



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

AN UNCONVENTIONAL YEAR

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Rendering to Caesar
and to God
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An Unconventional Year

by **REV. JOHN A. MOLDSTAD**, President
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD, Mankato, Minn.

Dear Members and Friends of our ELS:

Our Board of Trustees in the month of April had a difficult decision. Consulting with the Circuit Visitors, the board canceled this year's synod convention due to the pandemic.

Pastors, delegates, and visitors look forward to the annual June gathering. Members of our churches often remark that one of the unique blessings for the ELS is being able to gather on our Bethany Lutheran College campus for the traditional June convention. We treasure the time together for spiritual edification, conducting synod business, and enjoying the edifying fellowship and camaraderie.

There are many firsts this year. It is the first time that the synod in its century-old existence did not hold a convention. The college and seminary had to have graduation ceremonies online. The publishing of the Synod Report also did not occur, and instead an informal summary of board activities has been posted.

We draw attention to some items in the president's summary.

- **Membership applications:** Rev. Patrick Ernst of Frankenmuth, MI, and Rev. Lee Kuhns of Kissimmee, FL, have officially applied for permanent membership. Patrick is a recent graduate from our seminary; Lee is joining through colloquy.
- **Living Water Lutheran Church, San Angelo, TX,** has submitted its constitution and bylaws and is applying for official membership with the ELS.
- **The Planning and Coordinating Committee** has adopted a proposal that includes objectives, assignments, and dates of completion for the following three goals: 1) To have every congregation, in Christian love, enhance its focus on reaching the lost; 2) To equip the next generation through Christ-centered education; and 3) To develop and disseminate evangelism resources for home and world outreach.

- Recently, a grant was received to begin a school in the **Peruvian Amazon** village called **Parinari**.
- **Our Redeemer Lutheran, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia,** has requested a working relationship with our Board for World Outreach in order to focus on outreach strategies and long-range planning.
- Under the direction of the Board for Home Outreach, a new devotional, "**Good News for You,**" has been published. The free booklet can be obtained through the Bethany Bookstore (1-800-944-1722).
- **The Doctrine Committee** is recommending the synod in convention express itself in full doctrinal fellowship with the **Nyamira Diocese in Kenya** once proper registration has been secured indicating the diocese is no longer a member of the ELCK. This goes to the 2021 convention. (The Board for World Outreach has provided some assistance for Kenya amid the coronavirus challenges.)

The writer of Hebrews says, "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching*" (10:25). The verse applies to the assembling in our churches each week for Means of Grace worship. Yet it can also have implications for what occurs at our annual conventions. There, too, fellowship around the Word moves us to carry out the kingdom work of our Lord Jesus Christ. One of our historians put it like this: "The synod is more than boards or committees meeting here and there. It is more than a budget, more than an address from which mail is sent to its members. Its most important days, one might say, come each year when it holds its conventions" (Built on the Rock, p. 253).

God willing, see you at the 2021 convention!

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▲ SYNOD CONVENTION, 1961



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“In these uncertain times...”

by **REV. KYLE MADSON**, Editor
THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL, Norseland, Minn.

“In this world you will have trouble....”

John 16:33a

You’ve heard it many times by now: “in these uncertain times...” or “in these unprecedented circumstances...” These may even have become some of your most loathed phrases because of their frequency of use (or overuse).

To be sure, it’s no strain at all for us in the midst of the summer of 2020 to think of any number of things that have been “uncertain” or “unprecedented”: Will the wedding happen as planned? What will it look like? Will we be able to have a funeral for grandma? How will that go? Synod Convention canceled?! When has that ever happened before? Will school be able to start again in the fall? If so, how will that go? What will be different? Will we have in-person church this Sunday? What will the protocols be today?

There is little question that the past few months have been filled with “uncertainty” and “unprecedented” circumstances (at least in our lifetimes). But the repeating of the expression assumes something else. It assumes that prior to the pandemic or prior to nationwide riots, daily life was full of “certainty,” full of “precedent times” that were as guaranteed as granite is sturdy.

It seems honest to consider the past four months “uncertain.” But is it honest to presume that what preceded these months was “full of certainty?” Were we guaranteed wedding celebrations and funeral services without disruption? Or did we just grow to presume that to be the case? Has an annual synod convention without a hitch been a birthright? Or has our little church body just been granted so many uninterrupted that we’ve come to think of it this way?

C.S. Lewis, the great 20th century author and apologist, had this to say about “learning from war-time” that seems to instruct us well during our current uncertainties:

“The war creates no absolutely new situation: it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself.”

Could it be that the past handful of months of pandemic, economic turmoil, and civil unrest have actually yielded us nothing new at all? Rather, these months have merely “aggravated the permanent human situation so that we no longer can ignore it?”

It should not be so easy for us to forget who we are: depraved and dying sinners with bodies at all times susceptible to disease, dying, and death; minds at all times prone to ambivalence, fear, and despair; hearts defaulted to hatred and always chasing the mirage of “control.” But we make ignoring this permanent human condition an art form... and the devil and the world happily aid us. We are easily sold the notion that mankind (us and our neighbor) is “basically good” and that it’s reasonable to expect that we’re progressing beyond “good,” that we can even aspire to a day when there is no longer any inconvenience to daily life, no more “risk” of illness or death, no more injustice or hatred or violence. We envision the treasure is that “good life” going back to “normal” so that “better-than-normal” might again be pursued.

The Psalmist brings us to ourselves:

*Truly God is good to Israel (the people of God) -
 To those who are pure in heart.
 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
 My steps had nearly slipped.
 For I was envious of the arrogant
 When I saw the prosperity of the wicked...
 When my soul was embittered,
 When I was pricked in heart,
 I was brutish and ignorant;
 I was like a beast toward You (Lord).*

(Ps. 73 selected vss.)

To the extent that these “uncertain times” have in fact “aggravated our permanent human condition,” we ought to thank God. For it is only in knowing our real condition that we can recognize the real Treasure: A God who is with us in our always-desperate condition.

*Nevertheless, I am continually with you (Lord);
 You hold my right hand.
 You guide me with Your counsel,
 And afterward you will receive me into glory.
 Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

(Ps. 73:23-26)

May God grant us the right amount of “uncertain times,” that our failing flesh and hearts might always be returned to real Certainty:

*“... But take heart, I (the Lord)
 have overcome the world.”*

John 16:33b

The Bible says, “For I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6, NKJV). Yet in Genesis 6 Moses writes that, when the Lord saw how terribly immoral mankind had become, He “was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Genesis 6:6).
Does God change His mind?

Answer:

As human beings, we can be persuaded to change our minds about lots of things. Even “Sam-I-am” had a different opinion of “green eggs and ham” by the end of the famous Dr. Seuss book. So as human beings think of God and the way He carries out His will among us, to us it looks as though God is changing His mind.

Scripture even seems to speak that way on occasion. The Lord told Samuel that He greatly regretted setting up Saul as the King of Israel on account of Saul turning his back on the Lord (1 Samuel 15:11). Later, when the people of Nineveh repented and turned from their evil ways, God “relented from the disaster that He said He would bring upon them” and did not destroy the city (Jonah 3:10).

THE UNCHANGING GOD

Yet Scripture clearly teaches that God does not change (Malachi 3:6). According to His eternal essence as true God, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Since the Triune God exists from eternity, He exists outside of created time and space and beyond human notions of cause and effect. He knows all things, even all future events, and is present everywhere at every moment at the same time. In an ever-changing world, the will and Word of God endures forever (1 Peter 1:25; Proverbs 19:21). So the Lord does not “change His mind.”

That fact should cause the wicked to sit up and take notice. At the last judgment, the wrath of God will remain with them forever, where “their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44). After a few years of punishment, God will not change His mind about the people who are suffering in hell.

At the same time, the truth of our unchanging God comforts the hearts of the faithful. Scripture assures us that even though we deserve nothing but wrath, His grace and mercy will never depart. Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:39). He will not change His mind about the sins that He has forgiven.

THE UNCHANGING GOD MEETS CHANGING SINNERS

Generally, the Bible speaks of God in two ways. On one hand, it shows us glimpses of His glorious majesty existing above and beyond time and space. On the other hand, the Bible also describes God in ways that we can relate to Him as His creatures living in time and space. Therefore, since human beings know what it means to change their mind, the Bible sometimes speaks about God that way.

Yet God’s essence does not really change. He is always full of grace for poor, miserable sinners who repent, while at the same time is always ready to carry out His wrath and punishment on proud, self-righteous sinners who refuse to repent. What changes are the sinners. When the proclamation of Law and Gospel leads sinners to repent and trust in Christ as their Savior, they depart from the wrath of God and now live under His grace and mercy. From our point of view, it looks like God changed His view of us. But the truth is that He changed us, calling us out of sin’s darkness into His light (1 Peter 2:9).

The nature of God is beyond our understanding, and His ways are beyond our ability to figure them out. We are humbled by things that don’t seem to make sense. Yet we give thanks that the Lord, in His grace, makes His mind known to us in familiar terms we can understand so that we can know His saving will and grace in Christ.



Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

- > Send them via email:
pastorspvk@christthekinggb.org
- > Send them via “snail mail”:
 1700 Cardinal Ln,
 Green Bay, WI 54313

*This month, instead of presenting an article on the history of the work in Latvia, I decided to let one of the Latvian pastors describe his own journey from serving in the national church in Latvia to serving in the **Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia (CLCL)**. It gives you a sense of what this church body is all about.*

*The CLCL has more than 500 members in five congregations served by seven pastors. The following is excerpted from an article written by **Pastor Ilars Plume** in the February 2020 issue of the *Thoughts of Faith* newsletter.*

REV. THOMAS A. HEYN, Administrator
ELS BOARD FOR WORLD OUTREACH



▲ The Lutheran Church in Kekava, Latvia

The Journey

by **PASTOR ILARS PLUME**

I started my ministry in the national Latvian Lutheran Church in the last years of Soviet times. I didn't expect the collapse of the Soviet Union, at least not in my lifetime, so the breakdown of "the evil empire" came as a joyful surprise. Churches that formerly were almost empty were suddenly filled with people. Even former communists came to be baptized. We could evangelize prisoners and military people. Pastors were on television and the radio almost daily. But many opportunities were lost. This raised the question: What really is the Lutheran faith? What should we believe for ourselves and teach our people?

I and a group of others became acquainted with confessional Lutheranism through people from the United States, such as **Professor Erling Teigen** and **Professor Mark Harstad**, and from a few others in Europe. We learned what it really means to be a Lutheran. We discovered the Gospel and it filled us with overwhelming joy. Unfortunately, some were more attracted to the ecumen-

ical movement. We became a small minority and had to leave the national Lutheran church, lose our church buildings, friends, and lots of opportunities. I started to serve the congregation in the city of **Kekava** in the summer of 1989. Ten elderly people, sometimes fewer, came to Sunday worship. In a few years, we had about two hundred people and eighty communicants each Sunday. Then, in the mid-nineties, came the break with the national Lutheran church. Only thirty people remained to worship in a school, then in a hotel, and finally in the upper room of a garage.

Our numbers increased and we dedicated our own church building in 2002. More than sixty were gathering weekly. Most important, we grew in our confessional awareness and learned to appreciate the Gospel. We faced hatred from other so-called Christians and found ourselves almost back where we were in Soviet times, but facing a different monster—the indifferent, secular-

ized Western spirit with its greed, globalization, and consumer culture. Some of our members became more secular-minded. Many went to live abroad for economic and other reasons.

When the financial crisis hit in 2008, we lost support for the Augsburg Institute, our publishing house. Some pastors had to return to their secular jobs. Church work was burdened with practical problems. Nonetheless, attendance at Sunday services increased together with donations from the local people! A few years later, financial support from our friends in the **Evangelical Lutheran Synod** was partly renewed. Pastoral life and work became easier and more fruitful. Some of us returned to theological research and writing, new books were printed, and work on our hymnal was renewed. Our congregations became stable and we gradually grew. But the monster of secularization was still there. Morals continued to decline. The socialistic tendencies of the European Union accompanied by fears about our eastern neighbors still were and continue to be threatening. It is difficult to stand against that combination of unbelief, lack of values, and pluralism.

During all these years, we have felt the strong supporting shoulder of confessional Lutherans, especially from the **ELS and its Board for World Outreach**. Their financial support is important, but even more so, having brothers and sisters fighting the same fight for the Gospel, their friendship, prayers, yearly visits, exchange of experience, and encouragement. Thank you very much for all of that!

If you have questions,
please contact us:

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WEB:

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If you would like to help support this work, go to:

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▼ Pastor Plume in the pulpit



God at Work: Divine Care Through Many Callings



Fatherhood

"A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated ...every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another."

Martin Luther - "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility"

My name is Daniel Ruiz, and I am a father who lives in San Antonio, Texas. At first, this vocational title doesn't seem very exciting. However, when I take a deeper look at the joy of being a father, in my case, of four energetic and curious little people, suddenly fatherhood is fully characterized in one sense of the lives God has given into my care.

Often my children vocally review how I lead and serve them by repeating the lessons they have learned from me. In this regard, children need fathers to be present for love, forgiveness, discipline, and patient guidance. And a mother needs the father's aid in caring for the household, too. So much depends upon a father, including the reputation of a family. What I have taught my children is in fact often told to me with laughter and respect and sometimes with encouragement.

Don't get me wrong... my kids are not perfect. Even in front of my neighbors, some of whom may not be Christian, I must show concern for my kids' actions or the words they choose to use in front of others. Neighbors rely on fathers (especially Texans, who call all men "sir") to give children guidance. I recently spoke with a police officer, a father himself, whose greatest concern is for pre-teens already committing crimes. The officer asked one in particular, "Where is your father?" and the child responded with, "I have no father." And this is not the first story like this told to me. Often where there is no father, mothers are exasperated, the children do what they desire, and too often, the cycle continues.

I too grew up without my biological father. For a time, he was physically present but very negligent. Then he divorced and left. We felt cast aside on the road as he drove off on it. Now, with four children of my own, this past experience has enlightened me to the dangers that come without a father. Yet the same temptations that the devil threw in front of him no doubt have been used against me and other men in this position.

Often I find myself reflecting on Proverbs 22:6: *Dedicate a child to the way he should go, and even when he becomes old, he will not turn away from it.* Imagining all the outcomes for my children, the challenge is to guard myself against any legalism or, on the opposite side of this, just letting them do what they want so they think I am cool!

It is often in those moments, admittedly doubting my ability to lead and guide, that I hear my sons running past and shouting, "I love you, Dad." Or when I myself tell them, "Sorry that my

frustration got the best of me," they say, "I forgive you, Dad." I hear my own daughter return the comfort of the Gospel after a long day, showing me her muscles with a smile and telling me, "It is going to be okay, Dad, God the Father provides and is strongest, right?" "Right!" is my response. I see how they adore their mother and bring her joy and honor, giving their own confession of God's constant care for them.

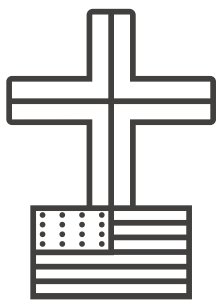
The Holy Spirit is working in their hearts, where I have planted the seed. God is watering it with His Gospel. Fathers, this is a labor in which there is much fruit, to God's glory, that allows us to boast in Christ with praise!

If this joy is so great for any father, how much more joy does it bring our Father in Heaven that His holy Son has justified you and me, His children, and called us into His wonderful family. How much more is our Father honored when we, fathers, continue through trials to trust and confess in Him before our children and their mother?

Paul wrote, *"Therefore I urge you, brothers by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship"* (Romans 12:1). Fellow fathers, your sacrifice in faith will not go unnoticed. It is holy and pleasing, done in faith. You are upheld by the Father in Heaven, whose Son redeemed you from past failures, forgiven. You are remade in the image of God so that by faith His everlasting love may flow through you. As you sacrifice daily your wants and desires in this holy fatherhood for your children and their mother, you raise many future parents to look and trust in our almighty and gracious Father in Heaven.

*"Hear us, cheer us By Thy teaching;
Let our preaching and our labor
Praise Thee God and bless our neighbor."*

ELH 27; v.3



RENDERING TO CAESAR AND TO GOD: PANDEMIC HEALTH CODES AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

by **DR. RYAN C. MACPHERSON**, Contributing Writer,
History, Philosophy, and Legal Studies,
BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE, Mankato, Minn.

When your church would like to gather as a public assembly to hear God’s Word, sing His praises, and receive Holy Communion, but your governor requires, under the color of a pandemic health emergency order, that everyone stay home—or perhaps permits a few at a time to gather, so long as they promise not to sing—what should you do?

The key to answering this question properly is the recognition that people are bound not to absolute civil obedience to an executive order, but rather to: (1) a constitutionally ordered civil obedience insofar as (2) such obedience does not involve any disobedience to God.

In a (perhaps surprisingly) harmonious manner, this answer rests simultaneously upon (1) principles of constitutional law and (2) doctrines of biblical theology.

An additional consideration, of course, is (3) Christian charity—love for one’s neighbor. While it may seem reasonable to expect that an urban mega-church with thousands in attendance poses epidemiological risks akin to a sports arena and hence it would be safer and more loving to suspend services (or at least to severely limit crowd size), the same level of concern does not apply to the more typical congregations of modest attendance, where declining membership already has resulted in a virtually automatic social distancing. Most churches today have fewer than 100 in attendance, although their architecture was originally designed to accommodate far more.

The present article focuses on that latter context: churches whose leaders may in good conscience choose to stay open even while remaining mindful of the pandemic—except that an executive order prohibits them from exercising their loving judgment or religious free exercise. In Idaho, the governor even went so far as to prevent clergy from making private visits to individual homes, i.e., the executive order allowed the pizza delivery man to come to the door, but forbade a

pastor from bringing Holy Communion to a parishioner’s doorstep. When Caesar shuts down even the socially thinnest activities of religious free exercise while shoppers (despite posted regulations) routinely pass within six feet of each other, touching objects in common, then the newfangled proverbial argument “the church is dangerous to the community so it must be closed out of love for humanity” fails. The time has come, therefore, to remind Caesar that the First Amendment protects religious free exercise, yes, even in times of national emergency.

RENDERING TO CAESAR AND TO GOD

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

With this brief statement, Jesus suggested a double syllogism for defining civil obedience and divine worship, which in a fuller form goes something like this (adapted, with quotations, from Paul E. Kretzmann’s *Popular Commentary of the Bible*):

What to Render to Caesar

- All things that are Caesar’s are things that a person should render to Caesar.
- All things that are “mere temporal, earthly things, which concern money, possessions, body, life” are things that are Caesar’s.
- Therefore, taxes, etc., are things that a person should render to Caesar.

What to Render to God

- All things that are God’s are things that a person should render to God.
- “All things which concern the Word of God, worship itself, faith, and conscience” are things that are God’s.
- Therefore, worship, etc., are things a person should render to God.

Thus we have the basic distinction between church and state, which Christianity introduced to Western civilization. Sometimes popes and bishops asserted undue influence over kings and princes, and sometimes kings and parliaments exerted undue influence over clergy and their parishioners. On balance, however, Christianity in general and the West in particular have been unique for their development of two distinct “kingdoms.” Henry VIII was the exception rather than the rule when he cajoled Parliament into establishing a state church and consolidating supreme power over both kingdoms—church and state—into an office held by one and the same individual, himself. As a corrective, America’s founding fathers distinguished church and state both constitutionally and theologically.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE: RENDERING TO EACH AMERICAN CAESAR WHAT EACH CAESAR RIGHTLY MAY CLAIM

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution contains two important clauses in repudiation of England's model of a state church:

1. **The No Establishment Clause:** "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..."
2. **The Free Exercise Clause:** "...or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Meanwhile, the same Constitution contains in its preamble:
3. **The General Welfare Clause:** "We the people of the United States, in order to ... promote the general welfare ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

From the general welfare clause flows the separation of powers into three distinct branches of the federal government—Legislative, Executive, and Judicial—and also the separation between the federal and the state governments. The main point of this structure is explained in paragraph two of the Declaration of Independence: God has granted to each person inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property, and the purpose of government is to protect those rights. The founding fathers recognized the selfish and corrupt tendencies of human nature, and so they safeguarded the general welfare (that is, the protection of life, liberty, and property) in a diffused arrangement of checks and balances between distinct government offices (hence, the separation of powers and the layering of federal and state governments).

The federal-state relationship is further explained in Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, where we find:

4. **The Supremacy Clause:** "This Constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof; and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every state shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding."

In an American context, therefore, "rendering to Caesar" occurs in a hierarchy of four levels:

- *First*, to the U.S. Constitution.
- *Second*, to federal laws and treaties.
- *Third*, to state constitutions.
- *Fourth*, to state laws.

Note that a governor's executive order, which functions as a proxy for legislation during a state of emergency, is in fourth and last position. More specifically, an executive order is in fourth-and-a-half position since state laws typically regulate the scope of executive authority during times of emergency. (For example, state statutes might allow a governor only 30 or perhaps 60 days of unilateral action, after which the legislature may extend or else terminate the governor's emergency powers.)

Therefore, as a matter of law, an executive order stands or falls according to its conformity with or violation of the state's laws, the state's constitution, federal laws and treaties, and ultimately the federal constitution. More precisely, insofar as the governor touches upon a federal issue, all four levels of analysis apply; for purely local matters, only the state constitution and state law apply, as noted in the Tenth Amendment. Religious liberty (the focus of this discussion) is protected at both the federal and the state level, so all four levels apply.

It is the province of the judiciary to evaluate whether the governor's orders pass muster at these four levels. (Several judges have issued temporary restraining orders—in North Carolina, in Kentucky against a governor, in Kentucky against a mayor, etc.—with regard to emergency orders that violated constitutionally protected rights. Indeed, Wisconsin's supreme court voided an entire executive order for its failure to be promulgated according to the rule-making procedures dictated by state statute.)

It also is **the duty of every office holder** (from local police to lieutenant governor), having sworn an oath "to defend the U.S. Constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic," **to refuse to enforce any unconstitutional orders** issued by a governor. (Several sheriffs—in Michigan, in Illinois, in California, etc.—have stated their intention not to enforce several emergency orders that they deemed to violate their own oaths of office. Dr. Cordie Williams, a Marine veteran, similarly reminded the police of his oath and theirs, with the result that the police backed away from a crowd of First Amendment demonstrators in Sacramento.)

THE THEOLOGICAL ISSUE: RENDERING TO GOD (WHO ALSO ASKS US TO RENDER SOME THINGS TO CAESAR, BUT NOT ALL THINGS)

Similarly, **as a matter of theology**, people are bound not to absolute civil obedience to an executive order, but rather to: (1) a constitutionally ordered civil obedience insofar as (2) such obedience does not involve any disobedience to God.

continued on next page →

First, what does “constitutionally ordered civil obedience” mean?

The American republic derived its constitution in part from the British system, in part from early modern political philosophers (Locke concerning the protection of natural rights; Montesquieu concerning the separation of powers), and also in part from the Roman republic. Christianity emerged when the Roman republic had recently metamorphosed into an empire, but the notion that distinct offices have distinct powers as dictated by a constitution nonetheless remained operative to some degree at the time that the Apostles Paul and Peter wrote their epistles, now part of the New Testament. Both apostles alluded to the notion of “constitutionally ordered civil obedience.”

Paul wrote: *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves* (Romans 13:1–2). Grammatically, “authorities” is plural: Paul recognized that **more than one authority existed, each with a distinct office**. As Paul continued: *Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor* (Romans 13:7). Obversely, a citizen is not required to render taxes to whom taxes are not due, or customs to whom customs are not due; to each his due, yes, but to no one what is not his due but is someone else’s due instead.

Peter wrote similarly: *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good* (1 Peter 2:13–14). An explanatory note in the Geneva Bible (an English translation favored among America’s founding fathers) reveals that **“ordinance” means “the framing and ordering of civil government,” in other words, the constitutional order**. The phrases following “ordinance” sketch out the practical application of rendering to each mini-Caesar what belongs to that mini-Caesar: to the king, to the governors, etc. This same framework readily applies today to the four (and a half) levels in the Supremacy Clause that defines America’s constitutional order.

Peter concludes this section of his epistle with an echo of Christ’s distinction between God and Caesar, using a distinct verb for what properly belongs to each: *Fear God. Honor the king* (1 Peter 2:17). Here we find also a hint of the next issue to be examined.

Second, when is civil disobedience warranted?

The same Peter who in his epistle encouraged obedience to the constitutional dictates of civil government on two occasions personally refused to obey a human rule that violated God’s establishment of the church. When ordered “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,” Peter replied with a pointed rhetorical question in mind: *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge”* (Acts 4:18–19). When charged later with a violation of the Gospel-gag order (“Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?”), Peter replied, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:28–29).

These examples, however, represent **a last resort**. The apostles sought, whenever possible, to honor every governing office, yes, even those of imperial Rome. Paul, for his part, exemplified how to work within the civil system, exercising his rights of citizenship. *And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”* (Acts 22:25). This plea spared him further bodily injury and gained him due process, as various magistrates intervened in his case by protecting his life and requiring that his accusers make a peaceful and public declaration of the charges against him. Ultimately, Paul exercised his right of appeal beyond the local authorities to the emperor himself. *“For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar”* (Acts 25:11).

We find here, in the earliest history of the Christian church, a lawful and respectful petition for redress of grievances: Paul’s appeal to Caesar. When Christian congregations today file lawsuits against governors and mayors, urging the courts to intervene for the protection of their First Amendment rights, those congregations fulfill their dual loyalties, rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s. Let it be remembered that our Caesar’s Caesar is the Constitution, which includes, within the First Amendment, the following:

5. **The Petition Clause:** Congress shall make no law ... abridging ... the right of the people ... to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

APPLYING CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AMID COVID-19

Not all coronavirus-era executive orders impinge upon religious liberty to the same degree, and some executive orders in fact protect religious liberty even while temporarily regulating social behavior in order to mitigate contagion. Judges at both the state and federal level have oaths of office to uphold as they impartially consider all matters of fact and of law in subservience to the Supremacy Clause. As we await their rulings, we reasonably may expect that some congregations have stronger cases than others depending upon whether and to what extent the executive order infringed upon their fundamental rights of religious free exercise, assembly, and the like. All parties, however, ought to agree that every congregation has a right to petition and, having petitioned, a right to due process. All parties also ought to agree that the defendant (e.g., a state governor) has a right to respond in court to the complaint brought by the congregation. Fair is fair, for everyone involved.

Thankfully, the Free Exercise Clause and the No Establishment Clause of the First Amendment have generally been interpreted by the courts in a manner that enables Christians to live faithfully in accordance with the distinction made by Jesus and the Apostles between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God. As the U.S. attorney general recently emphasized, the U.S. Supreme Court has held that religious free exercise is a **“fundamental right”** and any government agency that restricts that right has the burden to show that the regulation not only serves a **“compelling state interest”** but furthermore is the **“least restrictive means”** of doing so. That is to say, only in the rarest of circumstances do American courts tolerate a restriction upon religious free exercise. As a matter of constitutional law, religious free exercise is a fundamental right protected by the First Amendment; the six-foot rule, the ten-person rule, and other public health innovations must accommodate that right to the highest degree possible. Furthermore, the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees “equal protection,” a provision that would prevent governors from imposing stricter restrictions upon churches than upon other public venues, such as liquor stores (oddly enough labeled “essential businesses” and in many states suffering far less restriction than pastors and their congregations).

Happily, a legal complaint brought by some pastors against the governor of Idaho (remember: pizza delivery was okay, but a home visit for Holy Communion was forbidden) resulted in some telephone discussions between their lawyers and the state attorney general’s office, after which the governor revised the executive order to accommodate churches. As one of the pastors said regarding a police chief involved in

this case: “I would like to clarify one thing with all concerned: Chief Fry went out of his way to be very helpful to me. He is a man of honor and a true public servant. I disagree with his conclusions, but in no way do I desire to portray him as an antagonist or adversary, nor do I blame him for the Governor’s order.”

In other words, petitioning for a redress of grievances can be quite an amicable affair—a truly civil matter in both process and result.

If, however, recourse to the courts fails to protect a congregation’s ability to fulfill its divinely established mission, then it behooves not only church leaders but also the lesser magistrates of the civil government and, eventually, individual citizens to gauge the degree of tyranny and develop an appropriate response.

1. Bear patiently in hopes that the governor will soon loosen the restriction?
2. Appeal to a higher court?
3. Interpose, if you hold an office of public trust and have sworn to defend the Constitution?
4. Practice non-violent civil disobedience in the spirit of the prophet Daniel?

These four strategies are adapted from the Magdeburg Confession of 1550, in which our Lutheran fathers distinguished four levels of political oppression and charted Christian responses to each. Even at the fourth level, however, lawless rebellion shall not be entertained; rather, a measured response in proportion to the four levels of injustice will seek the good of church and state alike, in service to Caesar as much as possible, and in glory to God without fail.

4 Levels of Injustice

Level 1: The “Not Excessively Atrocious” Governor

Level 2: The Lawless Tyrant

Level 3: The Coercive Tyrant

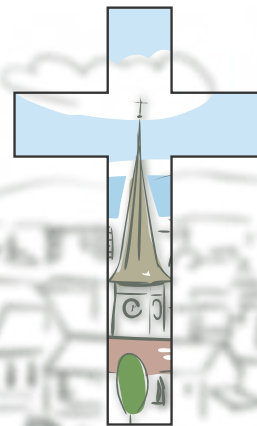
Level 4: The Persecutor of God

Adapted from the **Magdeburg Confession (1550)**
www.intoyourhandsllc.com/interposition

Cross Focus

Focusing on the world around us through the lens of the cross.

by **REV. PAUL FRIES**, Communications Director
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD, Mankato, Minn.



LAWS WE CAN COUNT ON

The Supreme Court of the United States recently made a very strange decision. They added meaning to a law that was very clear without changing the wording, causing businesses, schools, and even churches to question how they will follow laws when the very meaning of a law can change without notice.

Some also suggest that God changes His moral law, the Ten Commandments, to suit the times in which we live. If you think the Supreme Court changing a law will have profound effects, imagine a world in which God's moral law can be changed without notice! "You Shall Not Kill" would be optional and depend on the situation. If you could convince enough others to agree and defend your actions, you could commit murder without consequences. "You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor" would be ignored and you could accuse your neighbor of anything, ruin a reputation for fun, or lie as a witness in a trial, all without fear of God's wrath.

We need laws with clear meaning, both in our nation and from our God. Laws made by governments may change without notice, but God's moral Law does not. "I, the Lord, do not change" (Malachi 3:6 EHV). Give thanks to God that He does not change and that His Law does not change. And give thanks that He does not punish us as we deserve for breaking His Law! Instead, in His mercy, He forgives our sins, washing us clean from our guilt.

TEARING DOWN THE LAW

Lately, we have seen protestors pulling down statues of perceived offenders of one type or another and spraying graffiti on monuments. The anger expressed is sometimes understandable, but the destruction of someone else's property is never acceptable, even if that property is "public." Our country is ruled by laws and all our citizens should follow those laws. Christians, especially, should set an example in following the laws of our land and government God has placed over us.

We are truly blessed to live in a country that allows our grievances to be heard. If a statue or monument is seen as offensive, let's listen to the reasons. Let's follow the laws put in place for erecting or for removing monuments—together. The words we read in Jeremiah remind us of the reason we have earthly government—for the good of all: "*Seek the peace of the city where I have exiled you. Pray to the Lord for that city, because when it has peace and prosperity, you will have peace and prosperity*" (Jeremiah 29:7 EHV).



Candidates: **Jacob Kempfert, Ethan Urtel, Karim Yaghleji**



Vicars: **Sean Scheele, Samuel Johnson, Adam Brasich, Roger Emmons, David Choi**

2020 Seminary Commencement

The Commencement Service for **Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary**, which included the assignment of calls, occurred on Wednesday, May 6, 2020, at 10:30 a.m. in Good Shepherd Chapel. **President Gaylin Schmeling** served as preacher, and Mr. Samuel Johnson was the pianist. The sermon was based on Ephesians 3:8 with the theme “The Pearl of Salvation.” In the sermon, Pres. Schmeling explained that the pearl of salvation is found in the Gospel of Christ’s redemptive work for the salvation of all people. This pearl of salvation is the greatest treasure there is. It alone can give peace and security in this life and hope for the life to come. Those called into the public ministry are given the privilege to dispense this pearl of salvation through the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments.

Graduates from the seminary with a Master of Divinity degree were **Jacob Kempfert, Ethan Urtel, and Karim Yaghleji**. Jacob Kempfert was assigned as pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church (Saginaw, Michigan) and Karim Yaghleji was assigned as Arabic outreach missionary and pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church (Lombard, Illinois). Ethan Urtel will pursue further education.

Adam Brasich was assigned as vicar of Resurrection Lutheran Church (Winter Haven, Florida) and Our Savior Lutheran Church (Lakeland, Florida); **David Choi** was assigned as vicar of Seoul Lutheran Church (Seoul, South Korea); **Roger Emmons** was assigned as vicar of Grace Lutheran Church (Redmond, Oregon); **Samuel Johnson** was assigned as vicar of Our Saviour Lutheran Church (Lake Havasu City, Arizona); and **Sean Scheele** was assigned as vicar of Pilgrim Lutheran Church (Waterloo, Iowa) and Faith Lutheran Church (Parkersburg, Iowa).

THE BJARNE WOLLAN TEIGEN

Reformation Lectures 2020

OCTOBER 29 – 30, 2020

“We Confess Jesus Christ”

S. C. Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center
Bethany Lutheran College
 Mankato, Minnesota
 October 29 at 10:30 a.m.

1. Early Church Christology
Dr. Joel Elowsky
 Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri
2. Early Modern Lutheran Christology
Dr. Carl Beckwith
 Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama
3. Modern Lutheran
Dr. Jack Kilcrease
 Aquinas College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Registration available online:

blc.edu/reformation-lectures

MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:

Faith Lutheran Church Carthage, Missouri

by **REV. TIM BUELOW**, Contributing Writer
FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, Carthage, Missouri



The roots of Lutheranism in Carthage date back to a Swedish congregation that disbanded after the 1890s recession caused a number of Swedish miners to move on in search of work. Faith Lutheran Church began as a Missouri Synod mission in 1929, although it took until 1938 before the congregation was able to call its first full-time pastor. In 1967, Faith built its current church building, which was paid off in 1976. In the years following, controversy came as Sunday School materials were purchased that taught theistic evolution. A number of members left to begin a more liberal LCMS congregation across town. Tension with that congregation made it clear it was time for a synodical change. Faith Lutheran Church joined the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1999.

We are a small but united congregation with a wonderful facility. In the early 2000s, stained glass windows were purchased to further beautify the sanctuary, and in 2011 a 35-year-old German tracker organ worth \$750,000 was purchased for \$10,000 and moved to our sanctuary from a church in Michigan. We have used it in concerts featuring Bethany Lutheran College, Luther Prep, and our local Missouri Southern State University. Hymn sings have been one of our bigger draws in the community.

We recently remodeled several classrooms to enable us to start "Little Lambs Childcare" as a means of Gospel outreach in the community. How that plan will be affected by the current shutdown is currently unknown, but we entrust all things to God's hand. Last year, Faith Lutheran celebrated its 90th anniversary and honored their pastor for 10 years of service to the congregation.