



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

2022 APOLOGETICS SERIES: PART I

IS THE CHURCH REALLY TO BLAME?

Shedding Light on the "Dark Ages"

pg. 10

What's in a name?

“*What’s in a name?*” Juliet asks, bemoaning Romeo’s last name of Montague. “*’Tis but thy name that is my enemy!*”

Some today may surmise the *Evangelical Lutheran Synod* could also declare that its name is an enemy and prevents us from properly fulfilling Jesus’ great commission.

EVANGELICAL

An opinion piece in the *New York Times* on October 26 suggests “evangelical” is synonymous with one political party in the United States.¹ Should the ELS drop that part of its name to avoid such association, excluding about 50% of our neighbors? In the minds of many of our fellow citizens in America, that name conjures up a certain religious brand, which in truth does not include our use of it in our name. “Evangelical” in itself simply means we focus upon the Gospel (evangel) of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lutherans were the first Evangelicals in the 16th Century because the Gospel was the heart and center of the Lutheran Reformation. Evangelicalism made popular in the 20th century in the U.S. does not reflect that flavor.

LUTHERAN

In addition, the name “Lutheran” has a history that carries even more baggage to this day, so much so that some Lutheran churches and institutions in the U.S. desire to drop it lest it prohibit outsiders in their spiritual pursuits from visiting. When the Pope in 1521 excommunicated Martin Luther, he pronounced a curse on the evangelical party with the derogatory use of the name “Lutheran” with the result that it became a confession of faith. Dr. Erling Teigen made this observation in a paper delivered to the ELS General Pastoral Conference:

“Some have dropped the name from their church signs, thinking that may make them more inviting. Early on, Luther objected to the use of ‘Lutheran’ as the name of Reformation confession. In 1522, ... he wrote: ‘I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians, not Lutherans.’ Later, however, he came to see that the papal decree made ‘Lutheran’ an evangelical confession. Even if unintended, the papal decree in effect shifted the focus away from Luther’s person to the biblical doctrine which was condemned by the pope. Hence, five hundred years later, we confess our biblical faith as it is taught by Luther and expressed in the entire *Book of Concord* by identifying ourselves as Evangelical Lutherans.”

SYNOD

We could even label the word “synod” as another enemy since most people do not know its meaning. It emphasizes that we are Christians organized to walk together on the same road of our Evangelical Lutheran confession. Our enemy is not our name. To be sure, that is what our real enemy would love us to conclude. Satan and his kingdom and all his allies hate Jesus and would love to distract us from the real threats, his many diabolical lies, which tempt us sinners to trust in ourselves instead of our only Savior.

These feigned threats should not fool us. For confessional reasons, we in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod will retain all three words in our name. If you have been tempted in this manner and succumbed to compromise to make your mission tasks easier in this world, know that all such sins of denial, like that of St. Peter, are forgiven by Jesus’ holy precious blood. Pray that the Holy Spirit will fortify you in your confession of His truth, which alone sets sinners like us free.

¹Why ‘Evangelical’ Is Becoming Another Word for ‘Republican’, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/26/opinion/evangelical-republican.html>, Oct. 26, 2021.

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Pooling Up Jesus for Us

by **REV. KYLE MADSON**, Editor
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 **Read:** 2 Peter 1:16-21

Children are kind of amusing, aren't they? Watching them observe and take in seemingly simple truths is one of the great God-given joys of life.

I recall a seminary classmate retelling the account of his toddler—maybe 18 months old or so—in one of these joyful observing moments. The young boy was in the bathtub observing the faucet fill the tub with water. He was mesmerized by the flow of water—not so much the pool gathering around him, but the water pouring out. He had to have it. He had to hold it—capture it somehow. And so he tried... and tried... and tried... with his hand to grab hold of that amazing moment, that beautiful flow pouring forth from the wall. But empty hand after empty hand revealed to this young one that he couldn't. That flowing water was for him. But it wasn't for his momentary amazement. This water was going to hold him. It was going to warm him. It was going to cleanse him.

Peter, in the Gospel record of the Transfiguration, sort of reenacts the role of the little toddler. Peter sees something wonderful, something mesmerizing: Jesus gleaming with the glory of God on the mountain together with a headlining cast—Moses, the great Law-bearer, and Elijah, the preeminent prophet. Peter, like the young toddler, means to “bottle the moment” for his own purposes.

God abruptly interrupted Peter's plans to package up the mountaintop moment into the idol of His own design. He interrupted with His Word: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” God rescued Peter from any sort of producing role at all. This Script is not cunningly devised by Peter. It's not a private interpretation of yours or mine. It is God's Script.

“This is my beloved Son...Hear Him,” says the Father.

Ears are unique appendages of the body. They look a little funny. But more than that, their function is very unique. You can observe a foot or a hand at work. You can see an eye blink or shift its focus. If you listen carefully, you can hear a nose inhale or exhale. But ears... ears are utterly passive in their function. They don't move at all. They're just odd little funnels made by our Creator to gather and collect sound.

The Father's declarative “Hear Him” doesn't make us co-writers with the Father. Neither does it enlist us as supporting actors of salvation together with His Son. It just makes us Ears—odd little funnels that gather and collect the sound of Salvation, the Good News of Jesus as witnessed by the disciples and testified to in the holy writings. Not only did the Father speak this so that Peter, James, and John could hear it on that mountain, but God the Spirit set apart men, eyewitnesses to Christ—His suffering and His glory—to record this gracious audio of the Gospel so that you and I might become ear-witnesses.

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” is the gracious audio of Christian baptism—the words with which God claims us as His own children. “I forgive you all of your sins” is the sound bite from the cross, Jesus announcing that with His own blood, our sins and their death is lifted from us! “Take and eat, My body... Drink of it... the new testament in My blood”—with this glorious annunciation, God makes odd little funnels of beleaguered sinners like you and me and He pools up in us the gifts donated to us in His beloved Son: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

With His gracious Word, God makes and keeps us as ears, as collection pools for Jesus—His life, His death, His life from the dead—filled with Jesus unto the salvation of our souls. Hear Him indeed.

We were watching a **YouTube** video where two pastors (outside of our fellowship) discussed the nature of suffering. One of the pastors went so far as to argue that God causes suffering in our lives. This seems to go against what I was taught in confirmation class. **Does God cause suffering?**

Answer:

Philosophers call it the “theistic dilemma.” If God is all-powerful and perfectly good, why do evil and suffering exist? Human reason takes us only so far in answering the question. A true resolution requires faith in the Word of God.

God is not the source of suffering

When God created the world, He saw to it that everything He created was good. And not just good—very good (Genesis 1:31)! Sin and evil did not exist. Death and suffering were completely unheard of. Everything changed when mankind fell into sin and disobeyed God’s will. As a result of sin, sorrow, pain, disordered relationships, toilsome labor, and death came into the world (Genesis 3:16-19). Suffering does not find its source in God, but in the evil of sinful human beings. The next time someone asks the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?”, perhaps the first thing to discuss is, “Who is truly good?” In the sight of God, there is no such thing as a “good person.” There are only sinners who deserve condemnation (Psalm 14:3).

For this reason, any goodness God shows to us is a gift of His grace: Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). As Jacob looked back over his life, he prayed, “*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant*” (Genesis 32:10).

God is in control of suffering

Still, we recognize that God reigns over all things and that nothing happens in this world outside of His control. In Romans 8:20, the apostle Paul points out that “*the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope*” (NKJV). God reigns over suffering just as He reigns over everything else in this world.

That truth gives us pause as we consider our own sufferings along with the pain and hardships experienced by those around us. What kind of God hands His creation over to suffering? Why does He permit it? What might God’s purpose be for my suffering? God uses suffering for His gracious purpose

In His Word, God assures us that He uses suffering always according to His goodness and His grace. In Romans 8:20, He subjects all of creation to futility “in hope”—specifically in the hope of redemption. With suffering, God accomplished our salvation. “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us*

to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Christ Jesus suffered and died on the cross as the Holy Son of God to take away the guilt of our sins, making peace between God and us.

So, in the hands of God, suffering is no longer a curse, but can be a blessing. At times, the Lord uses suffering to chasten and discipline us so that we may ultimately partake in His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). For “*tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope*” (Romans 5:3-4).

The Lord declares that we are “*joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we also may be glorified together*” (Romans 8:17). As we follow Christ here on earth, we can expect to share in His sufferings, trusting that we also share in His eternal glory. In His goodness and grace, the Lord places limits on our suffering, delivering us in the day of trouble (Psalm 50:15). In the face of hurt, pain, and heartache, the Lord also strengthens us through His means of grace, comforting and supporting us with His unfailing love (Psalm 94:17-19).

As God’s people address these questions, our answers cannot go beyond what God tells us in His Word. “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts,*” says the Lord (Isaiah 55:9). When the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, Job repented for questioning God’s wisdom. He said, “*I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know*” (Job 42:3).

Conclusion

Suffering in this world need not lead to a “theistic dilemma.” When we find ourselves or people we love facing suffering, instead of questioning God’s wisdom, we put our faith in His love and trust in His Word. For “*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Romans 8:18).



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echoes

from **ELS PULPITS**
past

OCCASION:
BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

EXCERPTED FROM PRINT:
MORNING BELLS AT OUR SAVIOUR'S – 2008 (REV. N.A. MADSON)

Do You Value Your Baptism?

Matthew 3:13-17

by REV. NORMAN MADSON, SR.

Fellow Redeemed,

With the account of our Savior's baptism we are again brought face-to-face with one of the fundamental questions of our Christian faith, namely: "What does baptism give or profit?" In his matchless Small Catechism, Luther has, on the basis of God's Word, answered that question this way: "Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." And the words and promises to which Luther here refers are the words found in Mark 16:16: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" ...

... What we... shall seek to answer today is the pertinent question: **DO YOU VALUE YOUR BAPTISM?**



Do you value your baptism as a means of regeneration?

... You celebrate, perhaps, with no little ceremony, the day of your natural birth. But have you given the day of your second birth much consideration? And yet, dear hearer, what would it mean that you had been born of flesh and blood, but had not been born again of water and the Spirit? Would you not then have to curse the day of your coming into the world? What comfort would it give you that you had been born into the wealthiest of families if you lack the riches of God's grace? What would it avail you that you are known throughout the length and breadth of civilized world if you are a stranger to the covenants of promise? What, though you are born into the family of the mightiest monarch on earth, if you remain separated from Him who alone can truthfully say of Himself: **"All power is given to me in heaven and on earth"** (Matthew 28:18b)? ... (It is) His Word that says: **Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ** (Galatians 3:26-27). Does that mean anything to you? Or is your baptism merely a matter of form, which has not entered seriously into the warp and woof of your life?

Secondly, Do you value your baptism as a constant means of grace?

"Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten you again with water and the Spirit, and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace unto everlasting life" (Baptismal rite)... What is the significance of those words in your baptismal ritual? Is it only the natural depravity of mortal man that is being referred to here? By no means! "All your sins" means exactly what it says. In your baptism, you were given an acquittal not only from the charge of natural depravity (original sin), but from every sin which you in your life might commit. You were brought into the most intimate relationship with Him who can speak of the future as though it were long-gone past. Hundreds of years before His coming into the world, Christ could speak of His atonement as though it already were an accomplished fact. **Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, the her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins** (Isaiah 40:1-2).

But finally... Do you value your baptism as a weapon against sin?

... When the apostle Paul assures us that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, he is simply calling to mind the glorious truth that you have by baptism been "buried

with Christ by baptism into death." Was it grievous for Moses to suffer affliction with the people of God? No, he chose it, and why? Because **"he had respect unto the recompense of the reward"** (Hebrews 11:26b).

What a weapon was his baptism in the hands of Luther! The devil could drive him from one position of defense to another, but when he came back to that day of grace on which God had adopted him as His child, there the devil had to leave him alone. "There," says Luther, "it was grace and nothing but grace, for I was not able to do anything myself. God did everything." Oh, that there was more of the humble, childlike faith of the Reformer! Then the enemies of infant baptism would have less to say against this blessed sacrament. Then there would be more vital Christianity in evidence on every hand. Under the many crosses and afflictions which we must bear as pilgrims and strangers, we would then have that as our shield which the darts of the archenemy cannot pierce. We would then find comfort even in the chastisements of the Lord. Oh, you who have been baptized into Christ, make diligent use of this weapon, and you shall be more than conquerors. Yes,

*Learn to mark God's wondrous dealing
With the people that He loves;
When His chastening hand they're feeling,
Then their faith the strongest proves:
God is nigh, and notes their tears,
Though He answers not, He hears;
Pray with faith, for though He try you,
No good thing can God deny you.*

*Ponder all God's truth can teach you,
Let His word your footsteps guide;
Satan's wiles shall never reach you,
Though he draw the world aside:
Lo! God's truth is thy defense,
Light, and hope, and confidence:
Trust in God, He'll not deceive you,
Pray, and all your foes will leave you."*

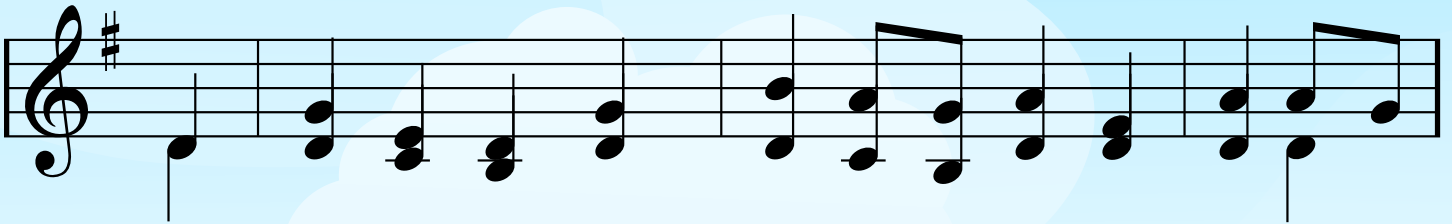
Lutheran Hymnary: vv. 4-5 (1913)

Songs out of Zion

258

Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest

447 444 7



We had to recite hymn verses every Friday. I'm not sure how happy I was to do this at the time, but now I am grateful for this unique aspect of my Lutheran School education. One of the hymns that made a strong impression on me was "Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest." I learned it out of the old *Lutheran Hymnary* (#278). It was also published in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (#353) and then the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (#258).

What got my attention were the short lines and the unique rhyme sequence. These lines are still stuck in my head from when I learned them several decades ago:

*I trust in Thee;
Deliver me
From misery (v. 1)*

*Most heartily
I trust in Thee;
Thy mercy fails me never (v. 3)*

*This will I plead
In time of need.
O help with speed (v. 6)*

I think the last stanza is the most poetic, as each line flows seamlessly to the next:

*Grant, Lord, we pray,
Thy grace each day,
That we, Thy law revering,
May live with Thee,
And happy be
Eternally,
Before Thy throne appearing.*

This hymn has an interesting meter and good poetry.

But what about its theology? What does it teach?

It teaches us where to find comfort in our trouble. This teaching is in the form of a prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is addressed as “my Savior,” “my Hope and my Salvation,” “my Helper,” the “Crucified,” and “my strong Defender.” Those are all terms expressing His commitment to us. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on flesh to save us. He came to be condemned and crucified in our place. He came to deliver us from “misery,” from “evil,” from our “ill behavior,” from “sorrows,” from “harm,” and from “troubles.”

This hymn expresses a humble and confident trust that Jesus does help and that He is always working for our good. Almost every verse gives expression to this faith: “I trust in Thee; / Deliver me,” “As Thou dost will, / Lead Thou me still,” “Most heartily / I trust in Thee; / Thy mercy fails me never,” “Now henceforth must / I put my trust / In Thee, O dearest Savior,” and “My refuge lies / In Thy compassion tender.”

Our faith rests in Jesus, who comforts and encourages us through His holy Word. The hymn regularly points to this saving Word. It says, “Thy Word’s my consolation” and describes “Thy Word and voice” as “comfort choice.” The reference to the Word in the sixth stanza can be applied both to Jesus’ promise and to His presence: “I have Thy Word, / Christ Jesus, Lord; / Thou never wilt forsake me.” Jesus promises to be with us always, and He is present to bless us through His Word and Sacraments (Matthew 28:20).

Through Jesus’ promise and presence, our faith is strengthened. Our desire is to truly serve our Lord and to be preserved in His truth (v. 2). We trust Him to deliver us from evil (v. 3) and to keep us from harm (v. 5). Even though we have sinned against Him, our hearts rejoice in the Word of grace and forgiveness He speaks to us (v. 4). In faith, we hold Jesus to His Word. We cling to what He says even when it seems like He has abandoned us or is punishing us. He has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). So we respond, “This will I plead / In time of need.”

The last stanza is a beautiful conclusion to the hymn and a good summary of the Christian’s hope. We pray every day for the Lord’s grace so we are kept in the faith and live lives that honor and glorify Him. As Jesus blesses us through His

Word, we look forward to all He has prepared for us in heaven. We will join the saints in song before His glorious throne where we will “happy be / Eternally.”

This hymn was written by Hans Christensøn Sthen. He was born in Denmark in the mid-1500s, probably around the time that the kingdom of Denmark and Norway was declared Lutheran in 1536. He pursued studies in theology, possibly also receiving training in Germany. He served as a pastor in several places in Denmark into the early 1600s. He was married, but little else is known about his personal life, including the date of his death. Sthen published several collections of hymns containing original compositions and translations of German hymns. The 1874 hymnbook of the Norwegian Synod (predecessor to the ELS) has fourteen hymns and translations by Sthen. The handbook to the 1913 Lutheran Hymnary calls Sthen, “the best hymn writer before the time of [Thomas] Kingo.”

This hymn expresses a
humble and confident trust
that Jesus does help and
that He is always working
for our good.

“*Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest*” was originally published around the year 1578. An original melody was prepared for this hymn by Ludvig M. Lindeman (1812-1887). Lindeman was a great curator and promoter of Norwegian church music, and his melodies were brought to America by Norwegian immigrants. Nearly thirty of Lindeman’s compositions and settings are used in the Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary.

The translation of Sthen’s hymn was prepared by Harriet Reynolds Krauth Spaeth (1845-1925). She was the daughter of Charles Porterfield Krauth, a leader of the confessional Lutheran revival in America in the nineteenth century. Spaeth had an impressive career in her own right as a gifted author and musician. Besides her translation of this hymn, she also prepared the translation for Brorson’s “*Thy Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We*” and Koren’s “*Ye Lands to the Lord*,” among other hymns.

I am glad to know this hymn. My faithful pastors and patient teachers gave me something as a child that I could keep with me throughout my life. Some children’s songs are meant only for children—they are songs we grow out of. Other songs, like “*Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest*,” are songs we grow into. We can keep them with us and go to them for comfort, for instruction, and for fitting prayer.

by **REV. PETER FAUGSTAD**, Contributing Writer
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IS THE CHURCH REALLY TO BLAME?

Shedding Light on the “Dark Ages”

The Inquisition, the Crusades, the stifling of science—Christianity often gets a bad rap when it comes to the Middle Ages. But what does history actually reveal about the influence of Christianity upon Western civilization?

The Inquisition was rare and unusual, not characteristic of the church as a whole. It actually was an improvement upon prior standards of justice. Inquisitors announced formal charges, sought the testimony of witnesses, and asked defendants to supply evidence of their innocence, all paving the way for modern judicial systems. Inquisitors took their time—sometimes a decade—before reaching a verdict. The medieval Inquisition was both more fair-minded and more transparent than the secret police of twentieth-century communist regimes. Church authorities did not themselves execute convicts, but only recommended punishment to secular authorities. Admittedly, the system was far from perfect and sometimes quite horrific. For example, some “confessions” were torture-forced.

There’s a sobering reminder here that human zeal so easily can depart from the true love of God and true love for

one’s neighbors. The Inquisition was not, however, merely a “Dark Ages” institution—it lasted until the 1800s, past the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. Nor did the faults of the Inquisition originate within Christian doctrine, but rather in a departure from biblical teachings concerning justice. Deuteronomy 19:15, for example, requires two, or better still, three credible witnesses before condemning the accused. Similarly, the Law of Moses, with only seventeen capital offenses, showed far more mercy than England’s criminal code of the 1600s, which tallied 148 capital offenses.

Like the Inquisition, the Crusades also were a mixed bag. In many ways, the Crusades were a defensive war against Islamic armies that already had conquered one third of Europe, disarmed the populace, limited their economic opportunities, and forbidden them from sharing the Gospel beyond their own families. Often their children were taken from them, enlisted in the Islamic army, and forced to fight against Christians. No follower of Christ, nor anyone appreciative of peace or justice, should have been content with Islamic oc-

cupation. Unfortunately, Christians’ “crusades” against Islam also included instances of wanton violence plus an idolatrous preoccupation with holy relics. This is a good reminder that not everything done in the name of Christianity is right, but at the same time, we should avoid the opposite extreme of supposing that there was nothing good about the Crusades. Codes of chivalry promoted honorable leadership. Islamic imperialism was repelled. The Gospel again could be preached without political restraint.

As for science, the standard jab against the church is demonstrably false. Church leaders sponsored the building of astronomical observatories. Christian intellectuals developed the world’s first universities, in which the old ideas of Aristotle and the newer ideas of what we now call the “Middle Ages” were freely debated. When the Bishop of Paris condemned 219 statements from Aristotle’s works in 1277, the result was not so much censorship as freedom—university faculty and students now had space to develop alternatives to Aristotle’s ideas about physics and astronomy. But they preserved Aristotle’s logical

way of thinking, as did Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon at Wittenberg during the 1500s.

In the late Middle Ages, universities cultivated a form of debate called the “disputation” that required the presenter to make a fair-minded presentation of both sides and then provide clear reasons why he favored one view over the other. Disputations fostered greater intellectual honesty and greater academic freedom than today’s universities, where “speech codes” and “political correctness” stifle true debate. Indeed, Luther’s 95 Theses and his Heidelberg Disputation came out of this Medieval approach to open inquiry. Martin Chemnitz’s treatise concerning the Lord’s Supper similarly followed the disputation model in order to compare Roman, Reformed, and Lutheran views, and to demonstrate with clear logic that the Lutheran teaching uniquely squares with Holy Scripture.

The Scientific Revolution followed on the heels of the Lutheran Reformation, preserving the best of Medieval intellectual life while also forging ahead with new methods of scientific experiment. Melanchthon was especially encouraging of Copernican astronomy at the University of Wittenberg. Even the Roman Catholic Church likely would not have been so critical of Galileo had it not been for bad timing—church officials viewed him as another Luther and overreacted in the fanaticism of the Counter-Reformation.

So, is the church necessarily hostile to science? Certainly not. Christianity teaches that God created the world and that God gave people eyes to see and minds to think. Modern science was founded upon this doctrine of creation. When some scientists turn against their Creator, promoting evolutionary theories, then of course tensions emerge—but that’s not the fault of genuine science, nor the fault of biblical Christianity.

Christianity encourages science so long as scientists do not reject the Creator. Christianity supports the proper administration of justice, which sometimes (but certainly not always) occurred during the Inquisition. Christianity recognizes that war may be waged justly in self-defense (which, again, sometimes but not always was the case during the Crusades). But Christianity is also more than all these things.

Christianity should never be defined by whatever people who call themselves “Christians” happen to do, whether good or ill. Nor should Christianity be equated with virtuous living, though of course that is an expected fruit of faith. Christianity is founded not upon human actions, but rather upon the words and works of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose from the grave to win forgiveness for all people. That Gospel of redemption is the heart and soul of Christianity. Medieval hymns cherishing this Gospel message illuminated people’s hearts throughout the so-called “Dark Ages.” The same Bible-based lyrics enlighten us still today.

- 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



Websites:

Center for Apologetics and
Worldview Studies:
blc.edu/apologetics

ELS Evangelism Resources:
els.org/resources/evangelism

Medieval Hymnody Enlightens Any “Dark Age”

Author Unknown, 6th or 7th Century

*Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord and precious,
Binding all the Church in one,
Holy Zion’s helper ever,
And her confidence alone. (ELH 8:1)*

St. Theodulph of Orleans, 770–821

*All glory, laud and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David’s royal Son,
Who in the Lord’s name comest,
The King and Blessed One. (ELH 277:1)*

John of Damascus, 696–754

*The day of resurrection,
Earth, tell it out abroad,
The Passover of gladness,
The Passover of God,
From death to life eternal,
From this world to the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over
With hymns of victory. (ELH 356:1)*

Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090–1153

*O Jesus, King most wonderful,
Thou Conqueror renowned,
Thou Sweetness most ineffable,
In whom all joys are found! (ELH 278:1)*

The Holy Art of Dying

Part I:

MEMENTO MORI

(Remember You Must Die)

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



Memento Mori, Frans van Everbroeck (ca. 1654-72). An example of keeping a reminder of death (a human skull) on one's work desk. Life is brief—like a soap bubble, a candle always burning lower, and slipping grains in an hourglass.

This last September, my family and I had the opportunity to attend a quaint and curious carnival: the aptly-named “Hearsefest.” As its name implies, Hearsefest is a car show for hearses. Over 100 hearse collectors from all over the country drove to the tiny town of Fowlerville, Michigan, to show off their eccentric transports. In addition to showcasing their decked-out hearses, many participants also proudly displayed their collections of funeral home memorabilia, mortuary cots, body bags (new), embalming machines (used), fake skeletons, and real caskets. (At least, I think the skeletons were fake. But I admit I didn’t double-check.)

Most might call this event macabre. Some may be surprised to find out such a niche culture of death exists. Yet such a ghastly undertaking is nothing new; its basic elements harken back to an ancient tradition called the *Memento Mori*, Latin for “Remember to die” or, put another way, “Remember you must die.” A *memento mori* is an artistic representation of death displayed in a prominent place. Common *memento mori* images include skulls, bones, hourglasses, and withering flowers. Before this present well-regulated and litigious generation, you might even find someone keeping a real human skull on their desk! The purpose of such grim mementos was to serve as a reminder that death is a certainty. You are no exception. Deny it, accept it, hide from it, laugh in its face—none of this matters. Death is inevitable. And our time of life before death is a limited commodity: brief, quickly flying, and once it’s past, irretrievable.

Lest we downplay the memento mori as a mere morbid derangement of more primitive generations, we do well to consider that God’s holy Word of Scripture is filled with such reminders for us. In a psalm, Moses prays that God would “teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). The Teacher of Ecclesiastes also says, “Better to go to a funeral than to a feast, since death is the final destination for all mankind. The living must take this to heart!... The hearts of the wise think about the funeral, but the hearts of fools think about the feast” (Ecclesiastes 7:2, 4). God Himself tells us that wisdom is found in memento mori: number your days, remember you must die. Therefore, enlighten your hearts with the wisdom of God’s eternal Word for everlasting life.

Not that meditating on death itself confers God’s wisdom. Rather, meditating on death points mortal hearts back to the eternal Word of God for life everlasting. In reference to earthly mortality, that Word tells us “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10), and again, “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like a wildflower in the countryside. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the Lord blows on them” (Isaiah 40:6-7), and again, “What is man that you remember him?” (Psalm 8:4), and again, “Remember that my life is just a breath” (Job 7:7), and again, “Truly each man at his best exists as but a breath” (Psalm 39:5), and again, “What is your life? Indeed, it

is a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears” (James 4:14). God repeats Himself often. This must be important.

And it’s especially important to remember when we find ourselves in a culture that assumes the best way to think about death is never to think about it at all. Or, as is the case with our niche cultures of death, to err in the opposite direction and embrace death through fascination, fetishization, and obsession. We may think that being fascinated with death and surrounding oneself with its paraphernalia is the same as understanding and accepting death. Yet one can still misunderstand death by embracing it through misguided methods, much as if someone seeking to understand rattlesnakes were to do so by cuddling with them.

Both the denial and embrace of death misunderstand the essence of what death is, why it is, and how to respond to it properly according to its true nature. Luther speaks of this in his 1519 *Sermon on Preparing to Die*: “We should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance.... The power and might of death are rooted in the fearfulness of our nature and in our untimely and undue viewing and contemplating of it.”¹ The true *memento mori* is death viewed properly, the delicate middle ground that numbers its days aright while also remembering that in Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, death is not the final destination, and the hearse does not carry us to our final resting place. Rather, the hearse carries us to the very site where Christ’s resurrection of our flesh in His own glory will occur. As it’s written, “By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

Martin Moller, a Lutheran pastor in the late 16th century, provides an appropriate illustration for how Christians should be aware of and face death: When one bird has been hit with a stone or shot down by the hunter, the bird next to it hurriedly flies away—so also our souls should hurriedly fly to repentance and God’s Word at every reminder of death, for we know not when death’s shot will strike us.² The Christian should not flee from death in fear or denial, but in remembering death hurriedly fly to the only remedy for death: God’s powerful Word that raises the dead and promises resurrection and heaven through Christ Jesus.

In remembering we must die, we hurriedly fly to God’s Word for repentance and absolution. We fly to God’s Word joined to water in Holy Baptism, in which we died with Christ, were buried with Him, and now will be raised glorious and victorious even as He was resurrected from death in glory (Romans 6:4-5). We fly again and again to God’s Word joined to bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, in which Christ’s body and blood in His death on the cross are placed directly on our lips,

and so we are nourished with all the benefits of Christ’s death, namely forgiveness for all our sins, everlasting life in heavenly glory, and eternal salvation in the gracious presence of God.

A true understanding of death cannot be provided from someone still bound to die; it can only be revealed from the Word of the One who knows all and who has Himself suffered death before us and came out alive on the other side to be the firstfruits of our resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). A true acceptance of death, a true *memento mori*, can only be found in one source, in the One who suffered death for our sake and conquered it. And you, dear Christian, have His Word: “He has swallowed up death forever!” (Isaiah 25:8).



From the *Totentanz* (“Dance of Death”) by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), a series of woodcuts that depict the inevitability and impartiality of death. In each print, Holbein portrays death coming to the elderly and young children alike, to kings and peasants and popes and paupers without discrimination or preference. Death comes equally to those afraid of death and those who laugh at death. The above image depicts the latter, called the “Idiot Fool,” and Holbein’s caption reads:

“He is mocking Death, by putting his finger in his mouth, and at the same time endeavoring to strike him with his bladder-bauble. Death smiling, and amused at his efforts, leads him away in a dancing attitude, playing on a bag-pipe.”

¹ LW 42:101-102.

² Martin Moller, *Preparing for Death*, trans. Arthur E. Schulz.

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CROSSING PATHS

ON THE ROAD TO JERICHO

PART ONE

Rahab and the Spies (Joshua 2:8-13)

A little girl wanted a cell phone for her tenth birthday. Her father said she wasn't old enough. Undaunted, she challenged him by citing precedent: "How old were you when Grandma and Grandpa bought you your first cell phone?"

Her father was born in 1967.

Many find it hard to believe that people were able to survive without cell phones. How did they communicate? Somehow, word got out.

The two men sent to spy on Jericho expected discretion from Rahab, a disreputable woman who kept a disreputable house in town. What they did not expect was her active assistance. She hid them on the roof. She deceived the townspeople who were looking for them. She pointed the spies to safety.

Up on the roof, Rahab told them why she had done this: "I know that the LORD has given you the land" (Joshua 2:9a ESV). Then she explained how she knew that. She recalled how the Israelites had defeated two kings east of the Jordan River. These were recent events. But she also recalled "how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came up out of Egypt" (v. 10a), an event that had taken place forty years earlier! How did she know that? "We have heard it," she said. Somehow, the Word got out!

Rahab described the Word's effects on the people of Jericho: "As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you" (v. 11a). But there was Spirit in the disreputable woman. Through that same Word, faith was alive in Rahab's heart. "For the LORD your God," she confessed, "He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (v. 11b).

By faith, Rahab saved the spies (Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25). By faith, she asked for mercy, and not only for herself: "Give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death" (Joshua 2:12b-13).

God gets His Word out today, and the Word has the same effects on all who hear it. The terrors of His Law convict us of sin, melt our hearts, and dissolve any trust we ever had in our works. But the same Word that works death in us also works life in us. God has mercy on us and offers us the consolation of His Gospel, the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life, not only for ourselves, but for our households, too.

The spies gave Rahab the "sure sign" she requested. We remember the scarlet cord she tied in her window. That cord was the sign of her family's deliverance from death; of her bond to Israel (Joshua 6:22-25); and of her bond to the Savior, born in the fullness of time of her own flesh and blood (Matthew 1:5).

What Rahab recalled and revealed was not only good information for the spies, but Good News for them as well. Forty years earlier, Moses had prophesied that Israel's enemies would hear of God's saving acts and that their hearts would melt when they heard it (Exodus 15:15-16, 23:27; see also Deuteronomy 2:25). What comfort it gave the two men to hear this prophecy fulfilled! And what joy it gave them to show God's mercy to Rahab!

Biblical literacy has declined, but it hasn't vanished. God's Word still gets out. When we cross paths with someone and they throw in some unexpected snippet of Scripture, we should rejoice because this is our opportunity to proclaim the mercy of God and share the Word of Christ.

The Word of Christ is the sure sign of our deliverance from death, and faith comes from hearing it. Faith is our bond to God's Son and to His people. By faith, we have the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake. To know that gives us comfort and peace. It also gives us the spirit of urgency as we cultivate Biblical literacy and communicate the Gospel to our neighbor. The Savior Himself, descended from Rahab, tells us how vital this work is: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24 ESV).

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invites you to their

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Saturday, March 5, 2022, 9:30am – 2:30pm

Bethany Lutheran College

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“Encouragement for the Homeschooling Mother”

BRENDA WAGENKNECHT

“Educating God’s Children”

Brenda Wagenknecht will share practical information on homeschooling children with unique needs. Children with exceptional gifts, developmental disabilities, learning differences, and those with trauma backgrounds require additional considerations when making a homeschool plan. Brenda will share information on neurological needs and accommodations as well as share specialized curriculum and resources.

REGISTER

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MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:

Bethany Lutheran Church

Ames, Iowa

by **REV. DR. MICHAEL K. SMITH**, Contributing Writer
BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Ames, Iowa



Bethany Lutheran Church was organized in 1919 by several families who refused to enter the merger in 1918. In 1920, a former Methodist church building was purchased and moved to a site in rural Story City, Iowa. The congregation joined the ELS the same year. From 1926-1938, Bethany operated a Lutheran elementary school. In 1968, Bethany relocated to Ames, first meeting in the basement of the parsonage, which was built in 1969. The present church building, located in a residential neighborhood on the south side of Ames, was built in 1977. The congregation began an extensive renovation of the parsonage in mid-2021.

Bethany has offering plates that were fashioned from the original oak trees at Koshkonong under which Rev. Dietrichson conducted the communion service on September 2, 1844. The congregation's pulpit, lectern, baptismal font, and communion rail were built by Professor emeritus Erling Teigen.

The congregation has been served by twenty-three different pastors throughout its history. Names such as Harstad, Teigen, Ylvisaker, Petersen, Madson, and Aaberg appear on the list of faithful pastors who have shepherded Bethany. Pastor Martin Hoesch served the congregation for the longest period, from 1997-2021. Pastor Michael K. Smith was installed as pastor on July 11, 2021.

Bethany is currently comprised of 45 baptized members. The congregation actively ministers to students of Iowa State University through its worship services and an on-campus Bible study.