



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



2022 Convention Essay

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

pg. 6



LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

Lutherans can easily be fooled with this subtle shift in preaching by filling in the Gospel from the context of any given platitude. Yet they are not being fed properly and are ill-prepared for the temptation to feel abandoned by God when difficulties enter their lives.

Our pastors can be pressured by well-meaning members to pursue the “success” found in those American churches that are “growing” based on their style rather than Gospel substance. Encourage your pastors to continue preaching personal Law/Gospel sermons and teaching the same in Bible classes with the crucified Christ always at the center. Support your college and seminary in producing a well indoctrinated laity and humble, Gospel-proclaiming pastors.

If Christless services are conducted and Christless sermons are preached, no growth can take place. External growth in real numbers of believers will not happen. Only a congregation of pharisees will be gathered together with no internal growth of sanctification taking place.

It has been my pleasure as the ELS president this past year to have visited almost 70 ELS congregations (over half) at least once and participate in their divine services. Consistently, our pastors are preaching Christ crucified and Jesus our righteousness and conducting Christ-centered services. It is comforting to know that ELS members throughout our nation are leaving their weekly visit to God’s house knowing and trusting that on account of Jesus’ person and work, they stand right and holy before Him, ready to continue in their many vocations in Jesus’ name. After Paul encouraged his readers in Colossae “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly”, he concluded:

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:17).

This past year, an ELS presidential committee was appointed to create a one-page definition of the unique “ELS Flavor” to which President George Orvick would often refer. The committee has completed its work with this overall theme: “Lift Up Your Hearts—Your Sins Are Forgiven.”

This has not only been emphasized in our seminary, but is also what is primarily accentuated by our pastors, young and old alike. The Gospel is to be proclaimed in the divine services and every sermon preached. It is easy to reference the Gospel as a point of information but fail to connect it with the hearer; it needs to be proclaimed personally to each hearer. If we are preaching the Law of God pointedly, and we should, so that hearers are convicted of their own sins, then the Gospel also needs to be pointedly declared as well. Instead of preaching solely using “we,” “us,” and “our,” we need to declare the Gospel with the pronouns “you” and “your.” This may seem to be “a distinction without a difference,” but there is a difference.

It has been observed that often in what are referred to in our circles as “contemporary worship” services, the sermon will resemble a halftime coach speech based on a Gospel-sounding platitude. Here is a brief sampling: “God is for you, not against you.” “The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you.” “You can do all things through Him who gives you the strength.” And “The truth will set you free!” While each of those statements are connected with the Gospel of your forgiveness in Christ, the broader Scriptural context is not noted. The sermon can be uplifting and comforting, but it is often Christless. It serves the diabolical lie that at least in part your status with God is based on how you approach Him.

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A Retirement Oration in Honor of the Rev. Pres. Gaylin R. Schmeling, S.T.M.

By Rev. Prof. Timothy R. Schmeling, Th.M., Ph.D.



Rev. Pres. Gaylin Schmeling

In the old tradition of Lutheran theological faculties, I wanted to offer some words of appreciation for our distinguished colleague, mentor, and father in the faith, Pres. Gaylin Schmeling, as he enters into

his *Ruhestand*, (i.e., his “retirement”). If my accolades sound anything like an obituary, let me assure you he has no plans to take it easy in the years to come. In fact, he has already commandeered the office next to my own!

First of all, Schmeling exemplifies what it means to be a theologian. Now, we often think of him as a church historian and dogmatician, but his first passion was the Old Testament, which always remained close to his heart. To be sure, his knowledge of the Church Fathers was infectious. He also helped spark a renewed appreciation for Trinitarian theology, Christology, and the means of grace in our midst, but it was his love of Scripture that really enriched all his teaching, especially his quest for excellence in preaching. What is more, he never forgot that theology was fundamentally a God-given ability to apply Law and Gospel—an ability that must be regularly cultivated through prayer, meditation, and the cross.

Second, he will go down as one of the leading ELS churchmen of the turn of the century. He not only helped us navigate the vexing doctrinal issues of that time, but he did so with Scriptural fidelity and an evangelical hand. Still his influence extends even beyond the ELS into the Wisconsin Synod. In addition, he was instrumental in the formation of

the CELC and served this global organization for Orthodox Lutherans by holding many of its offices.

Third, Schmeling has been the longest-running seminary president in ELS history. More pastors have cut their teeth under him than any other president. We have been all the better for it. He taught us to be Seelsorger, (i.e., “those who cared for souls”). His pastoral wisdom was in such high demand that students continued to seek it well after their graduation. Even those who never studied at his feet regularly sought out his sage advice. He is the unsung circuit visitor of our ELS ministerium.

Fourth, the seventeenth-century Lutheran pastor Valerius Herberger (1562–1627) was known as the “Jesus Preacher” because of his Christ-filled homilies. Schmeling can rightly be called the “Comfort Preacher” because of his comfort-filled homilies. For him, a sermon just wasn’t a sermon unless it offered peace to soothe our bitter woes. This was so much the case that you could hardly get a sermon draft past him that lacked the healing balm of comfort.

Fifth, Schmeling recognized that he could never be any of these things without a faithful companion by his side. Rebecca was a true helpmate fit for him. She didn’t just support and encourage him; she mentored the seminarians’ wives and organized the social life at the seminary. Together they provided a model for the Lutheran pastor’s home.

This brings me to my final accolade, if I can even call it such. Despite his manifold talents and gifts, Pres. Schmeling would count all these as loss compared to his baptismal grace. Here our old man is daily killed so that our resurrected life in Christ can break forth anew. For above all else, he wants us to so recognize our sinful condition that nothing can be more precious than Christ’s saving work and the Hauptartikel (i.e., “chief article”) of justification by faith alone. This is why we celebrate him. May you continue in this confession and baptismal grace throughout your *Ruhestand*. Hoch soll er leben (i.e., “Long may he live”)!

I know that the Holy Spirit brought me to faith in Christ, but what does the Holy Spirit do after that? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the believer's daily life?

Answer:

The same Holy Spirit who breathed physical life into the first human beings at creation breathes spiritual life into God's chosen people today. God has saved us "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7, NKJV). Yet the Spirit's work does not come to an end with the regeneration He gave us at our baptisms. The Holy Spirit still plays a central role in the believer's daily life, preserving us in the new life of faith unto everlasting life.

Believers continue to need the Holy Spirit every day. The apostle Paul reminds us, "No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:6). That does not change once a person is brought to faith. The Christian's struggle against the desires of the sinful flesh, the "Old Adam," never ceases. In Romans 7, the apostle Paul described his own inner conflict between his new life in Christ and his sinful human nature: *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice* (Romans 7:18-19). We experience the same kind of conflict in our own lives. The "Old Adam" in each of us continues putting the self ahead of God and others, doubting God's promises, and desiring everything that runs contrary to God's will. The work of the devil and the evil world around us complicate our daily struggle, adding fuel to the fire.

The Holy Spirit is our only hope. As our Counselor and Comforter, the Holy Spirit stands by our side, continually working to preserve us in the new life of saving faith in Christ. Ultimately, He does this by connecting us to Christ. As "the Spirit of truth" who guides us into all truth (John 16:13), the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus (John 15:27). He reminds us of all that Christ did to secure our salvation—His sinless life, His death on the cross, His resurrection on the third day. In so doing He strengthens our faith, bearing witness with our own spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). Beyond that, the Holy Spirit enables Christ Himself to dwell in our

hearts and ground us in God's love, filling us with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:14-19).

The results of the Spirit's work in our hearts show forth in our lives. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22). Apart from God, we are incapable of doing anything truly good on our own. Yet day by day He continues to sanctify us and enable us to live more and more according to the will of God.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes all of these things through the Word of God and the Sacraments. In the remembrance of God's grace in our baptisms, He enables us to drown the "Old Adam" with its sinful desires and lusts. Through the preaching and study of Scripture, the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), the Holy Spirit points us to Christ—both to our need for Him and to the assurance of our salvation in Him. At the Lord's table, in the body and blood of Christ under the bread and the wine, the Spirit comforts us with the forgiveness of our sins. This is why we call the Gospel proclaimed in the Word and the Sacraments the means of grace. Through them, the Spirit shares with us God's undeserved love in Christ.

Sometimes worship, Bible study, and coming to the Lord's Supper can seem mundane. Yet do not underestimate the Spirit! His greatest work is the work He does every day among us through those means of grace. Through these, the Holy Spirit sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith unto life everlasting.



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



▲ The Wartburg Castle near Eisenach in Germany.

2022 Convention Essay

(summarized version)

by **REV. S. PIET VAN KAMPEN**, Contributing Editor
CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH, Green Bay, Wisc.

One might regard Luther's return to public life in the spring of 1522 as a surprise. "Kidnapped" by Elector Frederick's men on May 4, 1521, Luther had managed to avoid drawing attention to himself. Since the Edict of Worms, Luther was a wanted man. So what drove Luther to risk coming back to Wittenberg? In a word, it was love: love for the people of Wittenberg, who Luther regarded as his flock. Radical reformers had stirred up the townspeople in the name of furthering the Reformation, leading to civil unrest. Luther could not stand by and let his flock be torn apart, even at the great risk of harm to himself.

This year marks the 500th anniversary of Luther's return to Wittenberg and the events that followed. From the Reformer and his times, we can gain an appreciation for how the Lord keeps us steadfast in the true faith by calling us to repentance when we stray and comforting us with the promises of the Gospel, and that He also preserves the truth of His Word among us.

Part 1: Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word — Steadfast in True Faith

In Luther's absence at the Wartburg, the duty of replacing him in the pulpit fell to two men: Gabriel Zwilling and Andreas Karlstadt. Karlstadt began to see himself as the leader of the "Wittenberg Movement."¹ Beginning in June of 1521, he began to press the issue of vows of celibacy among the priests, monks, and nuns. In mid-October, a committee of professors (including Karlstadt) and representatives from the monastery agreed on the need for administering both the bread and the cup in the Supper and that the canon of the mass (the language that made the mass into a re-sacrifice of Christ's body and blood) be abolished along with private masses. The elector, however, for financial and political reasons, continually rejected any changes to the mass in Wittenberg.²

On Christmas Day 1521, Karlstadt celebrated the mass without wearing the traditional vestments, conducted the liturgy in German, and at the Supper distributed both the bread and the wine to Christmas worshipers.³ After this, he began to make pronouncements on all manner of things:

He denounced pictures and images as dumb idols... He assailed the fasts, and enjoined the people to eat meat and eggs on fast-days. He repudiated all titles and dignities... He cast away his priestly and academic robes, put on a plain citizen's dress, afterwards a peasant's coat, and had himself called brother Andrew.⁴

On January 25, to prevent things from getting out of hand, the city council passed an inclusive ordinance governing both church and civil society in Wittenberg, mandating the reception of both the bread and the wine in the Supper. In light of the new ordinance, the townspeople took it upon themselves to break into the churches and destroy a number of the pictures.⁵

By mid-February, the city fathers in Wittenberg were ready for Luther to return.⁶ Luther arrived in Wittenberg on the evening of Thursday, March 6. On the first Sunday in Lent, March 9, 1522, Martin Luther returned to the pulpit of the City Church. That Sunday, he began a series of eight sermons calling his erring flock to repentance and setting their hearts once more on the grace of Christ. These sermons would eventually become known as the "Invocavit Sermons."

In these sermons, Luther aims for the heart of the matter: being able to stand before God, which is impossible for us apart from Christ and His saving work.⁷ Here is how Luther starts:

The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into another's ears, but every one must himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore every one must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian.⁸

In a rather pointed way, Luther offered this assessment: "I would not have gone so far as you have done, if I had been here. The cause is good, but there has been too much haste. For there are still brothers and sisters on the other side who belong to us and must still be won."⁹ Luther calls his hearers' attention to the important distinction between "must" and "free." "The 'must' is that which necessity requires, and which must ever be unyielding... But 'free' is that in which I have choice, and may use or not, yet in such a way that it profit my brother and not me." Believers have an obligation to not make a "must" out of something that is "free," either with heavy-handed legalism or with "the loveless exercise of liberty."¹⁰

Over the course of the remaining sermons, Luther dealt first with the "musts," the abolition of private masses along with the canon of the mass. He also deals with the "free" things—matters in which people have the freedom to choose: vows of celibacy, marriage, leaving the cloister, the observance of fast days, the reception of both kinds in the Sacrament of the Altar (Yes, for Luther, at least for now, this was a "free."), and private confession.

Even in the case of a "must," Luther argued that Christian love never uses force or undue constraint. So how does the Christian proceed in dealing with a matter where Scripture has spoken clearly? Leave the matter to God and let the Word of God work! He pointed to himself as an example:

I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.¹¹

Also in deciding on those things that are "free," Luther wanted his fellow believers to exercise their freedom in love:

1. Buelow, Timothy H. 2018. "Luther's Invocavit Sermons: The Wittenberg Professor's Pastoral Perspective in Preaching." *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* (Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary) 58 (4): 327-355. 327.
2. Brecht, 26-27.
3. Kittelson, 179.
4. Schaff, 379-380.
5. Bornkamm, 60-61.
6. Kittelson, 180.

7. Buelow, 331.
8. Luther, Martin. 1959. "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg, 1522." In *Luther's Works, Volume 51: Sermons I*, edited by John W. Doberstein and Helmut T. Lehmann, translated by John W. Doberstein, 69-100. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. LW 51:70.
9. LW 51:72.
10. LW 51:74.
11. LW 51:77.

We must bear patiently with these people and not use our liberty; since it brings no peril or harm to body or soul; in fact, it is rather salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a great service besides. But if we use our liberty unnecessarily, and deliberately cause offense to our neighbor, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith.¹²

So how did his congregation respond? “The Wittenberg congregation, who flocked to hear him, submitted immediately to Luther’s authority.”¹³

Part 2: Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word — by Preserving the Truth of Your Word Among Us

Luther had another reason to return home in early March of 1522. He had been working on something special: a translation of the Bible from the original languages of Greek and Hebrew into German.

During his visit to Wittenberg in December of 1521, his friends helped to settle in his mind the decision to translate the Bible, beginning with the New Testament.¹⁴ Yet it was Luther’s work on his German postils (a “postil” is a book of model sermons based on the Gospel lessons for the various Sundays and Festivals of the church year) for Advent and Christmas where we see the wheels beginning to turn in Luther’s mind around the need for people to know and have the Scriptures for themselves. Luther prefaced his Christmas postil with an introduction entitled *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*. Many of the thoughts he set down in that introduction Luther would later reiterate in his preface to the New Testament. In it, Luther wanted his readers to know that “the main thing in Scripture is the gospel and its basis in Christ as the one gift God gives to everyone... This is the center around which the entire Bible revolves.”¹⁵

That December, Luther began the task of translating the New Testament into German. Beginning almost immediately upon his return to the Wartburg, Luther finished his rough draft by the middle of February. It only took eleven weeks.¹⁶

When Luther arrived at Wittenberg in March, he enlisted the help of especially Philip Melancthon and George Spalatin. Luther’s friends proved extremely helpful when they encountered perplexing “bumps in the road.” The book was completed on September 20, 1522.¹⁷

Luther did not slavishly hold to a particular theory of translation, occasionally taking astonishing liberties with the text. For Luther,

12. LW 51:87.

13. Brecht, 61.

14. Bornkamm, 38-39.

15. Brecht, 16-17.

16. Bornkamm, 45. Brecht, 47.

17. Bornkamm, 80.

the gospel was meant for the ear as much as the eye. The result yielded a true German translation. Using the dialect of the Saxon court, which was also employed for diplomatic intercourse between the emperor and his various estates, Luther found a way to a form of German that most Germans could understand.¹⁸ In fact, Luther’s New Testament helped to unify and create the modern German language.¹⁹

Conclusion

At the beginning of *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament*, Luther’s treatise that summarized the main points of his *Invocavit Sermons*, he warns that the world’s hatred and persecution is the least of our troubles:

Even Satan is not satisfied with that; he plans to exercise his malice within our own ranks. If outwardly we are too strong for his stooges... he will rend and destroy us inwardly through ourselves... So henceforth we must have regard to ourselves rather than to our enemies from without.²⁰

In the town of Wittenberg in Luther’s day, Satan used people’s zeal and impatience for ecclesiastical and societal change to turn those who would be offended by innovative practices away from hearing the truth of God’s Word. So where is the devil trying to rend and destroy us inwardly through ourselves? As Luther says, we must have regard to ourselves. We also have failed to trust the Word of God, just as we have failed to pour the gifts of Christ’s love into our lives.

Yet we are not without hope. In Ephesians 6, St. Paul writes:

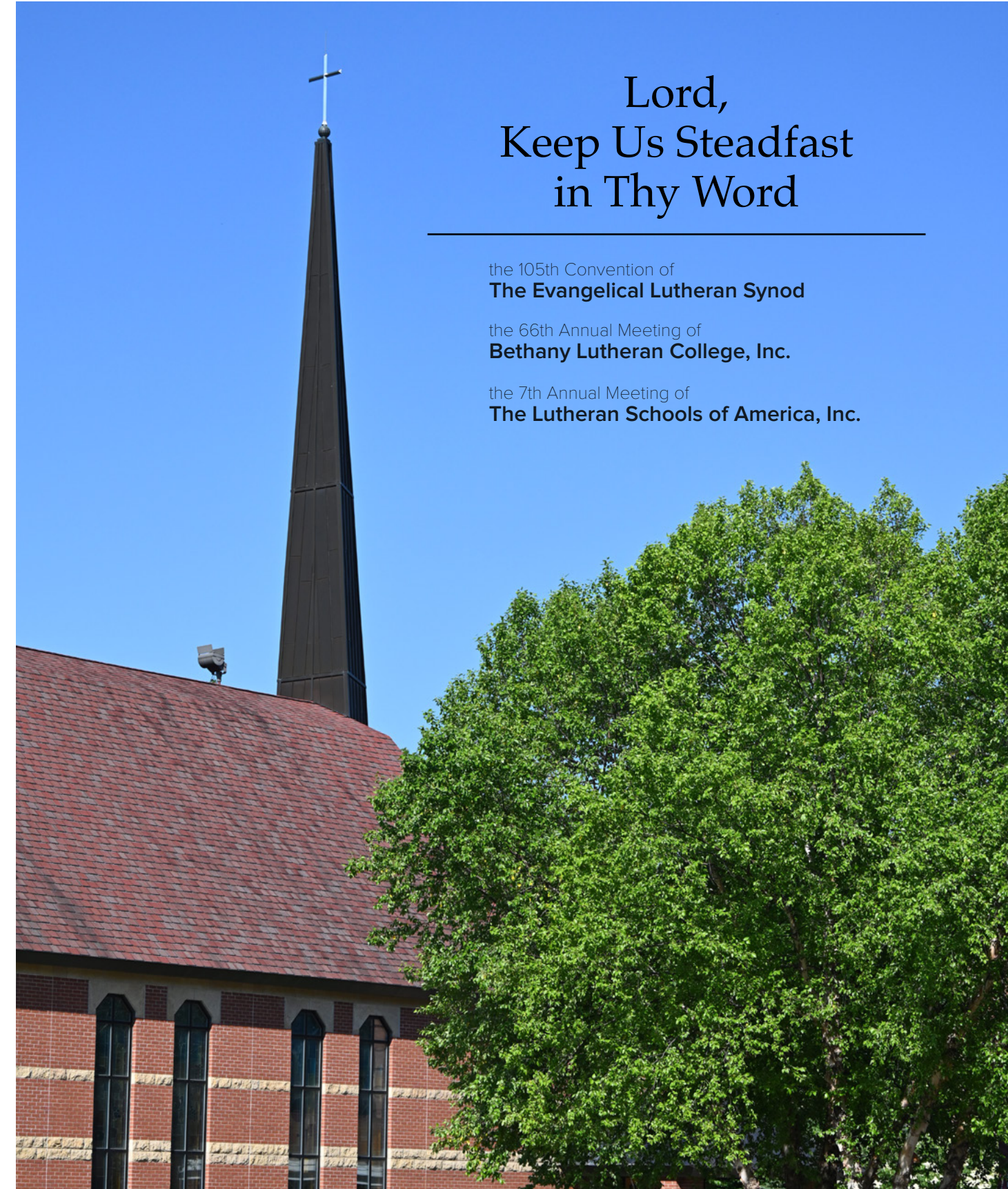
Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. (Ephesians 6:10-13)

The Word of God is the solid foundation on which we stand in that evil day, the protective armor that repels and withstands Satan’s accusations and temptations. This is the armor that Martin Luther wanted everyone to have. So use the Word. Read and study the Bible. Teach the Word. Most importantly, trust the Word. Luther nailed it when he said, “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word... I did nothing; the Word did everything.” The Lord will keep you steadfast in His Word—now and always. Amen.

18. Schaff, 358.

19. Kittelson, 175.

20. Luther, Martin. 1959. *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament*. Vol. 36, in *Luther’s Works, Volume 36: Word and Sacrament II*, edited by Abdel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann, translated by Abdel Ross Wentz, 231-267. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press. 237.



Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word

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2022 Bjarne W. Teigen
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 October 27–28, 2022

“Lutheran Care of Souls”

Care of Souls in the Lutheran Reformation

Dr. Mark Mattes,
 Grand View University,
 Des Moines, IA

Care of Souls in Lutheran Orthodoxy

Dr. Benjamin Mayes,
 Concordia Theological Seminary,
 Fort Wayne, IN

Care of Souls in Modern Lutheranism

Dr. John Pless,
 Concordia Theological Seminary,
 Fort Wayne, IN

Bethany Lutheran College | S. C. Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center
 Mankato, Minnesota | October 27, 10:30 a.m.

Saved by Apologetics?



Christian apologetics provides evidence for the truth of Christianity and for the person and work of Christ. Evidence speaks to our senses and reason. That raises some questions for the Lutheran who has been taught to be careful when it comes to the use of reason. Can apologetics be used to convict someone of a false worldview or religion? Yes. Can it be used in a preparatory manner to clear away obstacles so one would be willing to hear the Gospel? Yes. Anything more than that? Yes.

Consider this. If an adult convert told you, “I believe in Jesus Christ because of my wife,” should you respond by saying, “No, you believe in Jesus because of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit”? You would not say that because both are true.

“Because” is being used in two different ways. In the second case, “because” is used in the sense of what actually turns the heart from unbelief to belief. As we say in the Small Catechism, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts...” The Lutheran Confessions call this the “efficient cause” (Article II, Formula of Concord).

In the first case, however, something other than an “efficient cause” is understood. There are examples of “non-efficient” causes in Scripture. For example: *Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife* (1 Corinthians 7:16). The wife or the husband is not the Gospel, but they are being used in the service of the Gospel. Christians – by the way they live or by what they say (see 1 Peter 3:1-2) – can point to or imply the truth of the Gospel, which then alone converts a person dead in his trespasses and sins into a living believer.

Now take an example that speaks to apologetics. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the plot was hatched to kill Jesus (John 11:53). A few verses later, John records this: *But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also, because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus* (12:10-11). Did the miraculous raising of Lazarus cause these Jews to believe in Jesus? Not in the sense that a dead-man-now-alive was the powerful Gospel. But yes in the sense that a miracle and sign confirmed and pointed to the truth of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God, and the good news of salvation.

Apologetics—evidence for the truth of Christ—can point to, imply, or confirm the truth of Christ and His Gospel.

This is how Jesus Himself and His apostles made use of evidence. The fulfillment of prophecies by Christ, the miracles of Christ, the appearances of the risen Christ, and the appeal to eyewitness testimony were used consistently. This evidence was at times used in the service of the law (to convict one of sin – think of Peter and the great catch of fish in Luke 8:6-9). But such evidence was also used in the service of the Gospel by Christ himself:

- *“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then he told the paralytic, “Get up, take your stretcher, and go home”* (Matthew 9:6).
- *John ... sent a message through his disciples and asked Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news”* (Matthew 11:2-5).
- *“Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have”* (Luke 24:38-39).

- While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing (John 2:23).

Evidence was used in the service to the Gospel by the apostles, too:

- “Fellow Israelites, listen to these words: This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).
- This [raising of Tabitha] became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord (Acts 9:42).
- Then, when he saw [the miracle performed by Paul], the proconsul believed, because he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord (Acts 13:12).
- So they stayed there a long time and spoke boldly for the Lord, who testified to the message of His grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders (Acts 14:3).
- So we have recorded in the New Testament evidence appealing to the senses and reason being used in the service of the Gospel. Evidence testifies that something is true. Luke even calls such evidence “convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3).

At the same time, evidence can be ignored, denied, and misinterpreted:

- Even though he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him (John 12:37).
- “If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

- In Matthew 9, opponents of Jesus attributed His miracles to demonic powers (9:34).

In other words, when confronted with clear evidence, people willfully and sadly choose blind unbelief. With or without apologetics, the ever-powerful Word used by the all-powerful Spirit can be resisted with the result that many remain steeped in hostility toward God, wanting nothing to do with the love of Christ. Again, if conversion does take place, the only efficient cause is the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel.

So why present evidence? Why should Lutherans use apologetics? Clearly apologetics is an evangelism method in Scripture, especially in the Gospels and Acts. It approaches our neighbor with what God has given them: senses and reason. Christ and His disciples appeal to human senses and reason despite the fact they are limited and corrupted. In a world that continues to ask the age-old question “What is truth?” we not only have the truth but also that which points to, implies, and confirms it. Apologetics remains a serving platter on which the Gospel can be placed.

Is there some sort of danger in using apologetics? No more than sharing the law or even the Gospel. They also can be misapplied by the presenter or misinterpreted by the hearer.

What we confessional Lutherans have with apologetics is a biblically demonstrated way to communicate with a desperate and dying world. We can explain to our neighbor his sin, forgiveness in Christ, and the evidence that says this is certainly true. We then leave it in the hands of the Holy Spirit. “The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

- Presenting evidence for the truth of Christianity
- Critiquing worldviews that oppose Christianity
- Fortifying believers with a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture
- Engaging unbelievers in conversations leading toward the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness in Christ



Recommended Reading:

David Thompson, “A Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Christian Apologetics and Its Practice”, LSQ 60, no 4 (2020): 291-344.

Available at: els.org/apologetics

“Q&A Leading to Christ” series of apologetics flyers:

els.org/apologetics/qalc



Websites:

The Center for Apologetics and Worldviews:

blc.edu/apologetics

ELS Evangelism Resources:
els.org/resources/evangelism

40+ Hours of Video Archives:
blc.edu/apologetics/events

MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:

St. Paul Lutheran Church Lengby, Minnesota

by **REV. GENE LILIENTHAL**, Contributing Writer
ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH, Lengby, Minn.



St. Paul Lutheran Church of Lengby, Minnesota, was organized in 1887 by Rev. Ylvislaker. The first Gospel ministry took place in a little log house owned by John Stave, Sr. The organizers were sturdy Norwegian pioneers.

In 1898, when the question of building a church arose, Rev. Nesseth found out that some pine land near Pine Kale was for sale. He got \$96.00 from the Ladies Aid, went to Crookston, and bought forty acres of pine land from the state. Then the able-bodied men of the congregation went out and cut the logs and hauled them to the sawmill. Others who could not help paid for getting the logs skidded into the sawmill. In 1901, the building of the church began.

In the difficult years of 1917-1919, like many Norwegian Lutheran Churches, St. Paul Lutheran Church of Lengby split in membership. The smaller group formed Immanuel Lutheran Church, served by Rev. Nesseth, who had resigned from St. Paul. In 1919, Rev. A. Sorenson was called to serve St. Paul.

The two churches remained separated for over thirty years. In 1953, St. Paul found themselves without a pastor. There was talk of closing the church, but they had a nice church building. The small Immanuel congregation was being served by the newly ordained Rev. John Moldstad of Bagley, but their building was very small. These two congregations joined together again in 1953. St. Paul resigned from the E.L.C. and joined the Norwegian Synod, which changed its name to Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1958. St. Paul then called the Rev. John Moldstad as its pastor. St. Paul now shares its pastor with Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church in rural Bagley in what is called the Lengby Lutheran Parish.