ we are spurred onwards to continue in faith.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

As Pastor Brian Wolfmuehler stated in his marvellous book, *A Martyr's Faith in a Faithless World*,

"Christians need heroes who remind us of God's mercy. We see in their lives how God forgives sinners and saves the ungodly... Christians need heroes who remind us to thank God for all His gifts and that he raised up great men and women before us to teach us and bless us... Christians need heroes who can stand as examples, especially when the Lord gives us their same vocations and callings... Christians need heroes who pray. Christians need heroes who serve. Christians need heroes who suffer with patience. Christians need heroes who die." (pg 13-14)

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have looked at just a few of the ways that the Lutheran Confessions serve as a pedagogical tool for teaching the Christian Faith. Through methods such as catechesis, repetition, and memorisation, they embed the teachings of the Faith in the hearts and minds of believers.

We can learn from the example of the Lutheran Confessors to not only affirm with clarity the truth but also boldly condemn falsehood so that Christians are able to recognise and resist false doctrine confidently. By joining the Reformers in submitting to the authority of Scripture and using reason ministerially, we can rest on the stable foundation of God's Word in a confused and ever-changing world. And by being aware of the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before us we can gain courage and strength to endure this life while we await the life to come.

***"Everyone who comes to me
and hears my words and does
them, I will show you what he
is like: he is like a man
building a house, who dug
deep and laid the foundation
on the rock. And when a flood
arose, the stream broke
against that house and could
not shake it, because it had
been well built."
Luke 6:46***

Tasmin Bourne

References:

1 Paul McCain et al., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 309–311.

2 McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 314.

3 Usually translated "What does this mean" in our English versions, Luther's German version of the Catechism poses the question in a slightly different way, "Vas ist das?" Literally, "What is this?"

4 This hymn is unfortunately not in the Australian *Lutheran Hymnal and Supplement*, but can be found in the LCMS's LSB, number 581

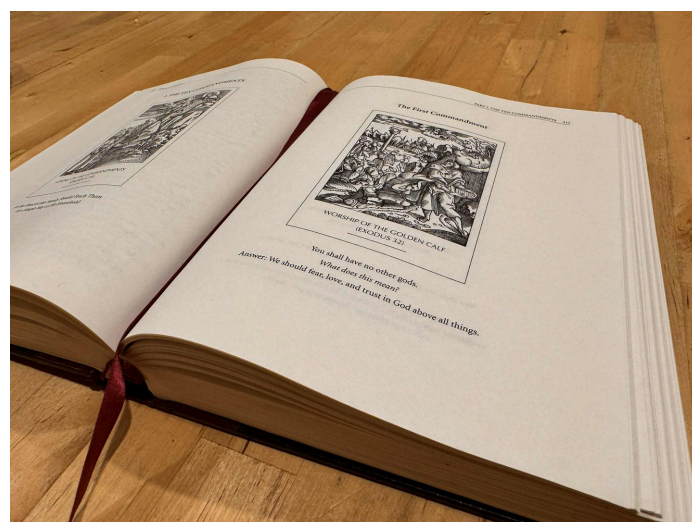
5 <https://www.lca.org.au/cticr/>

6
<https://www.lca.org.au/blog/2016/10/20/homosexuality-lca-says/>

7 Andrew Richard, 'On the proper use of reason', The Brothers of John the Steadfast (blog) 6 Dec 2017, <https://steadfastlutherans.org/2017/12/on-the-proper-use-of-reason/>

8 Apostle's Creed, circa 2nd Century AD; Nicene Creed, 325 AD, Athanasian Creed, 6th–8th Centuries AD.

9 A blog article on the heresy of Modalism in contemporary evangelicalism. https://thecripplegate.com/modalism_on_ess_and_td_jakes/



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Photo: Men Lead by God Camp 2025 with Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Boyle.





By Mark Ariens
2025

For the past four years, particularly the months since Synod, I have studied diligently the Scriptures and the Book of Concord to determine God's truth on what the church is, what unity of doctrine means and what partaking in the Lord's Supper is.

This is not my area of expertise, and I humbly submit to our faithful confessional Lutheran pastors and theologians for correction and instruction. As a layman, I seek only to contend for the faith, in the face of assaults on the truth of the Word of God, without being contentious.

From this study, it is clear that the authority of Scripture should not be rejected in any of its teachings and that church bodies must not set themselves up above God's Word. We must treasure the truth and grace of God's Word and confess that it is the only rule and norm for all faith and life. We must avoid a false unity of one church with contrary beliefs, teachings and practices.

The following is a summary of the biblical teachings that clarify matters of church and fellowship, providing evidence that only one confession of belief, teaching and practice is biblical and therefore true and right.

The Invisible Church

According to the Scriptures, the Church is the congregation of the saints who truly believe Christ's Gospel and have the Holy Spirit (Apol., Art. VII, 28). It consists of those who hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:1-30). The whole Christian Church is those whom the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps with Jesus Christ in the one true faith (Small Cat., expl. Art. III Apostle's Creed). The moment a person is brought to believe in Christ, he becomes a member of the church. Membership in the church is dependent on faith. The apostle Paul expresses it, "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith" (Romans 11:20).

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By Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer
2025

***“Way deep down somewhere
you've got all the answers.
There's something you need
to know. Look inside yourself.”***
Pop band, Hear'Say

***“We conclude, therefore, that
a Christian lives not in
himself, but in Christ and in
his neighbour.”***
*Martin Luther,
Freedom of a Christian*

Introduction

As a father and his young adult daughter sat down to talk, she tried to express what she was going through, saying, “I’m so confused about who I am and where I’m going in life. When I was a child life seemed simpler. Now my friendships seem to come and go. The dreams I had for my career haven’t quite been working out the way I hoped. I look inside and ask myself who I really am, but I’m not sure anymore. I search my heart to try and discover what my passions are and where I should go next in life, but there too it all feels hazy and uncertain.” As the father listened to his daughter, he felt her pain and confusion. He loved her dearly. Yet he was struck by how much she had been influenced by that trend he had noticed in many places, the tendency to look inside for a sense of identity, purpose, and meaning in life.

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!

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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

SPEAK LORD 2025 CONFERENCE TOUR



By Marcia Townsend
2025

The Speak Lord 2025 conferences were held over three weekends in June, with Rev. Dr. Kirk Clayton presenting a series of talks centred on apologetics, the practice of defending the Christian faith. His goal was not only to equip believers to answer sceptics but also to provide tools to support the faith of fellow Christians—especially children—who may face ridicule or doubts about their beliefs.

Each weekend began with an introduction to apologetics and the existence of God. Dr. Clayton clarified that “apologetics” is not about apologising for being Christian but about being prepared to give a reasoned defence for our faith, as instructed in 1 Peter 3:15–16. Dr. Clayton highlighted John 10, where Jesus appeals to His miracles as evidence of His divine claims. Similarly, in Acts, Paul refers to the public nature of Jesus’ ministry when speaking to King Agrippa, emphasising that the events of the Gospel were not done “in a corner” but openly.

The approach taken in the conference was evidential apologetics—examining historical, textual, and archaeological evidence to support the truth of Christianity. Dr. Clayton introduced the three classical tests used to evaluate the reliability of ancient documents:

- Bibliographic Test – Examining the number and age of manuscript copies.
- Internal Evidence Test – Assessing whether the content is consistent and if authors were eyewitnesses.
- External Evidence Test – Looking for corroborating evidence from outside the text, including archaeology and non-biblical sources.

Old Testament Reliability Bibliographic Test

For the Old Testament (OT), the earliest complete manuscripts we have are from around 1000 AD. This is due to the Jewish practice of destroying worn texts to avoid disrespecting sacred scripture.



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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

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- Become an Ambassador in your local congregation to keep them informed of updates and news. Visit <https://cwfellowship.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
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