



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

What in the world is going on?

CRITICAL THEORY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

pg. 10



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The Christian Creeds Confess

Sunday, May 26, marks a Christian minor festival whose date fluctuates from year to year depending on the date of Easter. We call this day Trinity Sunday, observed the week after the Feast of Pentecost. On that day, many of our congregations will use the *Athanasian Creed* since it spells out in great detail what the Christian Church teaches and believes regarding the Holy Trinity.

Creeds are statements or confessions of faith. The earliest creed that was consistently used in the early Church was “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9; see also 1 Corinthians 12:3 and Philippians 2:11). What was determined early on, however, was the need for Trinitarian Creeds to state clearly what Scripture teaches. In the face of denials and distortions about who God is, we have the Christian Church confessing in greater detail over the next five centuries what we call today the three Christian ecumenical (universal) creeds. Professor Kurt Marquardt speaks of them in this way:

The earliest of these creeds is the *Apostles’ Creed*, a baptismal creed the origins of which may be traced back to second century Rome. The *Nicene Creed* was named after the Council of Nicea (325) which had to confess the full Godhead of Jesus Christ against the Arians, whose errors have been revived in our time by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Council of Constantinople (381) added most of the third article, on the Holy Spirit. The third great creed of antiquity is the *Athanasian*, named in honour of St. Athanasius, the great champion of the *Nicene Creed*. This longest of the three creeds confesses in detail the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity and of the Person of Jesus, the God-Man. The *Augsburg Confession*, in its very first and third articles, takes its stand squarely on these Trinitarian and Christological confessions of the ancient church.¹

The opening and closing lines of the *Athanasian Creed* speak to the importance of the teachings contained therein. “Whoever will be saved, shall, above all else, hold the catholic (universal, Christian) faith. Which faith, except it be kept whole and undefiled, without doubt, one will perish eternally... This is the catholic (universal, Christian) faith; whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved.”²

Now these sobering words often get our attention, especially after a casual reading since it can appear confusing when read quickly and not thoughtfully. But in truth, when given serious study by any Scripturally instructed Christian, it is a clear statement of faith.

On occasion, it might be worthwhile to use the sermon on Trinity Sunday to examine the *Athanasian Creed* in greater detail interspersing stanzas from Hymn #39 in our *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* – “Whoever Would Be Saved.” This would underscore the serious nature of these truths to the Christian faith. One could also make use of the prayer which follows at the conclusion of this hymn, as well as *The Collect of Thanks* on p. 105 (ELH).

Making these confessions with the saints since ancient times connects us with the Church our Lord has protected for these two millennia. All three creeds speak of the works of God on our behalf in regard to the role all three persons fulfill in our eternal salvation. God the Father willed your salvation from eternity and sent His Son. God the Son won your salvation by His death and resurrection. God the Holy Spirit distributes your salvation to you through the Gospel so that the Son is present with you, forgiving you all your sins.

¹Anatomy of an Explosion, by Kurt E. Marquardt, Concordia Theological Seminary Press: Fort Wayne, IN, 1977, p. 9.

²The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, Morning Star Music Publications, Inc.: St. Louis, MO, 1996, pp. 29-30.

LUTHERAN SENTINEL

4 ECHOES FROM ELS PULPITS PAST
**Living Wells Dispensing
the Water of Life**
REV. ALF MERSETH

6 CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SERIES
Education: A Job for Parents
REV. JESSE JACOBSEN

8 THE LUTHERAN AND MARTYRDOM
Joyfully Allow the Lord to Slay Us
REV. JACOB KEMPFFERT

10 DOCTRINE COMMITTEE SERIES
Critical Theory & Social Justice

12 EDITOR'S DEVOTIONAL SERIES
**The Lord Makes Us
Readers of the Time**
REV. KYLE MADSON

16 **Military Monument
Paver Invitation**

DEPARTMENTS:

- 2** From the President
- 14** Synod News - '24 Convention Details
- 15** Pastor, I Have a Question...

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Cover Photo by Edrece Stansberry on Unsplash.com



THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL / JUNE 2024 / VOLUME 107 / NUMBER 3 / ISSN 0024-7510

PUBLISHED BY:
The Evangelical Lutheran Synod
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

ADDRESS EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
Rev. Paul Fries
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

**ADDRESS CIRCULATION CORRESPONDENCE
and ADDRESS CORRECTIONS TO:**
Lutheran Sentinel
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

**PERIODICAL POSTPAID AT MANKATO, MN 56001
and ADDITIONAL OFFICES. POSTMASTER:**
Send changes (Form 3579) to
Lutheran Sentinel
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

The *Lutheran Sentinel* is the official publication of the **Evangelical Lutheran Synod** and is published six times per year. The subscription price is \$12.00 per year with reduced rates available for blanket subscriptions at \$10.00 through a member congregation.

STAFF:

Rev. Kyle Madson	<i>Editor</i>
Rev. Paul Fries	<i>ELS Communication Director</i>
Rev. Piet Van Kampen	<i>Contributing Editor</i>
Elsa Ferkenstad	<i>Subscription Manager</i>
Jessie Fries	<i>Proofreader</i>
Ryan Madson	<i>Layout & Design</i>



echoes from **ELS PULPITS** *past*

EXCERPTED FROM PRINT:

The Lutheran Synod Quarterly, September 1986

OCCASION:

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Graduation

AUTHOR:

Rev. Alf Merseth

Living Wells Dispensing the Water of Life

(John 7:37-39)

There are kidney transplants, and there are liver transplants; there are lung transplants, and there are heart transplants; and most recently, we heard of a heart and lung transplant in one operation. For this the medical profession is highly honored, and rightly so.

These graduates are dedicating themselves to a profession which, though it is often despised by the world, should be even more highly honored because they are dedicating themselves to being the human instruments that God uses when He performs the operation that He describes through the pen of Ezekiel: *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”* (Ezekiel 36:26). On this important day, what message shall we leave with these men? To what shall we liken them? To this: living wells dispensing the water of life.

The 2nd verse of this chapter tells us that they were celebrating “The Jew’s Feast of Tabernacles.” On the last day of the Feast, when the people had taken down their “booths” and waved the palm branches at the altar, a priest was selected to go to the pool of Siloam, which was considered to be “living water,” and to bring a pitcher of water and pour it out at the side of the altar. This was a symbolic act, symbolizing to them the presence of “living water” which would have its fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah that God had promised. This was all in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah, *“Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation”* (Isaiah 12:3).

In our text, Jesus surely indicates that He is the fulfillment of that prophecy when at the time of that ceremony of “living water,” He stands up and He invites, “If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.” Jesus indicates that He is the living water.

The “living water” that the Savior will give to the thirsting who come seeking it in repentance and faith is the full salvation that He has prepared for all sinners. It is His complete and perfect fulfillment of the law of God. It is His assuming all the guilt and all the punishment for your sins and mine, and bearing these sins in His own body to the cross. It is His making complete payment for our debt before God with His Holy precious blood. It is His resurrection, by which the Father declared that the sins of the whole world are forgiven. In this “living water,” there is forgiveness of sins. Here there is salvation.

Here in Jesus Christ, there is eternal life. If we have this water, by faith, we will “never thirst again,” as Jesus assured the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well.

The Holy Spirit, of whom the Evangelist says that He had not come at the time that Jesus spoke these words, has now come to make His presence known in the New Testament church, and through His indwelling in “those who believe in me,” as Jesus says, to bring that “living water” to a world dead in their own sins through the use of the Means of Grace, the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacraments. Luther said: “For that is the special work and office of the Holy Spirit, that He reveal and glorify Christ, that He preach and give testimony concerning Him.”

It is “*He that believeth on me*” whom Jesus says, “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38) He is thus describing all believers. He is describing all of us who are Spirit-filled Christians. For even as the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing after he had received the Holy Spirit through the waters of baptism on the road down to Gaza; and even as the Jews of the dispersion, who were scattered because of the continuing persecution of the church in Jerusalem, “went everywhere preaching the Gospel”; and even as Cornelius, who received the Holy Spirit through the preaching and baptism by Peter, taught his household, spoke to his fellowmen and to his fellow soldiers of the “living water” found in Christ, so surely must every believer of today, every Spirit-filled Christian of today, dispense the water of life in his or her own way. These Christians will spread, they will defend, and they will support that Word which tells of Jesus.

You graduates, however, have been called by your Lord to be dispensers of that living water in a special way. You are Spirit-filled believers who are dedicating yourselves to being under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and to leading the sheep of His flock to the “living waters”. You are to be “stewards,” Spirit-filled Christians who are in charge of and are responsible to God for the administration of His Means of Grace. You are living wells dispensing the water of life through administering the mysteries of God. Be that the Word of Truth, which has in it the mysterious “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” a power which no other word has. Be that the mysterious power of the water of Baptism, connected with the powerful Word and used by the Holy Spirit to plant or to confirm faith in the hearts of His people. Be that the mystery of the sacramental union of the bread and body of Christ and the wine and the blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, which gives and seals to you and your people the forgiveness of sins. What a service you are undertaking.

Do as St. Paul said to Timothy: “Preach the word.” When this is done, then we can say with certainty that blessings will follow for you and for those you serve. Those blessings, which will be both temporal and eternal, are these: That “water of life” gives and preserves faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts while we live here and thus we have spiritual life now. That “water of life” gives the assurance of the forgiveness of sins; it gives peace and comfort such as can be found only in Christ; it gives strength of faith for the daily Christian life; and it gives assurance that the hope of eternal life which the believer in Christ has now will be fulfilled.

What can we urge you to do but this? Bring your people Jesus Christ. Bring them cleansing for their sins through the water of life. Bring them salvation. Lead them to that “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1). Amen.



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SERIES: No. 3

Education: A Job for Parents

by **REV. JESSE JACOBSEN**, Contributing Writer,
LAKEWOOD LUTHERAN CHURCH, Lakewood, Wash.

The story of God creating and blessing all things draws us in. It shows that before anything else, we are His creatures. Everything in our existence connects to Him: all of our responsibilities, relationships, material possessions, and even our inner lives; our feelings, thoughts, desires, and conscience. This understanding of God's deep involvement and relevance in our being and identity awakens an appreciation for every experience as somehow connected to eternity and spiritual things. On the other hand, omitting God from the core of our existence would be a false way to live. It would make an artificial separation between earthly and spiritual kinds of information, and between practical and religious ways of life. We would find ourselves acting in certain ways without a satisfying reason behind it. Examples are showing love and respect, protecting life and modesty, and pursuing things like goodness, truth, and beauty.

This difference describes a biblical perspective on life versus a secular perspective. The word secular means “worldly” and assumes that we can have a certain part of our lives (relationships, responsibilities, education, etc.) that remains separate from our religious lives. It ignores the fact that we are God’s creatures in every way. For this reason, some Christian parents find a secular education unacceptable for their families.

Some parents can take on the challenge to **counter-balance the effects of secular public school upon their children’s worldview with a proactive and diligent pattern of devotional life at home.**

Some have a **parochial school available with an acceptable religious perspective.**

Some of them are blessed with another option: **homeschooling their own children.**

The third case is our focus in this article. With active attention and God’s blessing of time and resources, many parents find homeschooling to be a rewarding way of life for both themselves and their children. Since it can be done in a number of creative ways, most interested families can find an approach that fits their situation. In this way, homeschooling is an excellent model of education for many Christian parents.

Arguments raised against homeschooling typically come from the novelty of the idea in the speaker’s experience. How can parents do this or that? Do they really have the authority? We don’t have space here to answer the how questions but will touch on them again below. As for the authority, we need look no farther than our Catechism. The home is part of God’s design already in Creation. Children arrived (Genesis 4) only after the Fall into sin (Genesis 3), but God attached them to His gift of marriage (Genesis 1:28) in paradise. So in the Catechism, the Sixth Commandment (on relationships among men and women) and Fourth Commandment (about parent-child relationships) both speak of God’s intent for learning. Since marriage provides the nest that God designed for the raising of children, it also provides the original setting for their education.

In the New Testament, St. Peter calls Christians “royal priests” (1 Peter 2:9) who serve under the high priestly authority of our Lord Jesus. On one hand, this office gives Christians access to the holy Word and Sacraments – notably the meal of our Lord’s once-for-all sacrifice. This fount of forgiveness in Christ empowers Christians to glorify God in our vocations, including our family callings. On the other hand, the New Testament priestly office includes the responsibility to teach our Christian faith in ways that our

vocations describe. This is often applied to evangelism, but it really hits home when a new child is born. The Small Catechism is a priceless handbook for priestly parents as much as for their children.

Those who know about Dr. Luther’s Sermon on Keeping Children in School may wonder if Dr. Luther was arguing against Christian homeschools. Quite the opposite. He was arguing against the notion that children should be kept from becoming scholars, especially in matters of faith. He writes to the parents, “[God] has not given you your children and the means to support them simply so that you may do with them as you please, or train them just to get ahead in the world. You have been earnestly commanded to raise them for God’s service” (LW 46:222). Christian parents may rightly take from this sermon a concern about keeping their children in certain schools, especially if the lessons and atmosphere seek to tear down their faith and turn the children against the faith of their parents!

Following the perspective that the Christian faith is part of all Creation, Luther extends the Fourth Commandment to all kinds of earthly authority. This should not surprise us if we recall the phrase from our Catechism, “parents and superiors.” The reformer writes in a sermon on this commandment: “You father, instruct your son, that he may fear God; you master, your servants; you burgomaster, your townsmen; you prince, your subjects” (LW 50:151). Notice that the fear of God (or faith) is the main point of this instruction in every case. Our main point is that it all begins with parents. They not only have the authority to teach their children, but even the responsibility. As the Large Catechism states (LC I:141), schools exist to support parents in this duty.

Parents might be interested in the solution of a homeschool but wonder how to accomplish it. Support has been developed in the form of resources, programs, and cooperative communities of homeschooling families. Just as we must be careful to consider the faithfulness of any school to the teachings of Holy Scripture, so parents should actively consider the content and methods used by these resources or co-ops. Your pastor would be happy to support you in this responsibility. Within our synod, some groups have also formed to sponsor conferences and gather resources. Sometimes an excellent option will simply be to use an established parish school. Even then, it is still the parents who are originally given the joyful task of Christian education.



The First Lutheran Martyrs

Part III of IV



Joyfully Allow the Lord to Slay Us

by **REV. JACOB KEMPFFERT**, Contributing Writer,
GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH, Saginaw, Mich.

The burning of Hendrick Vos and Jan van Essen on July 1, 1523, marked a key transition in the early Reformation. Prior to this, the battle had been one of theological debate, mostly consisting of theses, pamphlets, examinations, and threats.

Now it was a battle of fire and blood.

Many histories of the Reformation treat this martyrdom as a distant, isolated incident, largely unconnected to what was happening in Wittenberg and the early Reformation. Some even fail to mention it at all. Yet the profound effect it had on Luther altered the course of Reformer and Reformation alike.

Luther first received the news at the University of Wittenberg near the end of July. A messenger reported that two Antwerp Reformed Augustinian friars had been burned at the stake as heretics for professing the evangelical faith. “[Luther] began

to cry silently, and said, ‘I thought I would be the first to be martyred for the sake of this holy gospel; but I am not worthy of it.’”¹

For Luther, however, this was not simply a matter of sorrow and tears. He immediately also gave thanks to Christ for His power made perfect in weakness and suffering, in the head of grain that falls to the ground dead in order to bring forth life at its final consummation in Christ’s return (John 12:23-25). For Luther, new martyrs meant the gospel had finally returned, that “the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come” (Song of Songs 2:11-12).

These words from Song of Songs inspired Luther’s response to the burnings in Brussels. The painful news caused him to do something he had never done before: write a hymn. And, reflecting the fact that the earthly loss of martyrs was nothing but gain for Christ’s church, he thereby discovered a talent and passion for hymn writing, a talent that would profoundly influence not only the Reformation but also Christian worship for the next five hundred years (and counting).

1. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, 103.

He modeled his hymn after the popular musical form of folk ballad, containing simple but dramatic language that conveyed heroic thrills and striking horrors alike, sung by wandering minstrels and common people in marketplaces, roadsides, and taverns. With this genre, Luther intended to get the word of the martyrs out as quickly and widely as possible.²

For his first hymn, Luther began with familiar words, taking inspiration from the initial verses of Psalms 96 and 98, both of which exclaim, “sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things!” (Psalm 98:1). “For Luther, the events in Brussels were one of God’s marvelous deeds that required song, a new song.”³

In August 1523, Luther’s first hymn, “A Lovely Hymn About the Two Martyrs of Christ Who Were Burned in Brussels by the Sophists of Louvain” (popularly known by its more approachable first line, “A New Song Here Shall Be Begun”), was published as a low-cost broadsheet. Though intended as a popular song rather than for congregational singing, it was later included in the 1524 Wittenberg hymnal for use in the divine service. Our own ELH 556, *Flung to the Heedless Winds*, is a shortened adaptation of this hymn.

In Luther’s original, he provides a detailed account of the examination, defrocking, and burning of the two martyrs as a means of reporting to the world at large what had occurred. He contrasts the faithful steadfastness of Vos and van Essen with the guileful tricks of their examiners (the “Sophists of Louvain” University), who in their departure from the Word and love of Christ act as puppets of “the old arch-fiend.”

Much to their shock, the fiend and the sophists are overthrown by two humble youngsters. The kingdom of God is not in intellectual talk or clever words but in power (1 Corinthians 4:10), and God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). The boys bravely go to their death “with singing and God-praising.”

In two verses believed to have been added later, after the hymn’s first publication, Luther indicates an attempt by some to silence reports of the event, accusing those who “would gladly gloss it over” of betraying a guilty conscience by trying to cover up facts. Yet “good Abel’s blood outpoured / Must still besmear Cain’s forehead.”

Their ashes are scattered, but that only means they can fly into every corner of the world with their testimony of Christ crucified and resurrected from death: “Stream, hole, ditch, grave—nought keeps them still / With shame the foe they spatter.” The song of the martyrs has spread to the world, and “in every land, / In tongues of every people” the martyrs’ voices still “go gladly singing.” Against the lies of the enemy, against all human claims to lordship, God’s Word always prevails.

The hymn that opens as a “new song” closes with the promise of a new spring, paraphrasing the above-quoted words of Song of Songs 2:11-12: “Even at the door is summer nigh, / the winter now is ended, / the tender flowers come out and spy; / His hand when once extended / Withdraws not till He’s finished.”

But Luther’s literary output regarding the Augustinians did not end with poetry. Immediately following the executions, Luther—demonstrating his pastoral heart—also composed a letter of comfort to the faithful evangelical Christians in the Netherlands, sent as a printed leaflet for distribution. In it, he opens with a reference to the same verse that provided inspiration in A New Song, Song of Songs 2:12: “...we were compelled to submit to the terrible powers of darkness and serve such disgraceful errors of the Antichrist. But now the time is come when the voice of the turtle[dove] is heard and flowers appear on the earth.”⁴

The letter to the Netherlands reflects all of Luther’s common themes when speaking of the martyrs. Rather than an oppression, it is a joy and privilege to know Christ and “suffer shame and injury, anxiety and distress, imprisonment and death, for Christ’s sake.”⁵ For a long time, the church had been pressed to pray to sham saints, but now, finally, genuine saints and true martyrs testifying to Christ alone appeared again.

The “two precious jewels of Christ, Henry and John,” are dear to God, for He in His grace had chosen them—and the people of the Netherlands—to be the first to shed their blood and die for the evangelical faith. For the martyrs do not die in misery but instead live in heaven’s glory (Revelation 7:13-17).

This is a similar point that Luther later emphasizes in his lectures on Abel in Genesis 4: “When Abel is slain by His brother, he becomes the first to be freed from sin and from the misfortunes of this world; and throughout the entire later church shines like a brilliant star through the distinguished testimony concerning righteousness which God and all Scripture gives him.”⁶

The comfort Luther gives to the persecuted Christians in the Netherlands is the same comfort Christ gives to all His precious Christians who suffer persecution in this world. Not only is a greater glory being accomplished in them, but they are being held up as a shining example to the world that Christ is Lord and lends His divine strength to His people. “He has given us a new and fresh illustration of His own life, and now it is time that the Kingdom of God should be not in word but in power [1 Corinthians 4:20]...Because, then, we see our present tribulation and have such strong and comforting promises, let us renew our hearts and be of good courage and joyfully allow the Lord to slay us.”⁷

2. LW 53:212.

3. Robert J. Christman, “The Antwerp Martyrs and Luther’s First Song,” *Lutheran Quarterly* vol. 36 (2022), 383.

4. Martin Luther, “Letter to the Christians in the Netherlands, August 1523,” *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 193.

5. *Ibid.*

6. LW 1:245.

7. Luther, *Letters*, 193.



by the ELS DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

What in the world is going on?

CRITICAL THEORY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Justice is God's word. It's equated with what is right.
If justice is done, then right prevails.
Just is what God is; He is always right and never wrong.
One of God's attributes, or characteristics, is that He is just.

Abraham said: "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*"
(Genesis 18:25).

Justice also is what God does; He establishes justice – He punishes the guilty and rewards the innocent. This is at the heart of justification, which is the central teaching of the Bible and of Christianity: God is the judge who declares you, the guilty sinner, innocent or righteous for Jesus' sake. He laid all the guilt of every person in the world upon Jesus, who suffered and died for the sin of the world, but rose on the third day *"for our justification"* (Romans 4:25), that is, as certainty that we are righteous in God's sight.

God's justice is always carried out: He punishes every sin. He punished His Son, Jesus, for all iniquity. By faith in Jesus, a person benefits from this justification and is not only declared innocent, but actually is innocent by God's decree. God's mercy in Christ is not opposed to His justice. But if a person does not repent or believe in Jesus, then God's justice must condemn the person.

Justice is God's word. The movement for social justice steals this word to put it to another, more worldly, use. It is not a biblical term. Social justice is determined by human judges and is applied according to earth-bound requirements, while true justice and righteousness is determined by God according to His commandments.

There is a commendable, Scriptural desire for justice and to see that injustice does not prevail. But first we need to see that some have used and some continue to use the term social justice to advance anti-Christian (unjust) goals.

The roots of this come from Cultural Marxism, the subject of the most recent article in this series. Marxism originally involved putting people in economic classes against each other in order to accomplish societal change. This anti-Christian philosophy put everyone into two classes – oppressor vs. oppressed – in an effort to pit them against each other and promote violent rebellion.

Cultural Marxism developed from Critical Theory, which arose in the 1930s as criticism of churches, schools, universities, corporations, government entities, and other institutions in an effort to change the culture by changing these institutions. Critical Theory pits people in different categories against each other. According to this viewpoint, people are to be categorized by identities such as race, ethnic origin, gender, and sexual orientation.

Critical Theory encourages people to identify themselves within these various categories and to recognize into how many groups they fall to determine in what ways and to what degree they are either "oppressed" or "oppressors." This encourages people to think of themselves as victims and fosters resentment against those who are seen as "privileged" – who are assumed to be oppressing and victimizing others even if they do not realize it. People are urged to think not in terms of God's justice for individuals,

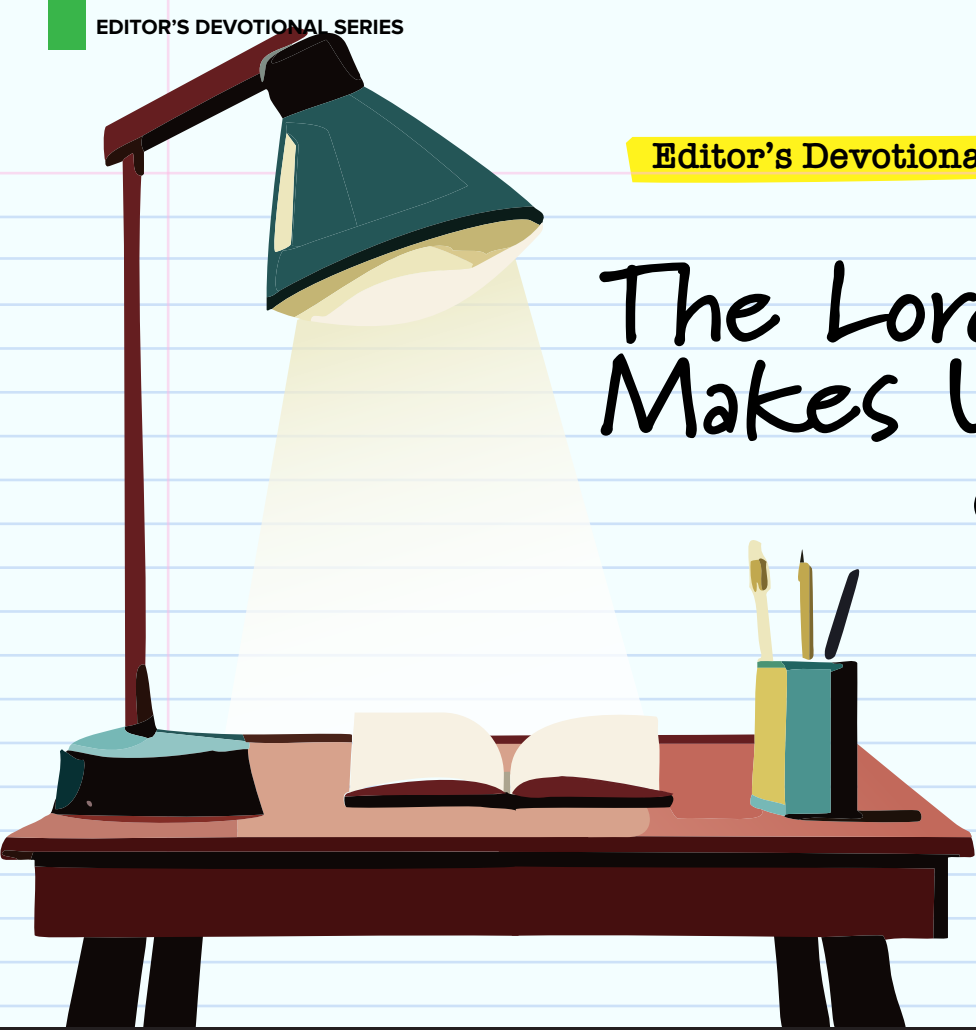
but in terms of a much more limited justice for groups (such as sexual justice or racial justice).

Cultural Marxism, or Critical Theory, emphasizes the group to which a person belongs. The most fundamental identity by which God wants us to "categorize" ourselves is the identity that Baptism gives us: as His redeemed children. In the relationships in which He had placed us and in the duties to which He has called us, God also wants us to find an identity in our divine vocations. He gathers us not into many different groups, but into His one holy Christian Church, in which we together receive God's gifts and mutually serve one another in love. God tears down the walls that are put up by others: *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:27-28).

In His commandments, God addresses us as individuals. Each of the Ten Commandments is addressed to "you," singular. When Christians see injustice being carried out – whether through prejudiced attitudes and actions, physical or mental abuse, treating people unfairly, or showing favoritism in a sinful way – our response is not to condemn the "system" but, with God, to condemn the individual act that transgresses God's commands. The goal is repentance, which will result in God's justification and its fruit: righteous living, which is "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Christians do what they can, within their individual vocations, to pursue righteousness and justice. The way we do this is not to neglect the person in need, as the priest and Levite in Jesus' parable did (Luke 10:31-32), but with God's help to provide whatever help we can, as the good Samaritan did. This is *"faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:6). This attitude is one that takes Jesus' words to heart: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35, NKJV).

Editor's Devotional Series:



The Lord Makes Us 'Readers' of the Time

► Read: Lamentations 3:18-26

by **REV. KYLE MADSON**, Editor, *The Lutheran Sentinel*
NORSELAND & NORWEGIAN GROVE LUTHERAN CHURCHES, Norseland, Minn.

What time of life are you in?
 Young adulthood?
 The “prime” of your life?
 A time of mid-life crisis?
 Are you in your “twilight years”?
 The end of life?

We have all sorts of categories, measurements, and markers for determining our “time of life”. That shouldn’t be too surprising. Time is one of the very first gifts God gave to His creation: **“two great lights, one to govern the day (time) and another to govern the night (time) – for (telling) seasons, days and years”** (Genesis 1:14, 18).

It’s among my first memories of school: a cardboard-backed play clock with two plastic “hands” riveted to it so that one could “manipulate” the hour and the minute with the goal that the one playing with it could learn to “tell time,” as we say.

Perhaps it should occur to us as somewhat ironic that we say it that way, though – “telling the time.” Ironic, because much of the rest of our lives from kindergarten on is spent struggling against the reality of time – especially that we are not “tellers” of time at all. Instead, at best we are “readers” of it and at worst “deniers” of it.

The Scriptures are chock-full of references and allusions to time and our getting along with it. Endurance and waiting are exercises of time. A favorite phrase of Jesus’ as He prepares His disciples is “a little while” (John 16), and it’s as vexing to his disciples as if you were to say the same thing to a five-year-old. The reality of “sorrow now” and the hope of “rejoicing then” (John 16) are major motifs as well. In His great mercy, our Lord makes us readers of the time.

The Christian life is a life lived “learning to read God’s Time.” And lesson 1:1 of this discipleship is that...

BEGGIARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS OF THE TIME

I keep this in my heart. This is the reason I have hope:

By the mercies of the LORD we are not consumed, for His compassions do not fail (Lamentations 3:21-22).

Those cardboard learning clocks are so often the kind of “time” we covet now – time that we can manage and manipulate and “set” according to our own conveniences, desires, and reasons. We envision our lives so much better off if only the time would listen to our telling:

- No more suffering with sickness – TIME for health and happiness only!
- No more suffering for living and confessing as a Christian in a culture hostile to Christianity. TIME for me and all Christians to be respected and revered and held in the highest regard!
- No more of this adding to the church only as fast as we bury (if that!). It's TIME for us to see and experience the windfall of conversion like we read about at Pentecost – when success is tangible and inspiring!

THE ‘BIG HAND’ OF MERCY

But all of our “time telling” is based on one prodigious and proud fallacy –namely, that even one single moment of our lives was an earned or deserved moment of life. The truth that skewers this fallacy is uttered by the Lord's Jeremiah: ***By the mercies (the loving-kindnesses) of the LORD we are not consumed*** (Lamentations 3:22). That means that every single second of our lives – from our first baby breath to our last desperate gasp and every moment in between – every moment is MERCY. Every moment of our proud, brutish, and ungrateful yet gratuitously blessed lives has been a moment that deserved to be consumed by the Lord's just wrath against our sin and guilt... but was not. You could say we fail to read the ‘big hand of mercy’ in telling of the time. It is only because of the Lord's mercy that we have any time at all to think about our “time of life”. It is only in our learning to confess our beggar status and the Lord's boundless mercy that we learn to be patient and pacified “readers of the time.”

The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks him.

It is good to hope quietly for the salvation of the LORD (Lamentations 3:25-26).

GOSPEL GIVEN TIME

The life of Christian faith is a time of waiting – waiting on the Lord whose mercies (loving-kindnesses) are new every morning! Mercy – the Lord patiently withholding from us the destruction we deserve and persistently showing us grace instead – divine mercy makes us able to “read” correctly this waiting time. Neither the proud world nor our sin-blind flesh can “read” life according to God's mercy. And so the world and our flesh can't tolerate any waiting. They need “their paradise” now or never...

But our ***“Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to persist but everyone to come to repentance”*** (2 Peter 3:9). God has been patient with us in His Son. He patiently promised His Son as a gift to His fallen world through His prophets. ***When HIS time had fully come, He sent His Son to be born of a woman born under the Law*** (Galatians 4:4) – the Law that had no time to show us mercy. But our Lord of mercy made time for us by emptying the full penalty for our sins upon His Son so that He could give back to us the luxury of time – the luxury of living a life of waiting on the Lord.

The Gospel – The Mercy of the Lord in the Person and work of Jesus – the Gospel gives us eyes to read “the time” rightly. The Mercy of the Lord tells us we have time to suffer trials and hardships, we have time to confess and repent of our sins and guilt, we have time to endure shame that comes upon us from the evil of others – even time to endure dying and to face death. The Lord's Mercy affords us time – time to wait in and bear up under all of this – because the Lord's mercy has purchased us out from underneath the ticking time bomb of our sins and has secured us status in the timeless paradise of Heaven – **the Salvation of the Lord.**

***The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,
To the soul who seeks Him.
It is good to hope quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.***
(Lamentations 3:25-26).

Announcing the:

107th Convention of the
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

68th Annual Meeting of
Bethany Lutheran College, Inc.

9th Annual Meeting of the
Lutheran Schools of America, Inc.

SYNOD SUNDAY | June 16

4:00 / Synod Sunday Service

Preacher: **Rev. David Thompson** (Mankato, Minn.)

Liturgist: **Rev. Shawn Stafford** (Janesville, Minn.)

5:00 / Dinner (free will donation)

MONDAY | June 17

9:00 / Opening Convention Service

1:00 / Anniversaries observed:

Robert Otto, 50 years

Darryl Bakke, 40 years

Thomas Fox, 40 years

Daniel Larson, 40 years

Ken Mellon, 40 years

Steven Sparley, 40 years

Steven Brockdorf, 25 years

Paul Fries, 25 years

Cory Hahnke, 25 years

Young-Ha Kim, 25 years

Phillip Lepak, 25 years

Daniel McQuality, 25 years

Bernt Tweit, 25 years

Walk Circumspectly in the World God So Loves

June 16–20, 2024

Bethany Lutheran College | Mankato, Minnesota

TUESDAY | June 18

9:00 / Devotion

1:30 / Convention Essay

Essayist: **Rev. James Braun** (Brewster, Mass.)

5:00 / Communion/Memorial Service

Preacher: **Rev. Jonathan Madson** (Sebring, Fla.)

Rebecca Jaech (1949–2023)

Ruth Reichwald (1939–2023)

WEDNESDAY | June 19

9:30 / Convention Essay continued

THURSDAY | June 20

8:00 / Unfinished Business

APOLOGETICS AND WORLDVIEW CONFERENCE

Sponsored by: **The Center for Apologetics and Worldviews (CAW)**

June 20, 2024 | Bethany Lutheran College | Mankato, MN

THE CENTER FOR
APOLOGETICS
AND
WORLDVIEWS

“Defending the Gospel of God”

The Apologetics of Jesus, Paul, and the Historical Reliability
of the New Testament Records

10:00 a.m.

*“Defending the
Historical Reliability
of the Gospels”*

Dr. Adam Francisco,
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

12:30 p.m.

*“Understanding
and Applying the
Apologetics of Paul”*

Prof. Luke Thompson,
Martin Luther College,
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

2:00 p.m.

*“Understanding
and Applying the
Apologetics of Jesus”*

Rev. David Thompson,
Center for Apologetics and Worldviews
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

3:30 p.m. Table Talk with Presenters

Question ...

I've been reading and hearing a lot in the news about Christian nationalism. I'm not sure what this term even means.

I'm a Christian, but also a patriot who loves my country deeply.

Does that make me a Christian nationalist?

Answer:

Patriotism is a God-pleasing virtue. Loving and serving our country is just one more way in which we love our neighbors as ourselves. Such patriotism does no harm and accomplishes much good. Christian nationalism and patriotism, however, are not the same. While patriotism is about how we love our country, Christian nationalism is about how we define our country.

A Christian patriot is not a Christian nationalist. That hasn't stopped some media outlets from trying to label any politically conservative Christian as a "Christian nationalist." On February 23, in an appearance on MSNBC, *Politico* journalist Heidi Przybyla said, "The thing that unites them as Christian nationalists... is that they believe that our rights as Americans and as all human beings do not come from any Earthly authority. They don't come from Congress, from the Supreme Court, they come from God."¹ In her mind, anyone who believes that inalienable human rights come from God is a Christian nationalist. So much for the *Declaration of Independence*, I guess!

Specifically, "Christian nationalism" is a political ideology which professes that public life should be "rooted in Christianity and its moral vision, which should be honored by the state and other institutions both public and private."² Christian nationalists believe that America has always been a "Christian nation" that enjoys a favored relationship with God, like Old Testament Israel. As such, the church should dictate biblical morality to society, and the government should help the church to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Some Christian nationalists believe that America must adopt Christianity as our official religion. A few extremists, like excommunicated LCMS member Corey Mahler, practice a form of Christian nationalism tied to white supremacy and fascism³.

Recently, a friend "down south" related how more and more of the Christian pastors in his community were running for public office. In some cases, their sermons had devolved into campaign speeches, arguing that voting for them would help bring the country in line with God's will. That's Christian nationalism.

So what's wrong with Christian nationalism? Aside from false pride and self-righteousness, it confuses God's reign over the spiritual realm and the temporal realm. In the temporal or secular realm, God reigns over this world through earthly governments—both Christian and non-Christian—to regulate outward behavior through the rule

of law (Romans 13). Yet God does not reign over the temporal realm for its own ends, but ultimately to preserve His Church in this dying, fallen world. Meanwhile, in the spiritual realm of the church, God reigns through His Word and Sacraments to lead people into the true Christian nation: the Holy Christian Church (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The Church—God's kingdom—is a kingdom "not of this world" (John 18:36), made up of people from every nation, tribe, language, and culture, which will last for all eternity. The church bears some responsibility to preach against the sins of our nation and its government, but primarily the church exists to preach the Gospel, not dictate morality to society. Likewise, the nation benefits from having a God-fearing populace, but the government exists to preserve life, freedom, justice, and peace, not to compel people to be (or live like) Christians.

Christian nationalism, in blurring the lines between church and state in pursuit of civil morality, trades the treasure of full and free salvation through faith in Jesus Christ for moralistic "dos" and "don'ts". In addition, Christian nationalism, if followed to its logical conclusion, will hurt people. Religious freedoms will disappear and persecution will arise against those who aren't "the right kind of Christians." In the 1800s, many Lutherans immigrated to America from Germany to escape just that sort of persecution.

To say that God favors one nation over another goes beyond Scripture. Every nation lives under God's grace. As patriotic Christians, we love our country, but we love and follow Jesus first. We strive for what is just, help those in need, love peace, protect life, and uphold the rule of law. We pray for our leaders. We vote according to good consciences, join the military, and even serve in the government. Yet we do all these things as servants of Christ, bearing His cross, reflecting His humility and self-sacrificing love in all things, understanding that following Christ means suffering for the sake of the Gospel, not receiving earthly glory. We live as faithful citizens, trusting that Christ is risen—and that He lives and reigns over all things, now and forever.



Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

---> Send them via email:
pvankampen@holycrossmadison.org

---> Send them via "snail mail":
Pastor Piet Van Kampen
Holy Cross Lutheran Church
734 Holy Cross Way,
Madison, WI 53704

1. Hains, T. (2024, February 23). *Heidi Przybyla: Extremist Conservative Christian Nationalists Believe Your Rights Come From God, Not Government*. Retrieved April 19, 2024, from [realclearpolitics.com](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2024/02/23/heidi_przybyla_extremist_conservative_christian_nationalists_believe_your_rights_come_from_god_not_government.html): https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2024/02/23/heidi_przybyla_extremist_conservative_christian_nationalists_believe_your_rights_come_from_god_not_government.html

2. The Edmund Burke Foundation. (2024). *National Conservatism: A Statement of Principles*. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from [nationalconservatism.org](https://nationalconservatism.org/national-conservatism-a-statement-of-principles/): <https://nationalconservatism.org/national-conservatism-a-statement-of-principles/>

3. Mahler, C. J. (2024, April 13). *I Am a Racist*. Retrieved April 19, 2024, from [corejmahler.com](https://corejmahler.com/i-am-a-racist/): <https://corejmahler.com/i-am-a-racist/>

MILITARY MONUMENT

ELS Military Monument Paver Invitation

All of you have had the opportunity to read about the newly erected ELS Military Monument located on the campus of our Bethany Lutheran College. Many of you may have had the privilege of seeing it in person. If you haven't yet, you'll do well to make time for it when you're on Bethany's campus. The cost to complete this wonderful monument exceeded \$300,000 and was met by many generous donations. An ongoing opportunity to join in this monument's honorary message is purchasing engraved paver stones. Many individuals and friends of our ELS and Bethany Lutheran College, as well as whole congregations or church groups, have taken part in this paver project, engraving the names of their beloved family or congregation members who've served honorably in this vocation of Christian warrior. Hundreds of paver stones are already engraved and placed, but there is room for many more.

Perhaps your congregation would consider honoring your members who have served. The cost for one 8"x16" granite paver is \$250 and includes up to four lines of engraving. In some instances, two names can be fit onto one paver as well. If you're interested in partnering on the paver project, please visit els.org/monument.

Photo by: Rev. Paul Fries

