

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



CHURCH

HISTORY

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A FISH STORY

BY TIM HERSET

Fishing stories have a distinct reputation. People exercise extreme caution when a fishing story is being told, giving the storyteller a skeptical eye and clinging to their right to determine whether or not they believe the story is true. The details make fishing stories memorable, and these details tend to grow from the time the fish is caught to when the story is told. But there's one fishing story, written by the Apostle John, where the details have stood the test of time.

After Jesus died and was buried for three days, he came back to life and appeared a number of times to his friends. Each time they were astonished and amazed. Jesus showed up like a ghost while his friends were hiding behind locked doors. Thomas wasn't there, and to say he missed out is more than an understatement. About a week later, Jesus did it again, but this time Thomas was in the room and got to see—and feel—that Jesus was alive and not a ghost.

Then one night, Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and a couple more disciples decided to go fishing. All night long they threw their nets into the sea. You can almost hear them mutter under their breath, "There's a reason it's called fishing *not* catching." As the sun started to rise over the east side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus yelled out from shore to his friends, inquiring whether or not they had caught any fish. They answered with a simple, slightly annoyed, "No." Jesus shouted back with an outrageous reply, almost like telling a bad joke. He told them

to throw their net on the right side of the boat and they would find fish.

Weary and worn out from a night of fishing and not catching, they gave their net one more hopeless toss into the water. Awakened with wonder, the seven strong fishermen were not able to pull the net into the boat.

Wide-eyed, John looked up from the splashing and thrashing of the fish and shouted, "It is the Lord!"

This sent Simon Peter overboard so that he could be near Jesus. He left the other six to haul the heavy net a hundred yards to dry land.

Standing next to a fire, Jesus had some fish and bread, but he told his friend to bring some of the fish they had caught. So Simon Peter ran back into the water to help haul in the net. This ordinary, old net was overflowing; 153 large fish were caught but the net did not break!

Jesus invited them to come and have breakfast with him, and they knew without a shadow of a doubt this was Jesus. It was the third time Jesus had appeared to them after he was raised from the dead.

John wrote this fishing story (and the rest of his account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection) so that we might believe and have eternal life. Do you believe it is true?

Herset is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

History is a story written by the finger of God.

—C.S. Lewis

Any of the just who make the passage through this life—not just at this place and this time—all constitute the one body of Christ while they are each individually members of Christ.

—Augustine

Not only is our view of the present colored by our history, but our view of history is also colored by the present and by the future we envision.

—Justo L. González

Next to the Holy Scriptures, which are themselves a history and depository of divine revelation, there is no stronger proof of the continual presence of Christ with his people, no more thorough vindication of Christianity, no richer source of spiritual wisdom and experience, no deeper incentive to virtue and piety, than the history of Christ's kingdom.

—Philip Schaff

Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.

—Deuteronomy 4:9



BY PASTOR MATTHEW BALLMANN

Sir Isaac Newton, the famous English scientist, once said, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Newton understood that anything he discovered was because of the work and insight of those who had gone before him. It takes true humility to admit that all we have has been passed down to us or built upon those who have gone before us.

The modern attitude is quite the opposite and believes all that came before us is to be thrown out as naive, laid aside as unhelpful, or cast away as oppressive. The mantra is loud and clear, “We will blaze a new bold way forward; we will leave behind the shackles of our forebearers.”

I would suggest that contrary to the modern attitude, this first principle remains true for those of us who are part of Jesus Christ’s Church. We are who we are today as the AFLC not because we discovered it ourselves but because of the Holy Spirit’s work through Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedel, and before them, Philip Spener, and before him Martin Chemnitz, and before him Martin Luther, and before him Jan Huss, and before him John Wycliffe, and before him Augustine of Hippo, and before him Basil the Great and Athanasius, and before them Irenaeus and Ignatius of Antioch. We stand in a long line of blood-washed children of God, filled by the Holy Spirit, who study the life-changing Word of God, repent and believe the gospel each day, and grow in love of our Savior and neighbor.

While there is always a danger of each generation forgetting what they have been given by the one before, we should always seek to consciously stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. And yet there can sometimes

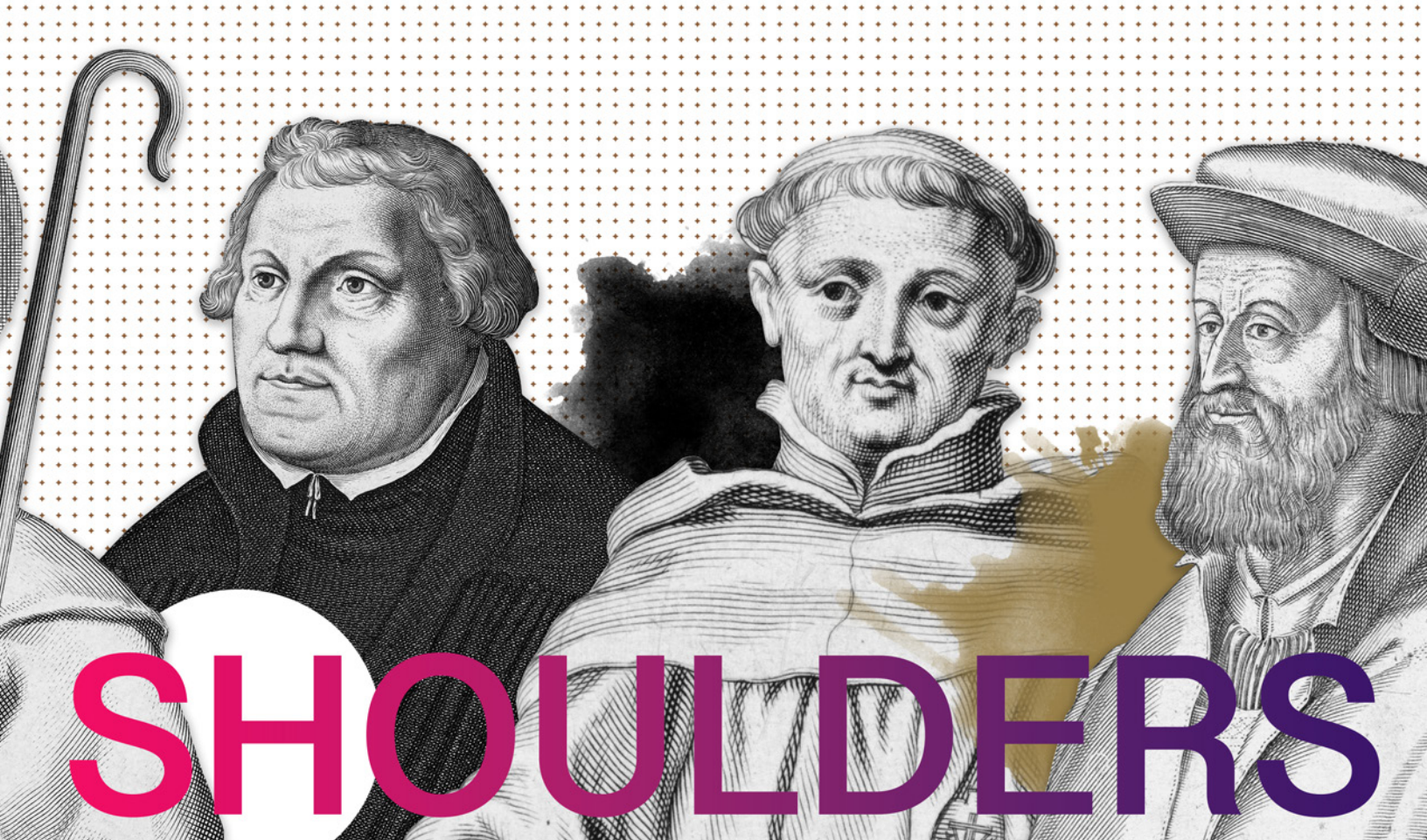
be a fear, arrogance, or lack of desire to learn from those before us. Why is that?

In recent years there has grown an unfortunate confusion in what is meant by the term *Sola Scriptura*. This term means the inspired and inerrant Word of God is the Christian’s supreme authority in all spiritual matters. Theology is ultimately subject to the Scriptures alone. *Sola Scriptura*, on the other hand, is the idea that the Bible is the only authority for the Christian, giving prominence to personal interpretations removed from the Church. But the Lutheran church teaches that the Scriptures should be read in community, interacting with the teachings and insights of Christians past and present.

These teachings and insights are what we might call “tradition.” But wait! Do we as Lutherans believe in tradition? It all depends on the definition. If one means an authority over Scripture, we reject this. If one means simply learning from what has been passed down from generation to generation, then we accept tradition.

G.K. Chesterton called tradition “democracy extended through time ... the democracy of the dead.” Or as Jaroslav Pelikan defined it, “the living faith of the dead.” So tradition should be understood as those teachings, emphases, and practices which have been held and passed down from generation to generation. To consciously engage with tradition means we move from passive recipients to active participants; this both protects us from unhealthy tradition and opens the treasure box of beneficial and Christ-honoring tradition.

Valuing those who have gone before is not a new idea



SHOULDERS

but has been part of the Lutheran hermeneutics from the beginning. The Lutheran reformers taught and modeled engagement with tradition not as a source of divine authority but as an interpretative help in reading God's authoritative Word. Two such reformers were Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard.

Chemnitz (see article on pages 12-13) reflected on the categories of tradition in his *Examination of the Council of Trent* (Part I) where he outlined eight types of tradition, seven being profitable and one being unprofitable. In this same work, Chemnitz wrote,

For we assign to the writings of the fathers their proper and, indeed, honorable place which is due them, because they have clearly expounded many passages of Scripture, have defended the ancient dogmas of the church against new corruptions of heretics, and have done so on the basis of Scripture, have correctly explained many points of doctrine, have recorded many things conquering the history of the primitive church ... Therefore we examine with considerable diligence the consensus of the true, learned, and purer antiquity, and we love and praise the testimonies of the fathers which agree with the Scriptures.

Johann Gerhard is another one of the theological "giants" of Lutheranism. His treatise, *Method of Theological Study*, dedicates roughly 25 pages to how one is to read the church fathers. Here he argues that while the church fathers are not inspired and make errors, they should not be

ejected from the church but read as witnesses, guides, and luminaries:

... their writings should by no means be expelled from the church or ripped out of the hands of theological candidates but should by all means be retained because of the commendable benefits one may expect to receive from reading them. Thus, it is not the case that they should have no authority just because divine authority is denied them. They are not judges of the faith but witnesses and guides. They are not deities but luminaries.

Gerhard goes on to provide an extensive list of principles for how we should read the fathers and incorporate their insights into their interpretation of Scripture. "Nearly all orthodox theologians follow the footsteps of Luther and Chemnitz by combining patristic [early church] opinions with the testimonies of Scripture," he wrote in his *Method*. In other words, if one wants to follow in the footsteps of the Lutheran reformers, they should read and learn from the church fathers.

As children who have received an enormous inheritance, our hearts should be filled with deep humility and gratitude for those who have gone before us. We are also invited to listen and learn from them as we seek to walk as faithful disciples of Jesus. May this serve as an invitation for us to humbly and gratefully seek the wisdom of those who have gone before us.

Ballmann serves Trinity Lutheran, San Antonio, Texas.

BY PASTOR ROB EDWARDS

Sometimes Christians today think that doctrine is a dirty word and that the differences between denominations don't really matter all that much. Many think that we should forgo distinctions altogether for the sake of Christian unity. This is how so-called non-denominational congregations got their start—their members didn't want to officially identify with one brand of Christianity. But, if you dig deep enough, you'll find that even non-denominational churches hold particular doctrines.

Having differences in doctrine among Christians is inevitable. Not everything can be true at the same time and in the same way. Does baptism save or doesn't it? Did Jesus' death on the cross atone for sin universally or is it limited in its effect? Can we reach a state of perfection in this life or not? It's clear that not every teaching can be correct. Because we're still sinners, Christians won't agree on everything in Scripture. That's to be expected. But when it comes to heresy, someone has to stand for the truth and speak out, even if it means you're the only one who does.

Athanasius was a man who did just that. Living in Alexandria, Egypt, at the beginning of the fourth century, young Athanasius showed great promise even though he hadn't received a theological education. The city's bishop, Alexander, took notice and made sure he received the proper training.

It was said that the depth of Athanasius' knowledge of the Scriptures far surpassed that of anyone else in his day. He had a zeal for the Word of God, something that would come in very handy later on when he took over as Bishop of Alexandria in 328 AD. By this time a theological firestorm had been raging for about ten years. A popular pastor named Arius had been teaching that Jesus was not God and, therefore, was not eternal; he taught that Jesus was the highest created being. Many people sided with Arius' argument. Emperor Constantius even promoted it later on. But tenacious Athanasius would continue the fight for the truth of God's Word.

For Athanasius, previous church fathers had firmly established from Scripture that the eternal Word (*Logos*) became incarnate in the man Jesus Christ, proving that He was not a creature made in time. They had concluded from Scripture that Jesus was "begotten" of God before the creation of the world. In other words, there was never a time when the Father did not have His Son—their relationship has eternally been one of Begetter and Begotten.

But let's ponder for a moment what it would mean if

Arius was correct in his assertion. If Jesus was a created being and not "of the same substance as the Father" (Nicene Creed), would salvation be possible? No, it most certainly would not. And, if Jesus was just an exalted creature, wouldn't that mean that we're pagan polytheists? Athanasius certainly thought so. For Athanasius, Arius' false teaching completely destroyed the gospel.

Athanasius knew that if Jesus was just a human like all of us, He would be unable to be our Savior. If Jesus was not God, He would be under the same curse and condemnation and would have needed a Redeemer himself. If Jesus was just a creature, we would still be held captive by the power of sin and death. But because Jesus is God, we can say with Paul, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (I Corinthians 15:55).

It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to live the perfect, blessed life that Adam was meant to live—but He had to be God to do so. It was also necessary for Jesus to die the cursed death that we deserved. But He wouldn't have been a perfect sacrifice or risen from the grave if He wasn't God. All this means that we could never have forgiveness or eternal life if Jesus wasn't God. After all, how could an inferior creature grant something that He didn't have the power to give?

The New Testament is clear on the person of Christ: He is the eternal second person of the Trinity. The doctrine of the two natures of Christ is essential to the concept of salvation. Likewise, the doctrine of the Trinity was also denied when Christ wasn't upheld as fully God. When someone denies the Trinity, it puts them outside the Christian faith. Because Scripture resolutely affirms the concept, we must stand on its truth, as well.

Athanasius must have felt like he was alone at times. And still he pressed on, never giving in or falling back. The truth of God's Word must be fought for; these doctrines still need to be defended today. Eventually, through other church fathers and strong push back against the heresy, Arianism lost most of its influence.

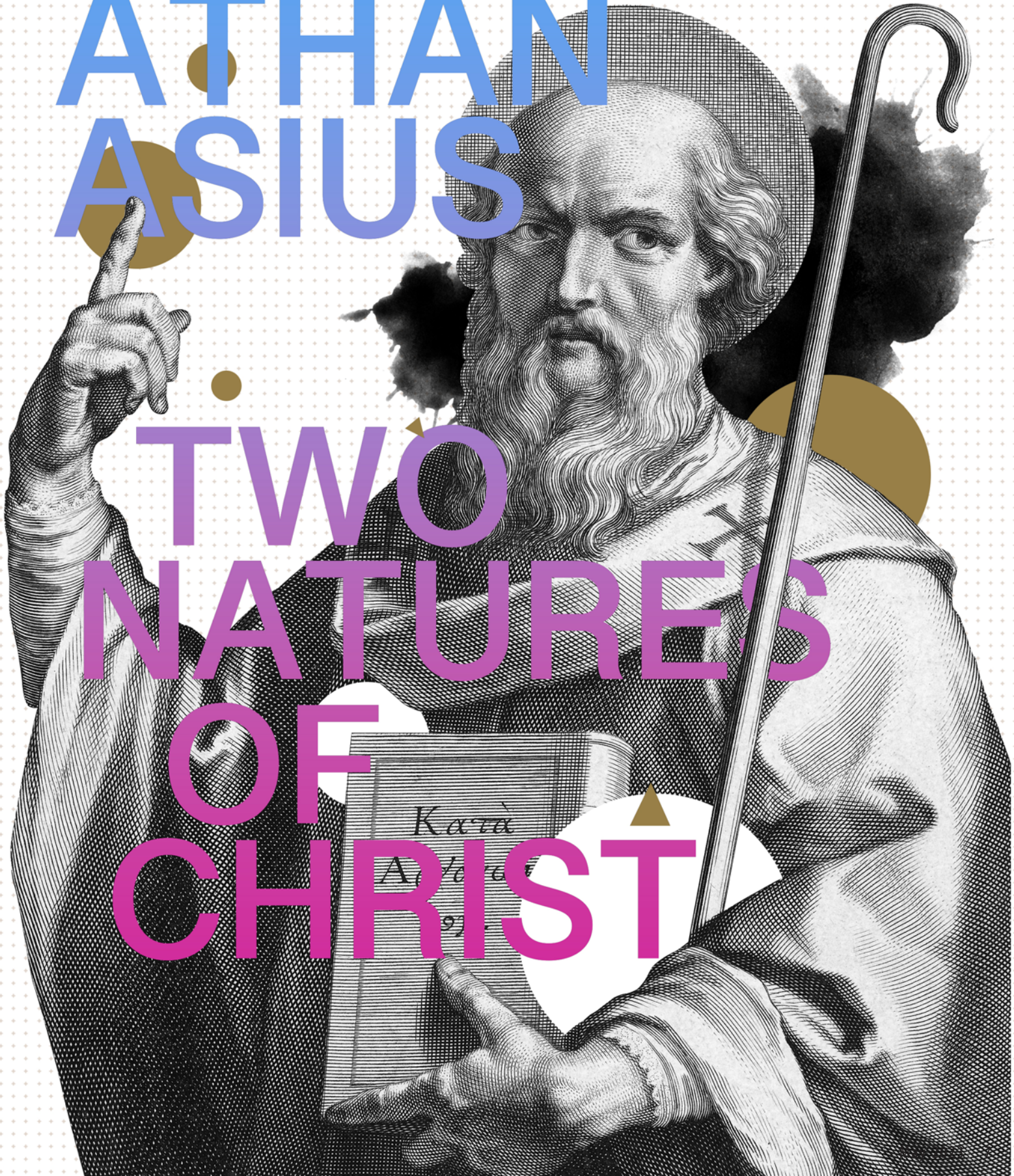
Athanasius died on May 2, 373 AD. He was considered a hero by many in Egypt. Unfortunately, he didn't live to see the doctrine of the Trinity fully formed in the Nicene Creed (AD 381) or in the Athanasian Creed (late 4th or early 5th century).

Arius was wrong about the nature of Jesus. Thankfully, Athanasius was faithful to Scripture even if it meant the world was against him. May the Lord likewise find us faithful in our day.

Edwards serves Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn.

ATHANAS ASIUS

TWO NATURES OF CHRIST



BERNARD

DEVOTED LOVE OF CHRIST



BY ERICA HUNT

As involved spectators of church history, it is easy for the modern-day Christians to look back on the Medieval Church with criticism and judgment. And it is true, this era of the church is full of complex hierarchies, misplaced worship, and a confused view of asceticism. The Medieval Age spans approximately from 500 AD to 1400 AD. This period of almost 1,000 years includes the geographical expansion of Christianity as well as the increase of the church's political influence and involvement. As the age of the apostles faded and the reach of Christianity grew, the church experienced the challenge of functioning over many nations, political spheres, and continual growth. The church had to answer big questions and wrestle with many ideas including: Who held what roles within the church? How should the sacraments be practiced? How much influence should a political ruler have in the church, if any? These teachings and doctrines were tested, debated, and defended.

These are questions the church will always wrestle with, and despite the many flaws of their age, the church today could learn a lot from our medieval predecessors. One man who was influential in the shaping of the church during this period was St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a monk, teacher, and deeply devout man of God. His writings and teachings have had far reaching affects in the church, even today.

Bernard was born in France in 1090 to a wealthy, noble family, which gave him access to a good education. He thrived in the academic setting, especially the humanities. His love for literature and rhetoric developed throughout his life, and he had a natural gift of persuasiveness. His decision to become a monk was finalized after the death of his mother, who had long encouraged Bernard to enter the church. Bernard persuaded a group of friends and family to join him at Citeaux Abbey in France. Citeaux was a small Cistercian order, which was formed to create an emphasis on one's relationship with God through isolation, prayer, and study.

Bernard thrived under the order of the Cistercians; he loved the lifestyle it offered and studying God's Word. He practiced the disciplines that had become important to those in the Medieval Church: monasticism, mysticism, prayers, fasting, and self-denial. He grew into a gifted teacher, speaker, and writer, and these skills, coupled with his desire to love and serve God, led him to quickly become a leader at Citeaux. He wanted to retreat permanently from the world and live in isolation, but that was not to be.

Bernard excelled in this order and is credited for its growth. After three years at the abbey in Citeaux he and others left to establish a new abbey. The place that they chose to settle was a marshy swamp called Wormwood. The establishment of the monastery was difficult, and Bernard carried on the work while battling much illness. But over time, God blessed the work of these men, and Wormwood transformed into its new name, Clairvaux, which means "clear view." Clairvaux flourished under the leadership of St. Bernard. As Clairvaux grew, and students came and went, Bernard was sought after for teaching, advice, and political consults. He traveled widely, even though he was often sickly.

As spectators of the past, we may look back and see Bernard's shortcomings. His political influence, allegiance to the popes, his recruitment of men to an ultimately unsuccessful second crusade, and his public disagreements with other preachers show that there is more complexity to this man, who like all men, was a sinner.

But despite his faults, it is evident in the many surviving copies of Bernard's writings that he took these disciplines seriously. These writings are deeply intimate in nature, revealing a personal and desperate relationship with God. Christians may be familiar with hymns based on some of Bernard's writings, such as, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" and "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee." Bernard's passion and work for God continued until his death in 1153.

Bernard's life and the church of his day share flaws, yet they also share a deep and intimate love for Christ that is undeniable. This love fueled a monastic movement that preserved the Bible during this era. Monks and nuns were instrumental in missions and proclaiming the gospel to unreached groups of people all over the world, as well as caring for the physical needs of the poor and sick. This love for God brought people into the monastic life and was deepened by the disciplines and commitments to praying, studying, and knowing God's Word. Yes, there were faults and problems in the Medieval Church, but these issues are not a lot different from those the modern church faces today. Believers today still struggle with grace and works, freedom of life or disciplined life, isolation from the world or involvement. But they can also take examples of the lives of men and women, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, and be encouraged and inspired by the intimate relationship and love he showed for his Savior.

Hunt is a member of Shiloh Church, Blackhawk, S.D.

BY C. PHILIP JOHNSON

Nearly 700 years ago an Oxford scholar held the radical idea that the laity, not just church leaders, should be able to read the Bible. Because of his influence and teaching, a group of his fellow academics finished a Bible translation in 1384, the year of his death. This groundbreaking effort enabled any educated person of the time to read the Bible in English.

For his effort in translation and because of his then-controversial stands in other theological matters, he was condemned by the church in Rome. And, although he escaped burning at the stake, his corpse did not, as the church exhumed his body and burned it.

This man, once referred to as a “reformer before the reformation,” was John Wycliffe. Although his name is commemorated by Wycliffe Bible Translators, an organization which in a very real sense carries on his work, few Christians know anything about him.

Wycliffe was born about 1320 and died, as noted, in 1384. The 14th century is marked by tremendous political and religious turmoil, when kings and royalty ruled European countries. During Wycliffe’s life the 100 Years War raged between England and France and their allies. The Black Death took the lives of up to one-third of Europe’s population. The Roman Catholic Church saw its grip on all things ecclesiastical weaken, and the church itself was embroiled in conflict—for a time, there were two popes: one in Rome and one in France.

What impact those events had on Wycliffe is a mystery since very little is known of his early years. Many of his writings still exist, but he was not one to record personal events. His surname comes from the Yorkshire village Wycliffe-on-Tees, located about 200 miles north of London, an area then under control of John of Gaunt, son of King Edward III.

Records indicate that Wycliffe began attending Oxford as a teenager, and soon his contemporaries noticed his scholarly brilliance. His life’s work can be divided into four categories of influence:

A PATRIOT

In 1366 Wycliffe became one of King Edward’s chaplains. England was no longer content to send tribute to the pope. Although he was not a member of parliament, Wycliffe’s description of the pope as anti-Christ must have had an influence on its members. He was also part of a commission sent to France to negotiate a peace treaty, one of many during the 100 Year’s War. During this trip he became close to John of Gaunt, a beneficial association since John later protected the scholar from the pope’s efforts to arrest and silence him.

A PREACHER

More than 500 of Wycliffe’s sermons have been preserved. Mixed in with practical, spiritual exhortations are

condemnations against the practices of the corrupt church in Rome, especially indulgences, pilgrimages, and prayers for the dead—any practice which could not be found in Scripture. He also set his sights against the friars of the day who were supposed to be the spiritual shepherds of the laity. Instead, Wycliffe described them as rich and indolent, and contrasted them with faithful ministers or servants. One tangible result of Wycliffe’s teaching and preaching was the Lollard movement. The origin of the term Lollard is unknown, but it was used to describe those who agreed with Wycliffe’s doctrinal stands. How many Lollards went about the countryside preaching and teaching is unknown, but their numbers must have been substantial because a contemporary writer stated that for every two travelers one met on the road, one would be a Lollard. The movement lasted into the 15th century and resulted in increased numbers of Protestants in England.

A REFORMER

According to the church in Rome, Wycliffe was guilty of 303 heresies! No writer of the 14th century can match Wycliffe’s stinging condemnation of individual popes or the office of the papacy. In his later writings and sermons, he denounced the pope as the antichrist. Wycliffe believed the pope was unnecessary, the pope did not have the exclusive right to interpret Scripture, and the pope’s involvement in politics proved he was a heretic. Neither were priests and friars spared condemnation. Wycliffe described true priests as those who followed Christ and His example. He concluded that confession to a priest was unnecessary and indulgences, pilgrimages, and clerical celibacy are all unscriptural and should be ended.

A TRANSLATOR

Perhaps the most significant impact of Wycliffe’s ministry was his consistent assertion that the Bible is the true authority for clergy and laity and that Scripture should be available to readers in their own language. Wycliffe’s contemporaries insisted that any interpretation of Scripture conform to current Roman Catholic teachings. Not so, said Wycliffe. Scripture has the final say over any earthly authority or logic. In fact, Wycliffe pointed out that man’s thinking changes over time, but the Scriptures never change and will last to eternity. In his view all logic, law, and philosophy come from Scripture, which is to be taken as literal truth. As such, it must be available to the laity in their own tongue. Each Christian should be able to read and study the Bible for themselves rather than depend upon church authorities. Today we are free to do exactly that.

It has been said that Christians of the present are standing on the shoulders of those pioneers of faith who have gone before. John Wycliffe was certainly one of those pioneers.

Johnson is a member of St. Paul’s Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn.



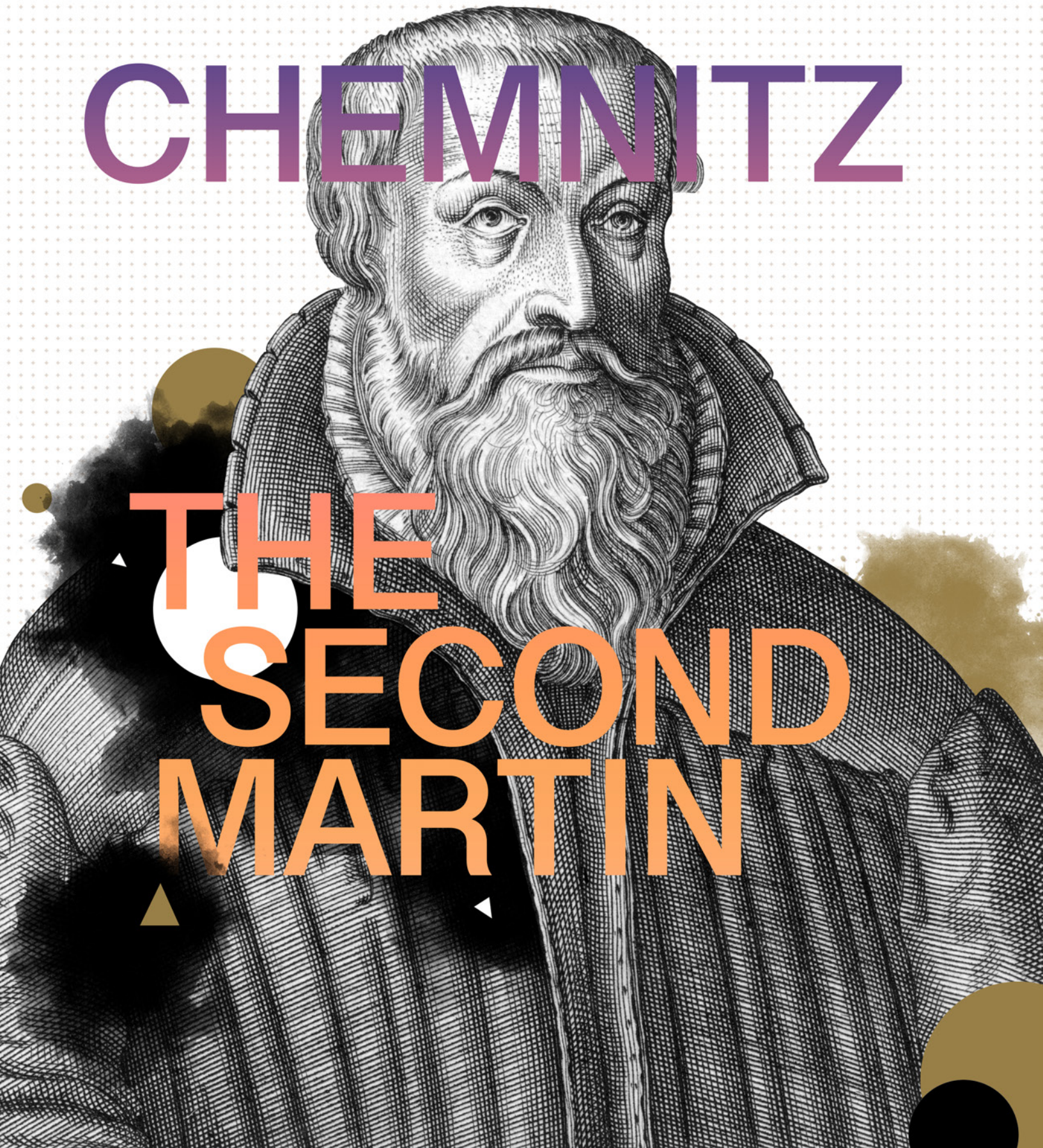
WYCLIFFE

PATRIOT
PREACHER
REFORMER
TRANSLATOR

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CHEMNITZ

THE SECOND MARTIN



BY PASTOR NICHOLAS SCHULTZ

Martin Chemnitz is often called “the Second Martin.” It became a saying about Martin Chemnitz: If it weren’t for the Second Martin the first Martin, Martin Luther, would not have stood. Chemnitz was a theologian of the second generation of the Reformation. In 1545, Chemnitz enrolled at the University of Wittenberg where he studied under Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon. He was Melancthon’s protégé, and in his autobiography admitted to not paying as much attention in Martin Luther’s lectures as he probably should have.

Chemnitz left Wittenberg in 1547 and enrolled in the University of Königsberg where he later became the court librarian to Albert, Duke of Prussia. As the librarian, he had complete access to the Königsberg State and University Library, which was considered one of the most prestigious libraries in eastern Germany until it was destroyed during the Soviet invasion in 1944.

Chemnitz devoted himself to theological study. He began by reading through the entire Old and New Testaments in their original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Then he moved on to read from those who first received the teachings of the Apostles, the church fathers. Once he had a good understanding of the early theologians of the church and had taken meticulous notes, he moved on to study contemporary theological concerns. In 1553, Chemnitz moved back to Wittenberg, where he was added to the university’s faculty and was later ordained.

By the time Chemnitz was a faculty member in Wittenberg, the Reformed Movement had, in many ways, become a greater threat to Lutherans than the Roman Catholics. On the continent, there were not only Lutherans, but also Anabaptists and Reformed followers who vied for influence. The Anabaptists were convinced Luther did not go far enough to reform the church. Anabaptists considered themselves reformers not only of the Roman Church, but the Lutheran and Reformed churches, as well. A few Reformed theologians such as John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Martin Bucer had gained good reputations and were widely published. The Reformed movement had initially crowded themselves in with the Lutherans through the *Variata* editions of the Augsburg Confession. Essentially, they accepted an altered version of the Confession presented at Augsburg in 1530. This meant that the Reformed theologians were able to bring in teaching at odds with the Lutheran confessions and sound biblical teaching. This also meant that differentiating Lutherans from

Calvinists was more difficult than it was with the Roman Catholics.

A united front was impossible. This became most clear in 1573 when some teachers in Wittenberg were exposed as Crypto-Calvinists, hidden Reformed theologians who would try to pass themselves off as Lutheran when in fact they were not. They would use carefully chosen words and phrases intended to make people think one thing when they intended it to mean something else. For instance, both Calvinists and Lutherans use the term “real presence” when discussing the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, but they mean two very different things.

In May of 1576, Chemnitz joined with five other Lutheran theologians to create a single document that discussed the controversies in their day. The document they created was known as the *Torgau Book*, which addressed the controversies brought about by the Anabaptists, Reformed, and others. A short summary of the *Torgau Book* was written, which became known as the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord*. The *Torgau Book* underwent a few revisions and, when finally signed by the six authors, was named the *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*.

Chemnitz’ heart was to ensure that the people heard the pure gospel. With various theologies being taught across the continent, it was easy to fall captive to false teaching that often sounded like what you had always been taught. The Church’s doctrine is defined only by the Scriptures. However, the presence of false doctrine forces the Church to be precise in its understanding of the Scriptures. This is how the Nicene and Athanasian creeds came about. And so, this is also how the Protestant Reformation and the entire *Book of Concord* came about.

Chemnitz understood that the discord brought by false teaching did great harm, not only to the Church, but to individual believers. False teaching inevitably robs the believer of the comfort they have in Christ Jesus. Throughout history, the Church’s response to this robbery and tainting of the gospel is to write a confession of what the Scriptures say about the topics in controversy. The goal of any confession is to clearly point out what is false and what is true from Scripture and to lead us to a right understanding of Jesus and His work. The result, Lord willing, is a pure preaching and teaching of Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection for your salvation.

Schultz serves St. Olaf Lutheran, rural Chamberlain, S.D., and Pukwana Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D.

BY DR. JAMES MOLSTRE

Philipp Spener was a leader of one of the great awakenings in Europe during the 17th century. The most important contribution he made to this revival was his *collegia pietatis* (literally, schools of piety, or small group Bible studies) and his book, *Pia Disideria* (pious desires). According to historians and observers of that day, the Europe in which Spener lived was characterized by a dead spirituality and a lack of morality among the parishioners and the clergy.

Spener wrote that the clergy was “entirely corrupt ... their lives reflect a worldly spirit, marked by carnal pleasure, lust of the eye and arrogant behavior” (*Pia Disideria*, 44-45).

The laity also was lacking spiritually according to Andreas Musculus, an influential 17th century church leader in Brandenburg, Germany. “Peasants had completely forgotten religion and loved their beer mugs more than the church,” wrote Eric Lund, a professor of church history. “They became so preoccupied with worldly pleasures that they ignored any preaching about the devil or hell and disregarded the 10 Commandments. Musculus described a Germany in which false security and contempt for true religion were so widespread that a fearsome divine punishment was imminent for these fleshpots of Egypt” (*The Problem of Religious Complacency in 17th Century Lutheran Spirituality*).

It was into this setting that Spener introduced small group gatherings on Sunday afternoon in his church at Frankfurt. These gatherings began as Sunday afternoon catechetical services open to everyone. Parents were taught the catechism by Pastor Spener during these gatherings and were expected to teach their children at home. In time, some devout men from the congregation approached Spener about the possibility of a small group gathering in which “pious minds might occasionally come together ... to confer with one another in simplicity and love,” wrote K. James Stein in his book, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch*. Unable to refuse such a request, private gatherings were convened at the Spener home twice a week from 1670 to 1682.

“I either repeated in summary fashion the sermon held the previous Sunday or repeated from the New Testament a few verses,” said Spener of the nature of the gatherings, “and then the men present discussed these things without contention or disquiet” (*Understanding Pietism*, by Dale Brown). In addition to a discussion of the Sunday sermon, the gatherings came to include prayers, devotional material, and other passages of Scripture. These gatherings were not intended in any way to replace the Sunday sermon, but to enrich it.

The small group gatherings quickly ceased to be small. Spener had standing-room-only crowds in his parsonage. So, he decided, with permission from authorities, to move the gathering to the church. By 1682 hundreds were attending the Bible studies. Spener reported that other cities were also starting small group Bible studies but with different methods.

For Lutherans in the 17th century, small group Bible studies were a novelty and lay activity even more so. Spener had hoped that through these Bible studies the priesthood of all believers would be strengthened, and it seems that it was.

“Like minded Christians gathered in homes to pray, share personal experiences, and study the Bible along with other edifying works,” write David Crowner and Gerald Christianson in their book, *The Spirituality of the German Awakening*. “The small size of the groups encouraged every individual to participate but also had a wider effect: it allowed the laity to have a greater voice than before, and thus gave concrete expression to Pietism’s belief in the priesthood of all believers. These circles, or *conventicles*, spread widely and served as a seedbed for the Awakening as well as a bulwark against the Enlightenment.”

There was suspicion and accusation on the part of those who were critical of the movement, especially the small groups. Some of the criticism is warranted, some is not. Rumors circulated at the time that wives and household maids preached at the gatherings; women denied their husbands good nourishment and took delicacies to their Christian friends; as well as more scandalous charges of which there is no evidence. The criticism of separatism, especially from the local congregation, was one that Spener was concerned about.

As the gatherings grew, the original intent of the Bible studies had to change from “pious minds conferring with one another in simplicity and love” to something too large for simplicity. Spener decided to change the format to one of a more institutional structure in the church. Several small groups left to form their own gatherings. Some separated from the church altogether. This development distressed Spener. On two occasions (1685 and 1690), Spener praised the importance of and denied that he regretted forming the conventicle. But Spener also admitted that he was not able to accomplish all that he had hoped, and history shows that as he moved on to Dresden and Berlin, he did not establish small group studies in either place. Some historians speculate that this was because he did not want even a hint of separation from the local congregation. But the pietistic movement and an awakening had taken hold as Bible studies like the one Spener started in Frankfurt spread to the towns of Essen, Augsburg, Schweinfurt, and Darmstadt. In 1677, Tübingen University faculty approved Spener’s proposal that *collegia pietatis* be instituted for theology students.

Small group Bible studies are an important part of the ministry of the Word in our churches today. They are a vital part of lay activity as parishioners come together to study the Bible. They remind us that even in a culture of moral decline, God’s Word is true.

Molstre is the dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.



SPENER
COLLEGIA
PIETATIS

PHILIPPI JACOBI SPENER

Evangelica Ecclesia Pastor. Nat.

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Victory in Christ

June 14-17 • Ramkota Conference Center, Sioux Falls, S.D.

In his book *The Gospel-Driven Life*, author Michael Horton devotes a large section to an exposition of Ephesians 4. In that chapter, Paul talks about walking “in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” and then later he quotes Psalm 68 in a reference to the ascension of Christ: “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). Horton argues that the Christian walk (life) is one long victory march where believers are swept together, following the ascended Christ in “a ground campaign of grace.” In Ephesians 4, this body of believers enjoys the spoils of victory—gifts from our Conquering King. These gifts unite us. We are united in “one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (vs 4, 5). Paul also says that this victory march is marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and grace.

In June, the AFLC will gather in Sioux Falls, S.D., for our 61st Annual Conference under the theme, “Victory in Christ.” I’m so excited for this time. Many of our Free Lutheran forefathers referred to the Annual Conference as the “spiritual powerhouse” of the AFLC. I wonder if this theme of victory touches on part of what they were talking about when they used that phrase. As an AFLC, we believe there is great encouragement and life to be found in the local congregation. We also believe that the Church is bigger than the local congregation, and when we gather with other believers from around the country, and even the world, we are reminded of the scope of the victory train that is following the ascended Christ. And that is powerful.

Come to the conference this year. Be reminded of God’s faithfulness as you listen to the reports of the different ministries. Praise Him for His generosity as you read the financial reports. Pray with brothers and sisters whom you’ve never met. Hear the Word of God preached in all its sternness and all its sweetness.

Ask the directors hard questions in their elective sessions and thank them for their work. Bring resolutions to the conference floor that will challenge and encourage the AFLC. Do so humbly, gently, patiently, graciously. Prayerfully vote for leaders. On Friday afternoon, learn from presenters about what intergenerational ministry can look like in your congregation and some of the dynamics behind the different school options for our children.

Drink lots of coffee and enjoy lots of warm fellowship. Horton compared the joy over the gospel to the dancing in the streets that happened when World War II ended. He says, “Dancing with strangers in the streets at the news of Christ’s victory, we become a community.” I assure you that as your new president, I have no intention of implementing any formal dances into our conference schedule. However, what excites me about gathering with you this summer is that we get to rejoice in Christ’s victory together, and that unites us into a community tied by eternal bonds. That’s special. That’s powerful.

~By Pastor Micah Hjermsstad, AFLC president



Conference Registration

An online registration form for the Annual Conference can be found at:

aflc.org/about-us/conferences

Cost: \$35/individual • \$60/couple

Online registration will be available through June 5. Price at the door increases to \$40/individual and \$70/couple.

- * Incumbents
- ** Must be elected or reelected to serve on board or committee
- X Nominations not named by press deadline

2024 CONFERENCE COMMITTEE NOMINEES

Committee No. 1 (Administration)

Pastor Luke Berntson, Northome, Minn.
Pastor Shane McLoughlin, Minot, N.D.

Three more nominees

Committee No. 2 (Schools)

Isak Olson, Rapid City, S.D.
Pastor Brandon Marschner, Culbertson, Mont.

Three more nominees

Committee No. 3 (Missions)

Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.
Zach Lynnes, Fargo, N.D.
Ethan Zeltinger, Fargo, N.D.

Two more nominees

Committee No. 4 (Publications and Parish Education)

Phoebe Olson, Rapid City, S.D.

Four more nominees

Committee No. 5 (Evangelism and Benefits)

Pastor Jerry Peterson, Durant, Okla.

Four more nominees

BOARD & COMMITTEE NOMINEES

Association Retreat Center

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, five-year term)
*Kevin O'Neil, Beresford, S.D.
X

Bay Broadcasting

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, three-year term)
Loren Tungseth, Fergus Falls, Minn.
X

Benefits Board

- (One layman, five-year term)
*James Rolf, Moorhead, Minn.
X

Budget Analysis Committee

- (One layman, three-year term)
Paige Moan, Ontonagon, Mich.
X
- (One layman, three-year term)
*Danielle Joyce, Anoka, Minn.
X

Coordinating Committee

- (One pastor, five-year term)
Pastor Martin Horn, Crystal, Minn.
X

Home Missions Board of Directors

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, two-year term)
No nominees
- (One pastor, two-year term)
*Pastor Luke Emerson, Saint Francis, Kan.
Pastor Nick Schultz, Pukwana, S.D.
- (One layman, two-year term)
*Hans Tanner, Fargo, N.D.
X

World Missions Board of Directors

Voted on by corporation members

- (One pastor, two-year term)
*Pastor Craig Johnson, Lake Stevens, Wash.
Pastor Ray Ballmann, Kopperl, Texas
- (One pastor, two-year term)
**Pastor Jerry Nelson, La Crosse, Wis.
X
- (One layman, two-year term)
*Ken Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
X
- (One layman, two-year term)
No nominees

Evangelism and Discipleship

- (One layman, five-year term)
Ignacio Davalos, Minneapolis
X

FLAPS Board

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, five-year term)
**Jordan Rumohr, Monticello, Minn.
Shane Voxland, McIntosh, Minn.

Parish Education

- (One layman, five-year term)
Rachel Mattson, Thief River Falls, Minn.
X

Schools Board of Trustees

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, five-year term)
*Dean Nelson, Vergas, Minn.
X
- (One pastor, five-year term)
No nominees

Youth Board

- (One layman, five-year term)
*Adam McCarlson, Plymouth, Minn.
X

CORPORATIONS

ARC Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- *Pastor Karl Anderson, McIntosh, Minn.
- *Tami Demo, St. Michael, Minn.
- *Doug Hertlein, Carroll, Ohio
- **Dr. Steven Johnson, Upsala, Minn.
- **Pastor Shane McLoughlin, Minot, N.D.
- Stephen Moan, Ontonagon, Mich.
- Jennifer Niemela, Greenbush, Minn.
- **Chad Rieschl, Brooklyn Park, Minn.
- Lois Van Someren, Amery, Wis.

Eleven more names needed

Schools Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- **Don Balmer, Thief River Falls, Minn.
- *Arne Berge, Binford, N.D.
- Pastor Luke Berntson, Northome, Minn.
- Amy Dalager, Argyle, Minn.
- Kelly Emerson, Saint Francis, Kan.
- Pastor Todd Erickson, Maple Grove, Minn.
- **Pastor Jason Gudim, Golden Valley, Minn.

Stephen Moan, Ontonagon, Mich.

*Caleb Peterson, Fargo, N.D.

James Scott Pierson, Golden Valley, N.D.

*Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, Moorhead, Minn.

Walter Rolf, Lisbon, N.D.

Greg Tanner, Fargo, N.D.

Alan Twedt, Portland, N.D.

Kristin Watson, Minneapolis, Minn.

Pastor Calvin Willard, Everett, Wash.

Four more names needed

Home Missions Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- Jim Harrington, Lisbon, N.D.
- Regan Johnson, Honolulu, Ha.
- Bria Larson, Bismarck, N.D.
- Zach Lynnes, Fargo, N.D.
- *Pastor Brandon Marschner, Culbertson, Mont.
- *Sarah Meester, Valley City, N.D.
- Nathan Moen, Colfax, N.D.
- Luke Quanbeck, Minneapolis, Minn.
- **Jordan Rumohr, Monticello, Minn.

Hannah St. Cyr, Champlin, Minn.

*Rodney Scheel, Fergus Falls, Minn.

**Pastor Tom Tuura, Stover, Mo.

Pastor Brian Westerbur, Grafton, N.D.

Seven more names needed

World Missions Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- Pastor Karl Anderson, McIntosh, Minn.
- *Pastor Brian Davidson, Ashby, Minn.
- Pastor Dean Feistner, Madison, S.D.
- Cody Halvorson, Beulah, N.D.
- Larry Herzog, Valley City, N.D.
- Pastor Jarrod Hylden, Beresford, S.D.
- *Pastor George Lautner, Clarion, Iowa
- **Pastor Jerry Nelson, La Crosse, Wis.
- Kristin Peterson, Valley City, N.D.
- Zachariah Ritland, Hubbard, Iowa
- Joan Smith, Minneapolis, Minn.

Nine more names needed

June 14-17 • Ramkota Conference Center, Sioux Falls, S.D.

The AFLC's 61st Annual Conference will be held June 14-17 at the Best Western Plus Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center in Sioux Falls, S.D. The conference theme, "Victory in Christ," comes from I Corinthians 15:57.

Registration and Meals

Registration for the conference is available online. To register, please visit aflc.org/about-us/conferences. The cost of registration is \$35/individual, and \$60/couple. Online registration will be open through June 5. To register over the phone, call Chanel Nelson in the AFLC president's office at (763) 412-2001. Walk-up registration will be available for late registrants at an increased price of \$40/individual and \$70/couple.

The conference registration form includes meals available at the conference center. As you register, please refer to the conference schedule (subject to change) at right for the pastor's banquet and ministry luncheons. A full version of this schedule is available on the AFLC conference web page. Meals will not be available for purchase on site and must be purchased before registration closes on June 5.

Housing

Reservations for housing must be made separately by the registrant. A limited number of rooms are available at the conference center. Other local housing options are available, including local hotels, camp sites, or online housing rentals such as VRBO or Airbnb.

Children and Youth

Childcare, vacation Bible school (VBS), and youth activities will be available June 14-17. Please register all participants on the AFLC conference registration form available at aflc.org/about-us/conferences.

VBS activities will be provided for children entering preschool through those entering 6th grade. Summer teams from the Free Lutheran Bible College and volunteers will lead daily Bible lessons, music, crafts, and recreation during morning and afternoon business sessions, and children will join their families for lunch and dinner.

Childcare will be available for those 3 years old or younger during the morning and afternoon business sessions. Children in the nursery will join their families for lunch and dinner. If you plan on using this service at any point during the conference, please register your child/children for accurate planning.

Youth activities are available for students entering 7th grade through those who have completed 12th grade who register for the teen track. Morning activities will include worship, Bible study, and fellowship. After lunch with their families, students will head off site for afternoon activities. There is no additional charge for participation in youth activities.

WMF Day

WMF Day will be held beginning at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, June 14, under the theme "Rescued and Redeemed" from Colossians 1:13-14. Registration for the event is available online at aflc.org/women/wmf-day through June 5. A link is also available on the AFLC conference page. The cost to attend is \$25/person or \$45 with Wednesday's luncheon included. No meals can be purchased after June 5. Contact Margie Lee, WMF treasurer, at margieleend@gmail.com, with further questions.

Rekindle the Fire

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will offer a one-day event on Tuesday, June 13, at Living Word Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. The free event will begin at 3 p.m. under the theme, "Sharing Jesus in a Post-Christian America." Speakers include Pastors Jason Holt, Brady Arneson, and Randy Nelson. Dinner and childcare will be provided. For information and to register visit aflc.org/evangelism/rekindle-the-fire.



Nominee biographies due

Nominees to the AFLC Annual Conference are asked to submit short biographies to the AFLC president's office prior to the conference. The biographies will be made available to conference attendees at the discretion of the Conference Committee. The biographies will be solicited for nominees to boards and committees only, excluding corporations, conference committees, and the Nominating Committee. Biographies should be submitted to Chanel Nelson, executive secretary to the president, at chanel.nelson@aflc.org.

Annual Conference Schedule

Ramkota Conference Center, Sioux Falls, SD

Wednesday • June 14

9 a.m. Board/Conference Committees
7:30 p.m. Opening Ordination Service

Thursday-Saturday • June 15-17

8:30 a.m. Devotions
8:45 a.m. Business session
10:25 a.m. Morning break
10:50 a.m. Business session
11:40 a.m. Prayer time
Noon Lunch
1:15-2 p.m. Ministry electives (Th, Sat)
Lecture option (Fri)
1:15-3 p.m. Corporation meetings (Fri)
2:15-3 p.m. Ministry electives (Th, Sat)
Lecture option (Fri)
3:30 p.m. Business session
5 p.m. Pastor's banquet (Th)
5:30 p.m. Dinner (Th, Fri)
7:30 p.m. Communion service (Th)
Mission Festival service (Fri)

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



REMEMBERING OUR SISTERS IN CHRIST

BY MARY AADAHL

President Theodore Roosevelt is credited with saying, “Praying mothers are America’s greatest asset.” That profound statement reminds me of my mother, Harriet Rolf. Born in 1921 on a farm in western Minnesota, she grew up with Christian influences, including a bed-ridden half-sister who loved Jesus. Precious times were spent in this sister’s room memorizing poems, songs, and Scripture. Later at Bible camp, Mom received assurance of salvation, and thoughts of Bible school began. At the Lutheran Bible Institute in Minneapolis her faith matured. This was where she also met Kenneth Rolf, her future husband.

Along with raising six children on a busy dairy farm, Mom was very active at Trinity Lutheran (McIntosh, Minn.) with children’s ministries and served in local, district, and national WMF offices. She also authored the 1977 women’s Bible study on Philippians, a book she had earlier memorized. Daily family devotions at breakfast were central in our home, but Mom also treasured her quiet times alone with Jesus on her knees. Her family knew they were loved and prayed for along with a lengthy list of other people and needs. Remembered for her kind hospitality, Mom graciously welcomed many into our home, including pastors and missionaries who stayed overnight.

After 100 years of challenges and blessings, even a failing mind did not prevent Mom from quoting the entire 46th Psalm shortly before her death. The Word of God that she had “hidden in her heart” sustained her through every season of life. To God be the glory!

Aadahl is a member of Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn.



BY GWEN HAUGEN

Last fall my congregation, Faith Free Lutheran in Minneapolis, lost a dear sister, Charlotte Fruehauf. Charlotte was my friend as well as my sister in Christ for more than 30 years. One of the things I miss is seeing her at our WMF each month. She served as president for decades—our group figures that if it was good to have you in a position for a year it must be good forever. Charlotte’s love for the Lord and His Word wasn’t something that was put on for the day or just when others were around. She loved having Bible study together and praying for each other’s concerns.

It was impossible to think of Charlotte getting older. I remember driving to a district WMF rally a few years ago. A couple of ladies from our small group, including Charlotte, rode with me. We were to serve the morning coffee and treats. I pulled up to the church to unload our food before I noticed the sign that said, “Senior Parking.” I apologized to the others in the car for not noticing and started to back out. A small voice from the backseat said, “We’re seniors.” That was Charlotte.

Haugen is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis.



As we gather together on WMF Day we take time for a memorial service to remember the dear ladies in our congregations who have passed away. Please be sure to share those ladies from your congregation with Executive Secretary Dawn Johnson. Email Dawn at ctk@wwt.net.

Grove installed at Hauge Free Lutheran Church

Pastor Larry Grove was installed March 19 at Hauge Free Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., with Pastor Eric Westlake from Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn., officiating. Pastor Grove completed the lay pastor course work required by the AFLC Coordinating Committee and was approved for the AFLC licensed pastor roster in the summer of 2022.

Prior to serving as pastor at Hauge, Grove led Bible studies and served in other church leadership roles as well as having a drywall business. Pastor Grove and his wife, Joan, reside in rural Wanamingo. Pictured are members of the Hauge council (back row) along with Pastor Westlake (right front), and Pastor Grove and his wife, Joan (left front). Submitted photo.



2023 SEMINARY GRADUATES

JAMES SCOTT PIERSON

Northome, Minn.

Hello, my name is James Scott Pierson. My dad and I have the same first names but different middle names, so I've gone by Scott for my entire life. I was born in Sandusky, Ohio, to Jim and Sharon Pierson, and moved to Northome, Minn., before I started eighth grade. I consider Northome my hometown and Hope Lutheran my home church.



My family would occasionally go to church in Ohio but I didn't have much of an understanding of anything "churchy" before I moved to Northome. We began going to church more regularly after we moved. I really became aware of my own sinfulness and need for a Savior the summer after ninth grade.

It was at a Bible camp that I would say my faith became my own. From there, I continued to grow in my understanding of God's Word. After high school, I attended the University of Minnesota—Duluth for a year. I felt the call to ministry the summer after my first year of college and decided to transfer to the Free Lutheran Bible College (back when it was called AFLBS) since I didn't know how to go about becoming a pastor.

I graduated from AFLBS in May 2015 and continued my education at Oak Hills Christian College in Bemidji, Minn., graduating with a bachelor's degree in pastoral ministry in 2018. I began seminary that fall. After my first year of seminary, I took a year off to just work and focus on growing as a person. I came back in the fall of 2020 and am glad to be finishing this chapter of my life.

I really learned to trust in the Lord through my time at seminary. I know that He has a plan and that He is in control. I look forward to finishing my internship at St. Paul's Free Lutheran in Fargo, N.D., and serving as a full-time pastor.

JOSEPH LARSON

Ortonville, Minn.

I was born on July 17, 1996, as the youngest son of Rick and Deanna Larson. I was then baptized into the faith, a faith in which my Savior has sustained me ever and only by His gracious love and powerful Word. My father served as an AFLC pastor at three different locations while I was growing up: Abercrombie, N.D.; Fairbury, Neb; and Ortonville, Minn., where Abiding Faith has remained as my home congregation.



After high school, I spent two years at our Bible school (FLBC) where I was challenged by the Word and given confidence in my Savior's work. It was also here that I met my wife, Sarah Anderson (daughter of Pastor Karl and Debbie from McIntosh, Minn). I was blessed to serve in youth and dorm ministry while completing a bachelor's in religion from Liberty University Online.

In the summer of 2019, Sarah and I married and then moved into our first home: a seminary housing unit. Classroom studies provided a chance to anchor myself in the Scriptures and our confessions. Partway through our three years there, we saw Covid-19 sweep through the world, causing disruptions, fear, and uncertainty. More than ever, the unchanging Word of God that we were studying was needed.

Internship year allowed me to serve in Beulah, N.D. The Word of God that started and sustained me in the faith was now put on my tongue to comfort, encourage, and bless the congregation. No longer was I studying the Word for just my own soul, but also for the sake of the congregation. Going forward now into ministry, the same Word that delivered to me my Savior will be the Word that I will continually point to for salvation and the equipping of the saints.



REFORM OR RESTORE?

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

Over the years, I have been involved in fixing many buildings in our AFLC mission in Brazil, be it churches, seminary classrooms, camps, campus housing, or the Miriam Home. As the ministries have grown, so has the need to better accommodate those who use the facilities. But the question we always ask is, do we reform or do we restore them?

Maybe it makes more sense in Portuguese than in English, so let me explain. When I reform something like a car, I will replace broken parts, put some putty in the rusted holes, sand it down, and paint it. In the end, the car will look nice and run fairly well, yet the car will still have many old parts that can break. The same could be said about old buildings. You can change some bad wiring or fix a leaking roof, or install new drywall, but the building will still have issues because they

were ignored or went unnoticed.

On the other hand, restoration means tearing everything down to the foundation. Restoring a car means fixing it from the chassis up, making sure that every part is new or totally restored. All that is bad is trashed. When you are done, you have a car that may look old in style, but it is a brand-new car. Similarly, some buildings must be totally restored from the foundation up. Basically, you make a new building.

I often think of the difference between reformation and restoration when I work with people. God doesn't cover up broken parts, He restores them!

"And he who was seated upon the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true'" (Revelation 21:5).

This is hope; this is joy! As I work with people who have messed up their lives so badly that everything seems hopeless, I am reminded that God can make them new, and I have seen Him do just that.

Mikula and Valdecir can certainly attest to restored life. She was a terrible alcoholic, and he was a wild, bull riding cowboy whose bull riding was the least of the wild things he did. Today they are servants of Christ living totally transformed lives as caretakers of our camp. Their work shows that they are doing it for the Lord.



Pictured (from left): daughter Duda (second year Bible school student at SETELL) Mikula, Valdecir, and daughter Maiara.

They also are very involved in our Free Lutheran church in Coapar. They have a Bible study one night a week in their home and are also a big help to all the churches in Campo Mourão. If you want something done, call them, and they will do it with smiles on their faces and laughter the whole time. These two are bubbling over with joy, and everyone loves them. They are a true testimony of God's restoring grace. Their example is a reminder to us of God's grace, which is so abundant that it gives us hope and joy as we serve Him.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Maringá, Brazil.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Jason Siemens, Leduc, Alberta, Canada, has been elected as the president of the AFLC Canada. Siemens is a 2000 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College and a 2004 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary. The role was held on an interim basis by Pastor Al Pinno, who filled in for Pastor Kelly Henning, who recently passed away.

Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, attended the **2023 AFLC Canada Annual Conference** at the end of March in Frontier, Saskatchewan.

Reformation Lutheran, El Cajon, Calif., has closed and members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee have removed the congregation from the AFLC roster.

Pastor Ken Marquardt, Forest Lake, Minn., was moved from the fellowship roster to the retired clergy roster.

Pastor James Lindgren, who serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D., and Center Free Lutheran, Salem, S.D., was moved from the fellowship roster to the clergy roster.

Kirstie Skogerboe, Orange, Calif., was hired as the digital communications coordinator for ministries within the AFLC General Fund, including Youth Ministries, Evangelism and Discipleship, Parish Education, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, and the Coordinating Committee.



Pastor Jerry Holmaas

Jerry Melvin Holmaas, 70, of Thief River Falls, Minn., died March 17, at his home. He married Ruth Gunderson in 1974.

Born May 26, 1952, in Thief River Falls, he was the son of Stan and Ruby Holmaas. He graduated from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (now FLBC), Plymouth, Minn., in 1972. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1975 from Moorhead State University. Feeling the call of God, he attended the Free Lutheran Seminary in Plymouth and the Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minn., before going to graduate school at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill., where he earned a Master's of Divinity and a Master's in Hebrew and Old Testament. He served as a pastor for 15 years in Toronto, S.D.; Ottawa, Ill.; and Chassell, Mich., before accepting a call in 1995 as full-time faculty at the AFLC Seminary and Bible School, where he taught Hebrew and the Old Testament for 14 years before retiring.

Surviving are his wife, Ruth; one son, Luke (Rachel) Holmaas, Madison, Wis.; three siblings, Marlene (Phil) Rokke, Wanda (Kevin) Spading, and Russ (Vickie) Holmaas.

The service was held March 25 at Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn., with Pastor Kevin Hall officiating.

Congregational ministry spotlights sought

The October issue will feature spotlights on congregations that have developed ministries in specific areas that serve their congregations and their communities. We hope to include areas such as visitation, hospitality, teaching, foreign missions, multiplication, music, community outreach, tithing, and grief counseling. We hope these spotlights will

encourage our readers to consider how they might best serve their congregations through the spiritual giftings of their members.

If your congregation fits one of these areas or if you have an idea for an area of ministry to spotlight, please contact us. You may email ruthg@aflc.org, or laeditor@aflc.org.

Your gifts support the AFLC's monthly magazine

The AFLC's monthly magazine, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, is now free for all subscribers. The ministry is subsidized by your gifts. For more information on giving to our ministry, contact via email at lasubscriptions@aflc.org. Or, visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

MARCH MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Gerrie Jacobi
Elijah Finstrom

FLAPS

Pastor Paul Nash

Home Missions

Pastor Paul Nash
Elijah Finstrom
Darrel Bacon
Joseph & Thelma
Jenson

**Lutheran
Ambassador**

Elijah Finstrom

Parish Education

Bob Yates
Pastor Jerry Holmaas

Seminary

Joseph & Thelma
Jenson

Youth Ministries

Elijah Finstrom

WMF

Mardene Slaathaug
Bill Oxner
Elijah Finstrom

World Missions

Robert & Adeline
Soderbeck
Barbara Hall Silva
Jensyn Salvavold
Betty Gauger
Vernon & Dorothy
Russum

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-March 31, 2023

| FUND | REC'D IN MARCH | TOTAL REC'D TO DATE | PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| General Fund | \$30,488 | \$109,566 | \$135,397 |
| Evangelism | 12,679 | 32,079 | 36,182 |
| Youth Ministries | 20,997 | 47,111 | 51,035 |
| Parish Education | 9,395 | 29,857 | 35,278 |
| Seminary | 18,924 | 70,567 | 68,366 |
| Bible College | 28,499 | 100,623 | 108,746 |
| Home Missions | 24,012 | 80,946 | 104,257 |
| World Missions | 37,305 | 103,362 | 137,387 |
| WM Personal Support | 75,913 | 196,536 | 219,168 |
| TOTALS | \$258,213 | \$770,645 | \$895,816 |

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

FISH & BONES IN CHURCH HISTORY

The stone blocks were ancient. They looked ancient, they felt ancient, they even smelled ancient.

Our tour guide led us further along the underground tunnel, explaining as we went that these stone blocks formed the Western Wall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed long ago, and the ruins have been restored and



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

expanded many times over the years. But these stone blocks in front of us were laid during the reign of King Herod the Great, more than 2,000 years ago.

I was with four of my seminary classmates on a whirlwind tour of Israel several years ago. We had spent the last three days exploring the sights, sounds, and history of Jerusalem, walking where Jesus walked. Jerusalem is an ancient city, but I hadn't truly grasped *how* ancient—until we came to a section of the wall that looked slightly different.

The guide said to us, “This is a newer part of the wall. It was built during Emperor Hadrian’s reign, in about 130 A.D.”

There aren't many places in the world where something 1,800 years old is considered “new,” certainly not on this side of the Atlantic. I don't have much experience with ancient history—I got excited last week when I found a quarter from 1967!—but it's good for all of us to think historically and be regularly reminded of our place in this big, big world. There are ancient stone blocks everywhere that can teach and encourage us.

History without charity, though, leads to elitism. A good knowledge of history should spark humility, but it often does the opposite. It's easy for us to read about the Early Church, for example, and criticize how no one seemed to understand the right relationship between faith and works. Or

how it seems like everyone in the Middle Ages forgot what the church should look like. Or how the revival preaching in the 18th and 19th centuries never seemed to understand the gospel. If we find a bone in our fish, it's easy to throw out the whole meal.

Let's be charitable readers of church history. Let's know what we believe and guard it zealously but be willing to learn from those who have gone before us. Our particular faith group doesn't have a monopoly on faithful exegesis. Christians have lived in many different places through the years and have spoken many different languages. They read and interpreted their Bibles in worlds that looked very different than our world.

The categories and concepts they used could be slightly different than ours.

The earliest Christians didn't talk about salvation like the reformers did, but they focused on other elements that we barely mention today. The monks of the Middle Ages had different ideas about the church than we do, but they have plenty of valuable things to say about other issues. How might you be blessed, challenged, equipped, encouraged, or stretched by opening the pages of church history?

It's healthy for us to regularly admit that maybe we don't have all the answers. Maybe there is a better way to understand or explain some truth. Doctrine is important, and we should never compromise the truths we believe and teach. Scripture teaches us to handle the Word accurately and diligently. But we can still learn from

someone even if they thought and spoke differently than we do.

Studying church history opens our eyes to the vastness and beauty of how God has worked among his people through the years. Our heritage of faith didn't start with the founding of the AFLC. It even stretches beyond the pietistic movement of the 17th century and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Our history is measured by thousands of years, not hundreds. We share the faith with countless millions of believers who have lived before us. From Abraham to King David, from Peter and Paul to Athanasius, from Bernard of Clairvaux to John Wycliff, from Martin Chemnitz to Philip Spener, from me to

you. All of us who trust in Jesus for our salvation belong to the Church and we'll all one day celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb together, worshiping with a united voice and praising the same God.

Like most things, history is filled with fish and bones. As we compare what our spiritual forefathers believed and taught

to Scripture, as we do with all our teaching, let's spit out the few bones we come across but enjoy the valuable fish found in the pages of our church history.

If you're looking for somewhere to start, I'd suggest *On the Incarnation* by Athanasius, highlighted by Pastor Rob Edwards in this issue. It's available for free online and as an audio book, but I'd recommend the translation published by the Popular Patristics Series in 2012.

*Our history
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of years, not
hundreds.*

building the base

FALLEN

BY PASTOR MICAH KLEMME

Ever since the Fall, mankind is unable nor willing to return to God. Man cannot naturally receive the things of God (I Corinthians 2:14). In the last century, debates over Holy Scripture took center stage. Now the focus has shifted to issues regarding humanity. What is man? What is man's purpose? These issues stem from a fallen nature, which suppresses God's revelation and seeks substitutes to fill a spiritual void. Yet creation itself reveals enough about God to leave no excuses for rebellion against Him (Romans 1).

The idiom, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall," comes to mind with the God-substitutes of our day. When mankind itself is elevated to fill in the void in people's hearts, disappointment becomes inevitable. Empires rise and fall. On a smaller scale this happens often. Many have had heroes in their lives only to be disappointed when their flaws are made public. There are no true heroes to be found here on earth. Except for One.

People have changed their views of language to suit their God-substitute of choice. Some are using words to force societal change instead of using them to communicate the truth about objective reality. Long-held definitions don't matter compared to furthering an agenda. Behind this worldview is a quest to undermine the current status quo and start over in hopes for a greater society. But what prevents people from doing this later down the road? Some assume they know a way to make paradise on earth, but they fail to understand the fallen nature of man. As a beloved fictional butler put it, "Some men just like to watch the world burn."

In the age of information, Christians have access to a vast horizon of viewpoints from all around the world, some of which seek to erode the foundation of our faith. Leaders in the church may struggle to know which issues may be most pressing, for they are legion. For all that is out there, topics tied to matters of salvation are worthy of engagement and issues that have nothing to do with it are trivial. Evil must be endured for the sake of those still caught in the snare of the devil. Opponents can come to the saving knowledge of the truth. As fellow fallen beings for whom Christ died, they

must be treated with gentleness (II Timothy 2:23-26). The battle is not fought against flesh and blood.

Correctly teaching man's fallen nature is vital to understanding the gospel. If mankind has hope only in itself, evil is overlooked and underestimated. Christ becomes at best a good role model. Worst of all, mankind would be stuck in a state of rebellion against God. When opponents come and bring in their God-substitutes, the Church must be ready to counter with something better: Jesus Christ, the One revealed in Holy Writ as the given substitute for man's fallen condition. Unlike the deceitful words of men, God's Word enacts change in the heart, turning rebels back into citizens of heaven.

Whatever shifting ideas meet our minds today, the Lord is our steadfast hope. He became the great substitute for the world's rebellion. He is the entrance to paradise. He is the proof that God cares for humanity despite its fallen state. "What is man, that you are mindful of him" (Psalm 8:5).