



# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

"I appeal  
to Caesar."

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# OUR EXTRAORDINARY CALLING IN OVERCOMING EVIL

**“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

(Romans 12:21)

Most of us would probably say evil is multiplying every day in our American society and it is getting increasingly difficult not to be overcome by it. Most of us could probably make the case that in our lifetime, we have seen law and order deteriorate, disregard for life accelerate, civility disintegrate, rudeness proliferate, anger and hatred boiling over. But while evil can be kept in check with various societal boundaries and safeguards, these never last. The wickedness of man has been there ever since the fall into sin. Think about it: How long did it take for the first recorded murder to happen? Our first parents' firstborn son murdered his younger brother!

We thank our Lord for giving us governing authorities who keep evil in check and keep us from descending into anarchy. Evil has always weighed heavily upon the children of God. Sadly, because we are sinners, our natural way of responding to overwhelming evil is to respond in kind. Read Romans 12:9-21 and consider how difficult it is to respond to evil differently in various circumstances.

When Christians are being persecuted for confessing Jesus as Savior, we are called upon in His Sermon on the Mount to respond by turning the other cheek and counting such persecution as a blessing (Matthew 5:10-12; 39). But just as the government has the right and expectation to bear the sword to punish the evildoer, so even a Christian can defend him or herself against criminal behavior.

But in common ordinary life, when we experience evil from our fellow sinners in our homes, workplaces, schools, gymnasiums, athletic fields, traffic, in long lines, even churches, here is where we are called upon to heed the Apostle's words to overcome evil with good.

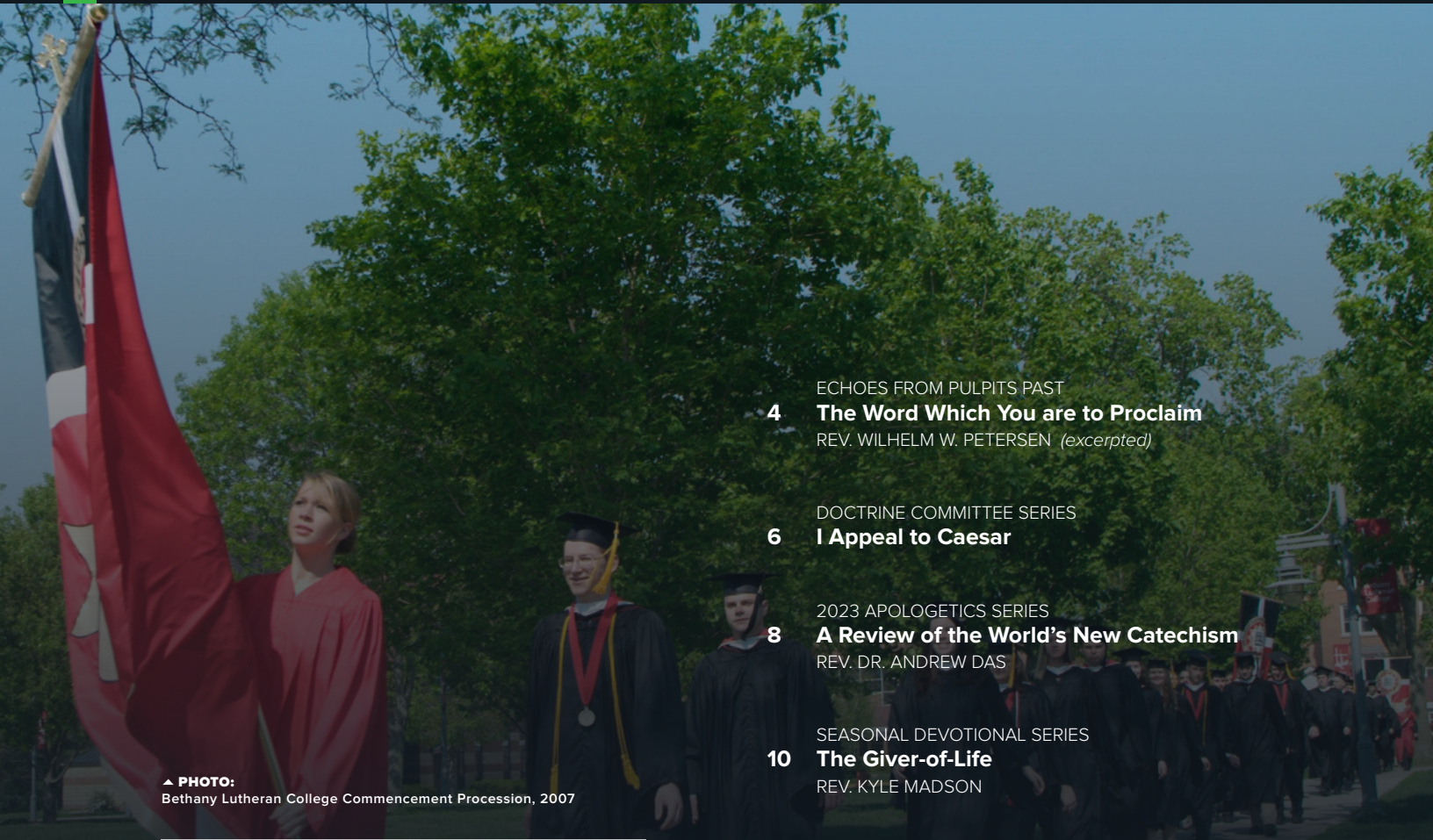
You have probably heard of Christian family members of a horrific murder victim speak out publicly that they forgive the murderer. When I have heard of these loving responses in the face of such evil, I marvel and ask myself if I would have such a gracious and merciful attitude.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says: Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (4:32). That last expression is not law, or in other words, “you better do as God did for you in Jesus.” Rather, it is our motivation to overcome evil with good. God did this for us even when we were still His enemies (Romans 5:6-11) with the result that our interactions with others, even our enemies, will naturally reflect the love we receive daily from our gracious Lord.

Overcoming evil with good in our lives has the prospect of requiring great patience. By responding to evil with the love of Christ, we naturally put ourselves in a vulnerable position, inviting the perpetrator to trample us underfoot. But in truth, while requiring long suffering, it affords the opportunity to bear witness to the love of God in Christ for all our neighbors.

We speak of this often when we pray the Lord's Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This is the power of Christ Jesus on full display in the lives of His disciples. Thanks be to our gracious Lord who is so longsuffering with us despite the evil we produce on a daily basis. Instead of being overcome by the evil around us and even in us, we are liberated by the Gospel to show kindness and goodness in return for Jesus' sake.





▲ PHOTO:  
Bethany Lutheran College Commencement Procession, 2007

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# echoes

from **ELS PULPITS**  
*past*

OCCASION:  
SERMON AT THE ELS SEMINARY GRADUATION SERVICE  
June 19, 1988

EXCERPTED FROM PRINT:  
"A BRIEF LEGACY" p.28  
(Rev. President Wilhelm W. Petersen)

## The Word Which You are to Proclaim

2 Peter 1:19-21

**Text:**

*And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Peter 1:19-21





In Christ Jesus, dear fellow—redeemed and especially you, the graduates:

When you began your theological studies some years ago, it must have seemed like an eternity ahead of you before you would graduate. But now that day has arrived and you stand ready to enter into the pastoral ministry. As you look forward to this work, the apostle Peter, writing by divine inspiration of the Lord, wants you to know that the Word which you are to proclaim is a reliable word and a clear word.

First of all, it is a reliable Word. That the Word is reliable is a refrain that runs throughout Scripture. “Your word is truth,” says Jesus. Again: “The Scripture cannot be broken.” “If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” The reason that it is reliable is because it was given by divine inspiration of God and therefore it is inerrant and infallible. Peter says in our text: *For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:21). And the apostle Paul writes: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16).

Yes, this Word is reliable when it tells the truth about ourselves, namely that we are poor, lost, miserable sinners, totally unable to save ourselves. Praise God it is also reliable when it tells us that, for the sake of Christ’s atoning work, our sins have been forgiven. That is the heart and center of this Word and we need to hear it again and again and again. Luther observes that the “law is a daily and familiar companion while the Gospel is a rare guest in our consciences” and therefore the Gospel must predominate in our preaching. We need to hear the consoling message “Your sins have been forgiven,” not just once in a while, but in all of our sermons and in all of our ministering. Your hearers must leave your worship service with the ringing assurance that “where sin abounded grace did much more abound,” that their “welfare is accomplished,” their “iniquity is pardoned,” and that they have “received of the Lord’s hand double for all their sins”. Remember, God has committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation, “that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Don’t be stingy with the Gospel. Open its floodgates to poor sinners. Heed Walther’s advice: “So preach the law that it drives the greatest saint to despair; so preach the gospel that it gives the greatest sinner hope.”

Walther also reminds us what our aim as pastors should be: Lead your hearers to the assurance that their sins have been forgiven, that they can have the certainty of eternal life, and that they can face death with confidence. He opines that the prevailing malady of our time is the lack of assurance and the reason is that many are not given reliable teaching. “I think” has replaced “Thus saith the Lord.” Go, then, with courage and confidence as you proclaim this certain Word, believing

that if there is anything of which we can be certain in this uncertain world it is the certainty of our soul’s salvation.

But not only do we have a reliable Word, but also a clear Word. “Which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place.” The psalmist said it long ago: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

That this Word is clear does not mean that there are not difficulties. The Bible itself says that there are “some things hard to be understood”. But the way of salvation is so clear that a child can understand it. A church father has compared the Bible to a river, so shallow that a lamb can wade through it and yet so deep that an elephant can drown in it, meaning that the way of salvation is so clear that a child can grasp it and yet at the same time it is so deep that the most learned cannot fathom everything in it.

Finally, this “more sure word” is not of private interpretation on our part. Just as the prophecy of which the text speaks did not originate in the mind of man, but was revealed by God the Holy Spirit, so we are not to interpret this Word of prophecy according to our own whims. In your seminary training, you took a course called hermeneutics, which is a study of the principles of interpretation of the Bible. You learned the hermeneutical rule that Scripture interprets Scripture, that we interpret less clear passages in the light of very clear ones. Here again Luther gives us good advice: “You shall not give your own interpretation. The Holy Spirit must explain Scripture. Otherwise it must remain unexplained.”

God has not granted us the liberty to edit his word; rather we are to proclaim it in all its saving power and beauty. Go then in the conviction that you have a reliable and a clear Word and proclaim it in such a way that your hearers will treasure it as did George Morris, who wrote in his poem “My Mother’s Bible”:

*Thou truest friend man ever knew,  
Thy constancy I’ve tried;  
Where all were false I found Thee true,  
My Counselor and guide.  
The mines of earth no treasure give  
That could this volume buy:  
In teaching me the way to live,  
It taught me how to die.*

# "I appeal to Caesar."

## St. Paul's Response before King Agrippa

by: **THE ELS DOCTRINE COMMITTEE**

After St. Paul's missionary trips in Greece and Asia Minor, he went south to Jerusalem despite being warned that in Jerusalem some Jews would try to capture him and turn him over to the Romans. The warnings were soon realized when the Pharisees and Sadducees accused Paul of sedition and false teaching. A plot to kill Paul was foiled when Paul's nephew (Acts 23:16) reported what he had heard to the commander of Roman troops. When it was revealed that Paul was a Roman citizen, the commander of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem arranged for Paul to be taken to Caesarea. In a hearing before the Roman Governor Felix, Ananias the high priest made the accusations and Paul offered his rebuttal in a powerful confession of faith.

Following that, however, Felix procrastinated. Luke writes that one of the reasons for the procrastination was that Felix was hoping Paul would offer him a bribe and could then be released. Paul languished for two years until Felix was succeeded as governor by Festus. After an additional hearing, Festus asked Paul if he was willing to go up to Jerusalem, where he would hold a hearing, and it is at that point that Paul says: "I appeal to Caesar," to which Festus says: "To Caesar you shall go." Paul was then passed on to King Herod Agrippa, who agreed that Paul should be judged by Caesar—who at the time was Nero.

This is the same St. Paul who exhorts Christians to "obey the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). The Apostle Peter writes similarly, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," to the king or to governors (1 Peter 2:13). Both of these point us to Jesus' words, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). The apostles carried that out when, in response to demands to desist from their preaching about Jesus, they said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

These Bible passages would seem to put Christians in a dilemma. Christians are to obey the government and there is a time when Christians are not to obey. So, we ask: When must I obey government? When must I disobey the government? Is it according to my conscience? My personal opinion? God's Word? How do I decide?

The Bible teaches us that the Christian in this life lives in two kingdoms or realms. One is the spiritual or heavenly realm—governed by the gospel, faith, and God's Word (called the kingdom of the right). The other, the earthly realm (the kingdom of the left), is in this world; it is established by God, but it is not governed by grace and faith, but by law and reason; not by the Bible and faith, but by laws enacted by men. The world is not the true home of the Christian but an alien and temporary home. Christians live in the world as strangers and pilgrims, but do not set aside their Christian life, beliefs, and behavior. They remain Christians and do not adapt themselves to worldly principles that are contrary to God's Law. While they live under the law of human government, they conduct themselves according to

God's revelation in His Word. When they have to say, "We ought to obey God rather than men," they do not resort to violence, though they may also have to suffer the consequences of their refusal.

When St. Paul appealed to Caesar, he was simply exercising his right as a Roman citizen. He was a Jew from the city of Tarsus in the Roman province Cilicia in Asia Minor. His father, a Jew, was a Roman citizen, which made Paul one by birth. The rights of Roman citizens included that they could not be put to death or beaten in the Roman empire without a trial. Thus, when Paul was persecuted by the Sadducees and Pharisees, they were acting against Roman law (as well as against their own law, as Paul points out). Before Festus, Paul defended himself: "*Neither against the law of the Jews...nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all*" (25:8). Paul's appeal was against the beatings and attempts on his life made on the person of Paul, a Roman citizen, without a trial. It was a matter of legality. And yet, Paul sees the hostility of the Jews as being against Christ: "*I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 21:13).

Christians must remember that their freedom to appeal to government is not license to disobey rules that they don't like, find inconvenient, or disagree with. "Obey God rather than men" points to divine commands—the law and the gospel. So, how does "I appeal to Caesar" apply to Christians in this life and society today? "To obey God rather than men" applies to matters not of our own subjective preferences, but to matters which are clearly given by God. St. Paul describes what is to be the spirit of the Christian living in the world: to conduct "ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

The alien home where Christians are strangers and foreigners is a nation of laws which guarantees its citizens certain rights. The Christian lives within those bounds—they have the same rights as do others in American democracy to petition the government, local and national, and not be persecuted or "canceled" when they do. Christians in America have all the rights of citizenship, and to "appeal to Caesar" is one of those rights; appeals can be made to the courts or to legislative government. When citizens object to laws, enacted or proposed, which they must disobey in order to be faithful to God's Word, they do not violate God's Word or the United States constitution, nor are they mixing church and state.

When laws or policies are considered or enacted which would prevent individuals from corporate worship or force Christians into actions expressly forbidden by God's Word, church leaders who are authorized to speak for the churches will have to "appeal to Caesar"—neither is that a violation of the principle of separation of church and state.

When individual Christians and church leaders speak to clear cases where government legislation or policies violate the religion clause of the first amendment, they rightly appeal to Caesar. Such appeals do not violate the biblical teaching on the two kingdoms, nor do they violate the political principle of separation of church and state. The first Amendment forbids the government from establishing a state church as well interfering with the free practice of religion. That includes regulations concerning public worship as well the confessed beliefs of the religion.

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+ *In future articles, this series will explore some current issues which cause concerns for Christians about situations where Christian faith and Holy Scripture collide with laws and practices in contemporary society.*



# A REVIEW OF THE WORLD'S NEW CATECHISM:

## Assessing the Theology of Cultural Marxism

“Catechesis” means to teach by “echoing back and forth.” Luther’s Small Catechism contains questions to be spoken by a parent, pastor, or teacher as children are taught to respond with answers that echo God’s Word. Catechesis—repetition and memorization until the message becomes second nature—is a very effective teaching method. The world employs this method as much as the church does.

The world’s catechism is printed on posters in hallways at public schools. The world’s catechism is shared in memes via social media. The world’s catechism is taught during HR training sessions in the corporate world. The world’s catechism creeps into Christian schools, too, such as when church-affiliated schools, colleges, or seminaries move away from their Biblical confession by adopting practices or slogans from the spiritually wayward culture around them.

The latest edition of the world’s catechism teaches a body of doctrine known as Cultural Marxism. Karl Marx (1818–1883) was more than an economic theorist who critiqued capitalism. He was a theologian of sorts, making theological assertions about God (whom he said does not exist), about man (whom he said is made merely of body, not of soul), ethics (which he said were invented by the ruling class to oppress the poor), and about many other deeper issues. Marx might have accurately recognized some economic abuses in the free market, but the theology that underpinned his entire system of thought was completely contrary to God’s Word. Marx was a heretic.

“Religion,” wrote Marx, “is the opium of the people,” a deceptive drug that prevents people from discovering their true condition. “The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, humility, in a word all the qualities of vulgar people.”

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) took Marx’s economic theory to a new level, weaving it into a broad philosophy known as “Cultural Marxism.” Not only should capitalism give way to socialism, but all institutions in the culture—especially education and the arts—should reject objective truth in general and Christianity in particular. “Socialism is precisely the religion that must overwhelm Christianity,” wrote Gramsci. “In the new order, socialism will triumph by first capturing the culture via infiltration of schools, universities, churches and the media by transforming the consciousness of society.”

Paolo Freire (1921–1997) brought Cultural Marxism into the mainstream of social science with his best-selling book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). The “critical education theory” he promoted summoned teachers and students alike to become “co-creators of knowledge”: school would no longer be a place to learn

facts, but now a “revolutionary” space for “constructing facts” through a social process of “dialogue.”

Transgenderism in today’s public schools represents yet another version of this same Cultural Marxist tactic: male and female are not true sexes created by God—facts of the universe—but instead are social constructs that can be transformed into a “gender spectrum,” with the pharmacy and the surgical knife “empowering” children to “choose” a new gender.

Numerous teachers and parents have contacted the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews to express their concerns over the sweeping changes occurring in public schools when it comes to how gender, marriage, parenthood, and traditional God-given authorities are treated across the curriculum and throughout the school culture. They have shared photos of posters on the wall and copies of books and worksheets distributed in class that clearly run contrary to the First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Commandments. The trend toward Cultural Marxism is not a random happenstance, but an organized and intentional process. For example, education agencies in New York, Illinois, and Minnesota have released new licensure standards requiring that teachers catechize public school students in Cultural Marxism.

Lutherans are committed to evaluating all doctrine and practice on the basis of God’s Word. This is the “Sola Scriptura” principle that we find emphasized at the beginning of the Formula of Concord. The Formula continues by addressing various topics and then listing “affirmativa” (statements that should be affirmed as sound doctrine) and “negativa” (statements that should be rejected as heresy). Scripture, not man, is the standard for making those evaluations.

Lutherans today need to take the very same approach toward evaluating the world’s new catechism. A helpful exercise when confronting any worldview is to chart it out in comparison with Holy Scripture. Where do the two intersect? Do they agree, or do they contradict? What must the church affirm and what must the church reject in order to teach clearly on such matters?

For example, when new education policies require more than just informing or teaching about sexual perversion, but actually require that teachers “affirm,” “incorporate,” “foster,” “support,” “plan,” “feature,” and otherwise actively showcase beliefs and behaviors that contradict the Bible and natural law, then one must conclude that the world’s new catechism constitutes what St. Paul called a false and deceptive philosophy (Colossians 2:8).

Upon realizing that the new state standards for public schools directly attack the souls of students and teachers alike, what is a Christian to do? What is a Christian college—like Bethany Lutheran College—that has a teacher-training program to do? Betha-



ny's education department expressed concerns when the new policies were still in draft form. Bethany's president bravely submitted written testimony to an administrative judge during the public comment period, objecting to an aspect in conflict with our confession of faith. Recently, some lawyers in Minnesota have announced an intention to challenge the new policy in court.

How will this all play out, especially regarding future teachers (graduating from Bethany and elsewhere) who receive state certification? We do not yet know. We do know the great need to pray for our college, her students, and secular authorities. We also must pray for our synodical leaders, theologians, pastors, fathers, teachers, and laymen—that God would grant wisdom and courage, to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Our confes-

sion in these confusing and evil times must be clear. In matters where God has spoken, anything less than clarity is the ploy of Satan: “Did God really say?” he asked Eve (Genesis 3:1).

In times of trial and persecution, Christians do well to remember their Good Shepherd. His love and protection stay with them in all of life's storms. He calls them to be faithful and promises never to leave them nor forsake them. Lutheran confirmands take a vow in God's name to be willing to die rather than to abandon the chief doctrines of the Christian church as presented in Luther's Small Catechism. How, exactly, that vow becomes fulfilled may hinge upon the details of a judge's ruling, but God's faithfulness to the remnant church is unconditional. In Christ alone, the saints find their confidence in these last days. May God grant wisdom and courage to those in our synod with the responsibility to lead the way.



- 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

ELS Apologetics Resources  
[els.org/apologetics](https://els.org/apologetics)

“Q&A Leading to Christ” Flyers  
[els.org/apologetics/qalc](https://els.org/apologetics/qalc)

## AFFIRMATIVA

We AFFIRM These Biblical Teachings

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27–28a)

No human has “been given the power to make a woman out of a man or a man out of a woman, or to nullify either sex.” (Smalcald Articles III.XI.2)

“According to their innate maleness and femaleness, men and women relate to one another in various complementary and mutually-fulfilling ways, within marriage and the family, and also in the larger human community. The distinctive procreative anatomy of men and women is an essential mark and feature of the maleness of men and of the femaleness of women.” (ELS Position Statement on Sex and Gender Identity, 2018)

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. ... The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 8:13, 9:10)

## NEGATIVA

We REJECT These Anti-Biblical Teachings

“The teacher fosters an environment that ensures student identities such as ... gender identity [and] sexual orientation, ... are ... affirmed, and incorporated into a learning environment where students are empowered to learn and contribute as their whole selves.” (Minnesota)

“The teacher features, highlights, and uses resources ... that offer diverse perspectives on ... gender, sexual identity, ... and other identities traditionally silenced or omitted from curriculum.” (Minnesota)

“The environment ensures all ... identities ... sexual orientation ... are affirmed, valued, and used as vehicles for teaching and learning.” (New York)

“The culturally responsive teacher and leader will recognize how their ... gender identity, sexual orientation, ... affects their perspectives and beliefs about pedagogy and students.” (Illinois)

“A Culture of Deception?  
 Equipping Christians with  
 Truth & Love in Tumultuous  
 Times”

Fifth Annual Apologetics and  
 Worldviews Conference

June 21–22, 2023  
 Bethany Lutheran College  
[www.blc.edu/apologetics2023](http://www.blc.edu/apologetics2023)

Conference Speakers:

Rev. David Jay Webber  
 Rev. Paul Dare  
 Mr. Joshua Nelson



*The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all the things that I said to you.*

**John 14:26**



# The Giver-of-Life

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

**NORSELAND LUTHERAN**, St. Peter, Minn.  
**NORWEGIAN GROVE LUTHERAN**, Gaylord, Minn.

## The Life Saver

I suspect everyone reading this article is familiar with a LIFE SAVER – the famous little hard candies. Regardless of your opinion on that candy, you have to hand it to Clarence Crane, the original creator. A candy in the shape of a flotation device used to save the life of one drowning—the name together with the shape of the candy just etches itself in the mind. Whether we like the candy or not, we remember it.

Life Saver -- That term, in a manner of speaking, properly applies to the second person of the Triune God as well. The Son of God came as Savior—the Saver of your life and mine. The familiar words of John 3:16-17 give us Jesus as our Life Saver:

*For God so loved the world  
that He gave His only begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him  
should not perish  
but have everlasting life.*

*For God did not send His Son  
into the world to condemn the world,  
but that the world through him might be saved.*

## Maker, Saver, Giver...

God the Father GAVE God the Son to SAVE. That duo makes up two-thirds of the Trinity. What about God the Spirit, then? Is the Spirit's person and role nebulous enough that we can think and speak of "The Spirit of God" in whatever ways best suit our own presumptions?

As audacious and as unbiblical as that sounds—us picking the Holy Spirit's role—that is the way it so easily and so often goes in popular Christian thought.

An atheist has no qualms with denying the existence of any sort of divine being. We expect as much from someone who professes to be a-theist (anti-god). A non-Christian (a Muslim, a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, etc.), while acknowledging God's existence in general, will take issue with this person called 'Jesus; also being God, equal with the Father in deity.

But where Christianity so often gets fragmented is in confessing the person and work of God the Spirit. Or, perhaps more to the point, the fragmenting comes in not confessing and believing what God's Word says about the Spirit's work.

Pentecost is a marked occasion for the Christian Church to celebrate the Grace and Compassion of God in the work of the Spirit—The Life GIVER.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and GIVER OF LIFE..." This beautiful confession is from the earliest centuries of the Christian Church—The Nicene Creed. It teaches us in simple speech of God the Spirit at work. And this work is Pentecost at its essence—the Spirit giving Life won for us by Christ.

## The Giver As Presumed

We like “GIVERS”. What our flesh especially likes, however, is to decide what is given to us. We’re sort of like children at the dinner table: We like that we have a mother and father who supply the meal. But what we prefer best of all is telling them what that meal ought to be, how or when it ought to be served.

It’s good to have God the Spirit as Giver, we concede. Best though, reasons our proud flesh, if the Spirit be: the giver of success/prosperity; the giver of credit; the giver of life advice; the giver of ‘inspirational experiences’—the kind that make great stories for Christian bestsellers.

## The Giver As Graciously Given

When we celebrate Pentecost, we celebrate yet another occasion for which we can thank God that His gifts DON’T conform to our presumptions or preferences. At Pentecost, we celebrate God the Spirit as GIVER... Our LIFE GIVER.

“Life Giver?” we may say. Jesus announces to His church that the coming Spirit is going to “teach us” and cause us to “remember things”. If that’s true, then the LIFE that this promised Spirit gives will be nothing more than words!

...And then we have it! The account of Pentecost is remarkable: visible fire over heads, speaking in languages unlearned, 3,000 converts in a single day! But what’s most remarkable of all is tidied up in this short expression from the assembly that day:

*“We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”*  
(Acts 2:11)

Proclaiming (with words!) the wonderful works done by God: THIS is Pentecost. THIS is celebrating the Holy Spirit and His Work. Jesus says of God the Spirit: He will teach you all things—bring to your remembrance the things I spoke about among you. In this same context, Jesus simply says of the Spirit and His Work: “He will take of what is Mine and declare it (words) to you.” THIS is Pentecost—the giving of Jesus IN DECLARED WORDS.

Tongues of fire were visible. Men spoke in languages they’d never formally learned. Thousands were brought to faith. All these things were real instances of that first

Pentecost Sunday. The Works of God in the person of His Son, Jesus declared in words for the people’s hearing... This is the ESSENCE of Pentecost. This is the Spirit Giving Life.

## Present-Day Pentecost

In this way, we aren’t merely remembering a historical event. We are noting Pentecost’s gracious activity still going on today! We are still gathered weekly by God the Spirit, who placed His name upon us with water and words. With Spirit-given words, God keeps us His own children. The Spirit Gives Life!

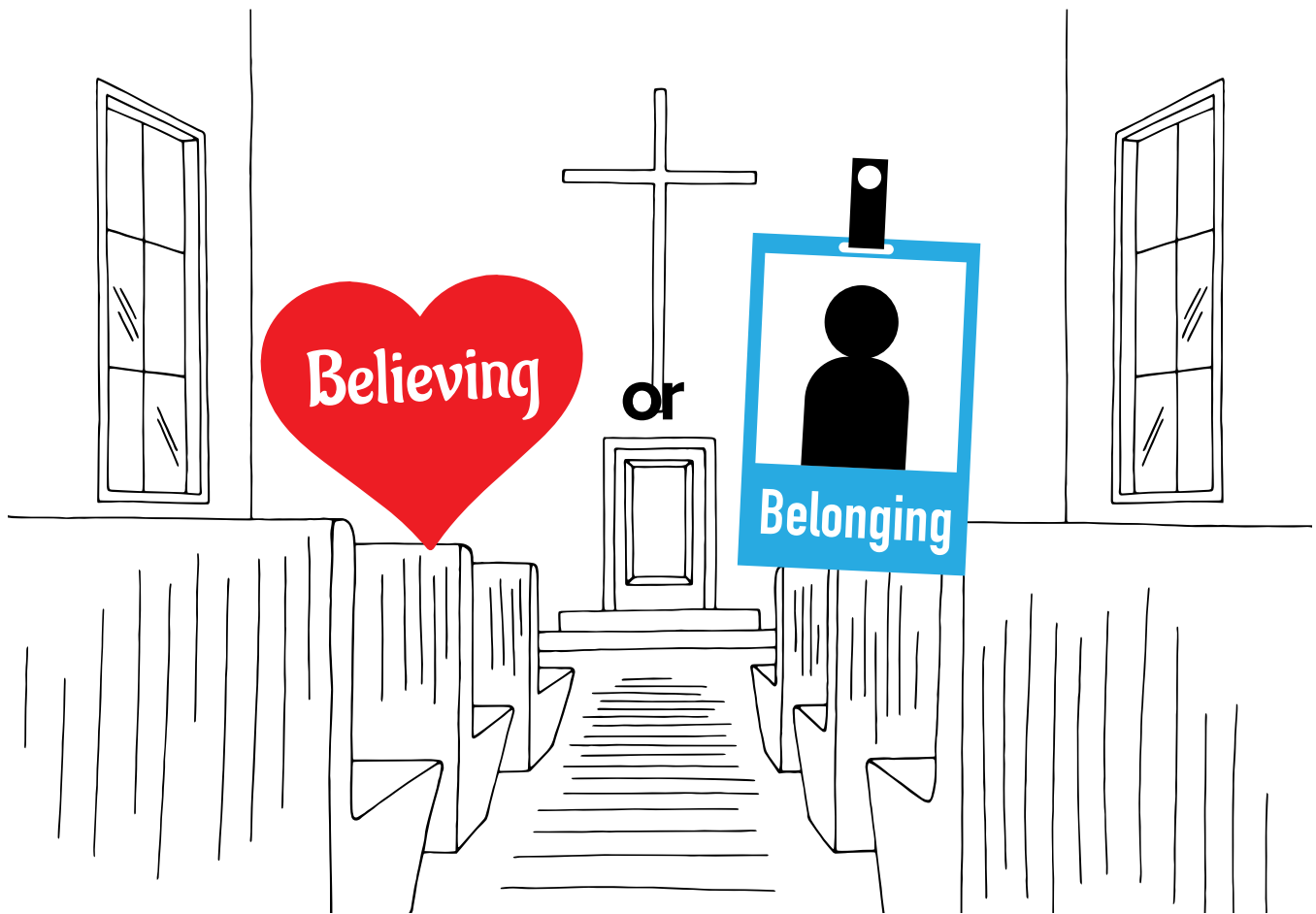
We come back Sunday after Sunday burdened with a week’s worth of sin and a conscience sullied by guilt. We confess to God and with others sinners this sin: lust and anger, impatient outbursts and harbored grudges, the forfeiture opportunities to pray to God or encourage a neighbor. We even acknowledge the death that is deserved because of this sin and guilt. And at this occasion, too, God the Spirit GIVES LIFE. The Spirit gives the Wonderful Works of God. LIFE is given to those who are dead to sin and dying according to the body. Jesus’ death and resurrection are applied with words. We call this word “absolution.” This is how Jesus taught that His body -- the Church -- would be: The Salvation He secured in His living and dying and rising, spoken (spirit-ed, if you will) to and for His people through servants called to do just that.

Finally, Jesus taught His Church to eat the Supper he gave according to the words with which He gave it. With words he declared that this Supper is in fact His body, His blood: the Forgiveness of sins! So when you, His Church, eat this Supper, the profit of Pentecost is still paying forward. The Spirit gives Life—Jesus— the Life of the world —the LIFE EVERLASTING.

God the Father gave His Son into Human flesh. We celebrate this “giving” under the title of Christmas. God the Son gave His Life to make full payment for the sins of the world and then rose powerful over death. We celebrate this “giving” with Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

And now, God the Spirit GIVES what God the Father and God the Son GAVE. God the Spirit is THE LIFE GIVER. The Spirit gives Jesus to His Church with nothing more than words. These words about Jesus are written record and they are proclaimed for you and me. This is the Spirit at work and His work is Life-Giving.





by **REV. ED BRYANT**, Contributing Writer  
**FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Medford, Ore.  
**OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Grants Pass, Ore.

## Where in the World is God?

Rev. Harold Senkbeil aptly titled a book that way. In his book, he answered the question this way: God is where His Word and Sacrament are. But what does church membership mean if we aren't looking for God? It means we are looking for something other than the main thing. Don't be surprised at this, for as Paul prophesies, For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3–4, ESV).

Here's an illustration: What do you look for in a vehicle? If we think about it, we will look for a vehicle that serves our purpose: A truck may carry so much weight, a car may be small and nimble in traffic, or a minivan may have room for our children and their friends. You don't go looking for an economy car but buy a pickup because you like the upholstery. You won't go looking for a minivan and end up with a tiny runabout because you like the color. You buy what you are looking for. What if you aren't looking for God in your church membership.

1. *Where in the World Is God?* – Senkbeil, H. – 1999; Northwestern Publishing House

Consider what the church is for. The faithful Christian congregation is unique; it is where we are to find God, receive His gifts, and worship Him. No other institution is like a faithful church...

- Our Creator tells us to be there.
- He promises to be there with us and speak to us through His Word.
- We hold the deepest truths in common with others, though we may have nothing in common but our faith. We confess together the truths about where we come from, our des-tiny, sin and salvation, and the meaning of life.

- We encourage one another in our Christian lives, charitably holding one another accountable in certain ways.
- We have a pastor who stays up late nights, concerned for our soul.
- We have a shepherd who speaks God's words to us and gives us His gifts while praying for us to our Lord.

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## The Dangers of a Wrong Idea

With that in mind, consider how many base their church membership on what they are looking for, but they aren't looking for God. Join a church for the wrong reasons and disappointment can be guaranteed. What sort of place are you looking for?

**The Friendly Place** / The most common reason that people give me for going to church is that it is friendly. The church should be friendly! But then so should McDonalds™, your pharmacy, and the big box store. Shame on us if we are not friendly to visitors and to one another, but the church doesn't exist to give you your weekly dose of friendliness, so if that is what people are looking for in a church, then don't be surprised if or when they find it elsewhere.

**The No-Commitment Place** / A friend of ours once told us, "I like my church because it doesn't interfere with my politics or my religion." In his view, the church gave him status and access to some nice people. The real error, though, is the idea that the church requires commitment from us. If we go there to meet God, then it is really He who requires a commitment from us. It is He who tells us: to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to take heed to the teaching, to forgive as we are forgiven, to teach and believe the same thing—what He teaches us, to be faithful (routine or regular) in hearing the preached Word and receiving the Sacrament, to encourage one another, and so on. These aren't the church's demands, but God's will, the way of love toward Him and one another. Perhaps it is easier to dismiss the importance of our church life if we deny that it is the Lord we are dealing with.

**The There-if-I-Want-It Place** / Several times, I have received requests to conduct funerals for non-members. In one

typical instance, the caller told me he wanted me to give his mother a Christian burial. He assured me that not only was his mother a member of my church, but a charter member. Since I had been pastor of the church for 13 years, I thought he had the wrong church. But no, although his mother had indeed been a charter member, neither she nor her family had been to the church in decades. It seems some want a place that will participate in their illusion that church is some sort of ticket to heaven that you can store away and pull back out when needed, rather than part of a new life of faith that extends beyond time.

The wrong idea of church membership leads people to neglect it, to look for the wrong things in it, and ultimately to forsake the real church altogether. We may laugh at the idea that we can get to heaven because our name is printed on a plaque of charter members, because we are listed in the church roster, or because we grew up in that town and that church. But we may find ourselves living as though it were true.

There is a reason that Christians around the world are risking life, limb, and liberty to be part of a Christian congregation. It's because our Savior promises to be found there.

**Over this series, we will see that church membership is when a believer, in obedience to Christ and His word:**

1. regularly gathers with fellow believers (*communion/community*)
2. to receive God's gifts through word and sacrament
3. in confessional harmony with them,
4. living a repentant, Christian life,
5. served by a pastor
6. whom they recognize as a shepherd accountable for their soul.





# “We are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”

ANNOUNCING THE

106th Convention of the  
**Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

67th Annual Meeting of  
**Bethany Lutheran College, Inc.**

8th Annual Meeting of the  
**Lutheran Schools of America, Inc.**

**JUNE 18–22, 2023** | BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE | MANKATO, MINNESOTA

## Synod Sunday June 18

- 4:00p** Synod Sunday Service  
*Preacher:*  
**The Rev. Thomas Rank** (Lake Mills, Iowa)
- 5:30p** Dinner (free will donation)

## Monday June 19

- 9:00a** Opening Convention Service
- 1:00p** Anniversaries observed:
- Edward Bryant**, 50 years
  - David Haeuser**, 50 years
  - Mark Marzock**, 50 years
  - Paul Schneider**, 50 years
  - J. Kincaid Smith**, 50 years
  - Karl Anderson**, 40 years
  - Shawn Kauffeld**, 40 years
  - Bruce Leonatti**, 40 years
  - Homer Mosley**, 40 years
  - Glenn Obenberger**, 40 years
  - William Stehr**, 40 years
  - Aaron Hamilton**, 25 years
  - Jesse Jacobsen**, 25 years
  - Paul Sullivan**, 25 years
  - Timothy Zenda**, 25 years

## Tuesday June 20

- 9:00a** Devotion
- 10:00a** Convention Essay  
*Essayist:*  
**The Rev. Aaron Hamilton** (Scottsdale, Arizona)
- 11:30a** Dedication of the ELS Military Monument
- 5:00p** Communion/Memorial Service  
*Preacher:*  
**The Rev. Timothy Erickson** (Dodge Center, Minnesota)
- Vergie Anderson** (1926–2022)
- Harry Bartels** (1929–2022)
- David Lillegard** (1935–2022)
- John Moldstad** (1926–2022)
- James Olsen** (1937–2022)
- Fred Stubenvoll** (1949–2022)
- Betty Vinton** (1937–2022)
- Carl Wosje** (1937–2023)
- Barbe Schneider** (1949–2023)

## Wednesday June 21

- 9:30a** Convention Essay continued
- 11:30a** Dedication of the Bethany Activity Center

## Thursday June 22

- 8:00a** Unfinished Business



## Question ...

*We know several older adults who have chosen to live with someone rather than marry him/her. The reasons seem to be economic. They have gone to a church that will give them a commitment ceremony, and then they say they are married in God's eyes. What is a Biblical response to this?*

## Answer:

"We want to get married, but if we do, our social security benefits will be greatly reduced." "After my husband died, I still receive a large portion of his pension. But if I remarry, all of that income goes away." Many of us know people in these kinds of situations, and our hearts rightfully go out to them. After the loss of a spouse, many older adults find an answer to their need for companionship in meeting someone new. Yet government benefits and employer pensions often incentivize surviving spouses away from remarriage by reducing their income if they choose to remarry. As a result, some older adults argue that they have no alternative but to live together out of wedlock if they want to be together. "After all," they say, "a marriage is just a piece of paper."

Yet Scripture speaks clearly when it comes to God's expectations for marriage and for the believer's relationship with his or her employer and with the state. If a man and a woman choose to live together out of wedlock, they are not following God's will with regard to marriage. According to Scripture, a marriage is more than "just a piece of paper." A man shall "leave his father and mother" and be "joined to his wife" (Genesis 2:24). Marriage involves the public declaration of a lifelong commitment and promise of faithfulness between husband and wife. That declaration and promise are missing in any cohabitation arrangement, even among senior citizens.

The Fourth and Seventh Commandments also apply. What happens when a couple avoids being married (or gets married) for the sake of a pension or a government benefit? At that point, people are then taking money or services that do not rightfully belong to them, either from an employer or from the government. There's another word for it: stealing.

For these reasons, it is especially troubling to hear that churches are offering people in this situation a "commitment ceremony." This is nothing more than an effort to put religious "lipstick" on the "pig" of sinful disobedience. Such "commitment ceremonies" sound like, for all intents and

purposes, weddings performed without a license, and violate the Second Commandment by deceiving people into believing that God says such living arrangements are pleasing to Him.

Some might complain that sacrificing income for marriage is too great a sacrifice to make. Yet did Jesus not say, "*Whoever does not bear his cross after Me cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:27)? Faithfulness is the cost of being a follower of Christ. Faith involves sacrifice, making hard choices while trusting in the Lord's promises to provide what we need and work all things out for our good. Even Jesus told His followers to "count the cost" of their discipleship. A faithful believer will want to think through his or her situation in life carefully prior to entering the world of dating. For older adults, part of that consideration includes the impact a marriage can have on one's finances.

The couple who fears marriage because of a potential loss of income needs to hear the assurance of St. Paul: "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32). Even though we human beings may have a hard time seeing how He can do it, our almighty and gracious Lord promises that He will provide for all of our needs. "*Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?...' For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matthew 6:31-33).

? Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

---> Send them via email:  
[pastorspvk@christthekinggb.org](mailto:pastorspvk@christthekinggb.org)

---> Send them via "snail mail":  
1700 Cardinal Ln,  
Green Bay, WI 54313

# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

6 BROWNS COURT  
MANKATO, MN 56001

BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE

## Special Dedications During Synod Convention

ELS MILITARY MONUMENT



### ELS Military Monument Dedication

**Tuesday June 20, 11:30a**

As most worthy tribute to military veterans on Bethany Lutheran College campus, the monument will serve to honor any and all veterans and ensure that the current and future generations will be aware of the cost of the freedoms enjoyed as citizens of our great nation through this God-pleasing vocation of warrior.



### Bethany Activities Center Dedication

**Wednesday June 21, 11:30a**

The new Bethany Activity Center will provide spaces for a variety of uses for the entire student body. The facility houses a six-lane track, jumping spaces, artificial turf infield, and drop down netting to divide the space for multiple user groups and purposes at the same time. These amenities will alleviate pressure on the existing Sports and Fitness Center and will provide much needed spaces for use by classes, students, and athletes alike.