

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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If Traditional Christianity is so Irrelevant why all the Irreverence?

The Contemporary Worship crowd, those who are saying the church will die unless we worship in such away as to touch them where people live (feelings/ emotions) and meet them where they need (child care, child raising, financial planning, or wanting to help others), harangue churches like ours. Pastors like me are labeled “maintenance” pastors by District and Synodical leaders. We are not interested in building the kingdom. In that much they are right. I’m not interested in building God’s kingdom. I am interested in proclaiming that His kingdom has been built for a long, long time. After all Jesus proclaimed almost 2000 years ago, the kingdom is here. I don’t think it has left since then.

But I digress. If my kind of traditional, liturgical, conservative Christianity is so passé, so irrelevant to today, why is it lampooned and contemned (Yes, it’s spelled right. Look it up.)? When TV, movies, songs, and comedians attack Christianity, it’s our “brand” they’re attacking in most cases. Occasionally, the mega churches are in the bulls eye, but usually it’s our crucifixes, our Lord’s Prayer, our Communion, our Baptism, our symbols, our ways, our vestments, our liturgies that are being parodied, derided, or ridiculed.

The psychopath is going to have tattooed on his body Bible verses not passages from *The Purpose Driven Life*. The serial killer is going to have a traditional shrine

with altar, candles, and crucifix in his basement, not a contemporary theater in the round. The loony tune is going to be shown donning “vestments” and going through a “liturgy.” He’s not going to be shown in a Hawaiian shirt and being as casual and nonchalant as he can be

The Devil, the World, and the fallen Flesh are not threatened and see no force behind the Contemporary, Emergent, Cutting-Edge, or Bleeding Edge “church.” C. S. Lewis, I think, said it was only permissible to make fun of people or things that were above you, not below you. The traditional church, her liturgy, her hymns, her symbols are seen as above the Devil, the World, and the Flesh, not so the non-traditional, non-doctrinal “church.” It has no weight, no gravitas, no enduring substance behind it, undergirding it. It is what men want to do *now*. It’s how men want to be church *now*. If you don’t like it, wait 3-5 years and it will change. The unholy three know this and see no need to identify such churches as threats. No need to bring the gates of hell against these churches. Much less than that will prevail against them.

But that’s not really my argument. My argument is that if the way we worship, the way I preach, what I teach is so irrelevant, why are these what the world around us vents its spleen against? These aren’t irrelevant, powerless, or pointless to them or they wouldn’t take the time to attack them so.

That wasn’t his nom de guerre. Martyr was. There was a reason for that. He was an apologist not a satirist. About the same time Justin Martyr was making a defense for the Christian faith Juvenal was satirizing the Roman Empire. Justin was martyred for his apologetics; Juvenal might have been exiled, but he wasn’t murdered. I watched a Lutheran satire on Mormons. It is spot on regarding the point of attack, but I still wish I hadn’t watched it. Let me tell you why.

I’m not in favor of making points by satire for the same reason that I was not in favor of making Pro-Life arguments with gruesome pictures. I said at the time, 25 years ago, that the Pro-Abortionists would respond with kinder gentler pictures, and they did. I think non-Lutherans are better at satirizing than Lutherans and unbelievers are best of all.

Many of our cherished Lutheran points can be satirized. So you believe in a Real Presence that you admit has no physical manifestation? You believe that the Gospel cannot be accepted but that it can be rejected? You believe that salvation is solely by grace and that God is gracious to everyone but all are not saved? You believe the finite is capable of the infinite, that 25 pounds of flour can be stuffed in a 5 pound sack?

Picture a scene like the one in the Lutheran Satire video featuring the two grizzled Lutherans and the Mormon Missionaries. Have it be two Reformed pastors in Geneva gowns and two Lutheran pastors in albs. Have the dialect flow fast and furious between the two Reformed

Justin Long-Lived

Posted 3-2-2015 by Rev. Paul Harris

pastors with them directing yes and no questions to the Lutherans. Our position will be made to look at least funny and maybe ridiculous.

My second reason for not teaching by satirizing is that we train our people to think satire makes points, wins arguments, or advances truth. The end result is we train them to learn from it rather than simply be entertained by it. We train them to be more vulnerable to satire.

Just because you can laugh at something doesn't mean you have overcome it or won the day. The early Church had apologists and martyrs. They left the satirizing to the unbelievers. I say we leave it to Saturday Night Live, Family Guy, and The Simpsons. What is worth dying for is worth being laughed at; this you could learn from Justin Martyr. Not everything that can be laughed at is worth dying for. This you could learn from Juvenal and this is not what we want to teach.

Redeeming Holy Days from Pagan Lies-Easter 1

April 10th, 2014 Posted by Pastor
Joseph Abrahamson

This is a reposting of a pair of articles published last year on the origins of Easter and some Easter traditions. The sources are given so that the reader can better be able to debunk the popular "historical" nonsense about the origins of Easter. The whole series is available at Diatheke Christianity and Paganism.

Easter is the English/Germanic name for the Festival of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This particular Feast Day is the heart and center of the whole liturgical practice of the Christian Church Year.

Because it is at the center it is under great attack by those seeking to discredit this liturgical festival. If these people can maintain that Easter is really originally pagan,

then they undermine Christ, His Passion, death and Resurrection.

In this article we will look at:

- Passover as the historical Biblical origin of the Christian liturgical Church Year;
- The historical development of the date of Easter/Resurrection/Passover;
- Claims of Pagan Origin or Influence, including:
 - The origins of the pagan goddess Eostre;
 - The historical Lenten Fast that lead to the use of Eggs in association with Easter;
 - And the particularly Christian use of the hare/rabbit as a symbol for the Trinity and the Resurrection.

Passover as The Origin of the Christian Church Year

The three High Festivals of the Christian Church Year are Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. All of these days were established in the early Church on the basis of the biblical dating of Passover. Any festivals that are tied to the dates of these Holy Days are derived from their relationship to Passover.

This means that, contrary to claims from many different sources, the choice of dates for these Festivals and those tied to them have nothing to do with pagan origins.

Let us say that again and more clearly: The dates for Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and all those church holy days that are directly tied to the dates of those holy days are all based originally on Passover. None of these days were chosen due to pagan influences. None! The actual choice for the date was based on what God declared to Moses in about 1,440 B.C. on Mt. Sinai.

There are Christian festivals that are not directly tied to these dates, those are dates such as the commemoration of Saints. Those days were chosen for their own

reasons: usually to commemorate the calendar day on which a person was born or died.

But the relationship between the Passover, Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas is an historically demonstrable fact through the writings of the Church Fathers. And this relationship to Passover is essential to understanding the theology of the Promise and Fulfillment in Christ as well as the establishing of the First Covenant and its fulfillment in the New Covenant.

About 1,470 years before the Son of God instituted His Holy Supper, that same Son of God commanded Moses and the Congregation of Israel saying: 12 Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ² "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. ³ Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight."

The ordinance for this festival and the Festival of Unleavened Bread is that the month of Abib become the first month of the religious calendar. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are the basis in the Books of Moses for calculating the two other major festivals of the liturgical year:

- the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) 7 weeks and one day, which marks

remembering God's revealing of the Covenant at Mt. Sinai at the end of those weeks (Exodus 19). The remembrance is tied together with the harvest of the Firstfruits and the requirement to offer the best of the firstfruits to God.

- the Feast of Tabernacles is calculated being the full moon seventh month (a sabbath month) from the first month. All the congregation was required to gather before the tabernacle each year on these three festivals.

And just as the Passover Lamb was selected on the 10th of the First Month, the scapegoat and the sacrificial goat for the Lord were selected on the 10th of the Seventh Month—The Day of Atonement.

Everything in the liturgical year is keyed upon Passover in the Old Testament. This key event does not get put aside in the New Testament. Rather, the Passover takes on even greater significance as it is fulfilled in the Passion and Resurrection of Christ.

While Clement of Alexandria attests to the fact that there were a handful of different days of the year that people thought the world was created, the view expressed by Clement (c.150 – c. 215), Hippolytus (170 – 235), Julius Africanus (c.160 – c.240) and others at the close of the 2nd century A.D. were the most widely accepted. That view was that the world was created March 25th, Christ was conceived March 25th, and Christ was crucified March 25th. March 25th also was the equinox. Which made this date easy to calculate.

Thus we can see that the choice of this date was also a public confession of the Hypostatic Union of the Two Natures in Christ. Observing Creation, Incarnation, and Passion on the same day confessed that it is the Son of God, the Creator, who became human and so intimately united Himself with humanity by suffering as a man in humanity's place.

We are not evaluating whether March 25th was the actual date that these events truly happened, we are demonstrating the early rationale for and the early widespread acceptance of this date in the teaching and practice of the Church.

This dating was the basis for later the work of Dionysius Exiguus (c. 470 – c. 544), and widely enough established in the late 2nd century to be used as proof by Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225 AD):

And the suffering of this "extermination" was perfected within the times of the lxx hebdomads, under Tiberius Caesar, in the consulate of Rubellius Geminus and Fufius Geminus, in the month of March, at the times of the passover, on the eighth day before the calends of April [March 25th], on the first day of unleavened bread, on which they slew the lamb at even, just as had been enjoined by Moses. (An Answer to the Jews, 8.18, emphasis added)

This view formed the basis for the Alexandrian Era and held in the ancient Church up to the 7th century A.D.

The Christmas Cycle separates from the Easter Cycle

While the early church equated March 25th (the equinox) with the Incarnation of Christ, all those dates related directly to that date became fixed on the calendar. However, the Passover changed each year because it was based on the lunar cycle.

How Did Easter Get Separated from Passover?

So the problem became, when should Christ's Passion and Resurrection be celebrated? Should it be held relative to Passover regardless of which day of the week it occurred? Or should it be held on the days of the week named in the Gospel narratives regardless of which day of the week the Passover actually occurred?

The debate is called "The Easter Controversy." It is actually several different controversies through the centuries about the same issue. Records about this debate and from this debate date back to the early and mid 2nd century. And the question of when Easter should be celebrated and how it should be calculated led to many writings of the early chronographers and calendarists.

There were two main parts to these controversies. First, whether Passover and Resurrection should be observed on the 14th of Abib or on the Sunday following. The controversies following this had to deal with the best way to calculate the Passover accurately.

Why Sunday Weekly Worship

Sunday became the focus of Christian worship because it is the Day of the Resurrection of Christ (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1, 19).

The weekly Sunday worship focused on the Passover given and instituted as the New Covenant fulfilling the Promise (Gal. 4). Paul testifies that the Lord's Supper was celebrated and tithes were gathered at worship on Sunday (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2). Weekly Sunday worship with the Lord's Supper is weekly observance of the Passover in Christ, but not the passover of the Old Covenant. It is the partial fulfilment of the Passover with the New Covenant. The complete fulfilment of the original Passover waits until the Return of Christ on Judgement day.

¹⁴ When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:14-16)

Often moderns will make the same claim made by the Puritans,

that Christians cannot worship on Sunday because that is a pagan day devoted to a pagan God. The Puritans tried to argue that the early church did not worship on Sunday but that this gradually came about as Christianity gave into paganism and wordliness.

But worship on Sunday was considered a vital confessional practice even while the Apostles were still alive. Ignatius (30 AD – 107 AD) wrote in *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, Chapter 9 (ANF 1:62-63):

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death—whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master—how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead. (emphasis added)

And later in the same chapter:

But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, "To the end, for the eighth day," on which our life both sprang up

again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ, (emphasis added)

It was on a Sunday that the Apostle John received the Revelation of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 1:9-10)

Justin Martyr (AD 100–ca. 165) bears witness to this unity of dates and practices (also pointing out that the Mithraists copied Christian practice in his time with regard to the ceremonies and sacraments of the Church) [*Apology* 1:66 --ANF 1:p. 185]. Justin highlighted the significance of the day and the liturgical practice in the following passage:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Sav-

our on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration. [ibid. 67, ANF 1:186]

The First Easter Date Controversy (up to 190AD)

So by the time the first main controversy about Easter became an issue, most congregations outside of Asia-Minor already celebrated Resurrection on the Sunday following the Passover.

But in Asia-Minor there were several congregations that maintained the practice of celebrating the Crucifixion on the 14th of Abib. These people became called "Fourteenthers" [Quartodeciman].

Eusebeus (Hist. 5:24) records the words of Irenaeus at the time: 12. "For the controversy is not only concerning the day, but also concerning the very manner of the fast. For some think that they should fast one day, others two, yet others more; some, moreover, count their day as consisting of forty hours day and night.

13. And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time; but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith." (NPNF2-01: 243 emphasis added)

Irenaeus stated that the difference in calendar observance was not divisive of fellowship.

There are two important things to note about this controversy:

First: The question of whether 14th Abib or the Sunday following

pre-dates this controversy. The practice of a Sunday Easter service is shown by Irenaeus' and Justin's letters. The practice of Sunday observance of Easter probably dates back to the Apostolic times.

Second: The issue at hand was when to break the fast for the Resurrection. We have already seen that the 40 day Lenten fast pre-dates Constantine. We see here in Irenaeus that fasting traditions varied from place to place but were considered old traditions.

The choice of the Church to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Sundays is very ancient, probably from the Apostolic period. The choice had nothing to do with Roman pagan holidays or any other pagan holiday. It had to do with making a clear Christological confession about the Christ-the suffering Servant, the God-Man incarnate who redeemed us from sin, Satan, and death itself.

The Second Easter Date Controversy (323 A.D)

This debate took place as part of the Council of Nicea where Athanasius worked against Arius. This is the council that the Easter-haters point to claiming that Constantine usurped the church and brought in pagan customs and dates.

Sunday Easter service was already the norm throughout Christianity by this time. The issue at the Council was which is the best way to calculate when Easter would occur.

The desire was to have all the congregations celebrating on the same date. But that could not happen by depending upon the rabbis fixing the month by physical observation. One of the complaints recorded is that dependency on such physical calculations might allow Passover to be celebrated twice in one solar year.

The practice was to wait until the rabbis had "set the month by observation" (היאיר יפ לע שדחה שודק)

or by means of reckoning (שודק החדש על פי השבון).

[From "Mishna Torah, Book of Times, Regulations for the Sanctifying of the Month" הנשמ הלכות קידוש החדש -ספר זמנים -תורה הכול פרק ב] -

The Council sought to keep the Passover in Christ from being arbitrarily decided and to have the date uniformly kept throughout the church at large. They set the equinox as the earliest possible date of Passover—already established by early tradition as the day of Creation, Incarnation, and the original Crucifixion.

Nothing in their discussions or in any of the surviving evidence suggests that these dates were chosen or influenced by any pagan practice or teaching. All the actual contemporary evidence points to a great concern that the Passover be marked accurately for the sake of confessing the Hypostatic Union of Christ and His saving work in His Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection.

The Third Easter Date Controversy (c. 600 A.D)

Churches in the British Isles which had been established early were using a different method of calculation than were the churches in the Mediterranean area. The calculations used in the British Isles were using the formula from the time of the Roman occupation, the formula that the church at Rome had made improvements to. The Easter date in the British Isles had nothing to do with pagan worship, but was based on the older method originating with the churches in the Mediterranean area. When this older method was replaced it had nothing to do with pagan practices. The churches in the British Isles were just conforming to what had been established by the Church at large in the Mediterranean world.

[Thurston, H. (1909). Easter Controversy. In The Catholic En-

cyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved March 26, 2013 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05228a.htm>]

Summary

The date of Easter and the rest of the High Holy Days of the Church are rooted in the observance of the Passover and have no roots in any pagan practice. The Passover was established by God nearly 1500 years before the fulfilment of the Promise in Christ's death and resurrection. The Church sought to clarify how this date chosen in the calendar and help make the practice consistent throughout the Church.

None of the controversies surrounding the dating of Easter had anything to do with pagan practices. Essentially these controversies were either disagreements on whether to observe the 14th of Abib rather than the Sunday following, or disagreements on the best way to calculate when the Biblical 14th of Abib (the Passover) would take place.

Anyone who contends that the dates were chosen on the basis of pagan sources is making a claim contrary to all actual evidence from the actual periods.

Report of the 2015 Annual ACELC Free Conference and Business Meeting

Bart Goddard ACELC Board of Directors
Dear Members of Trinity,

Pastor Harris and I again attended the ACELC Free Conference, February 10-12, 2015, at your expense. I thank you for your support, even though Thursday morning the Weather Channel said, "12 degrees, feels like minus-1." The theme this year was *Unbiblical Removal of Pastors from their Calls (Part II of Office of the Holy Ministry.)* Copies of the papers and sermons are available at the ACELC website: <http://acelc.net/>.

Besides the excellent papers presented at the conference, a few interesting things happened at the ensuing business meeting. There are now 25 congregations in the ACELC, with another handful promising to join soon. The "Becker Incident" seems to have stirred up a new wave of interest in the work of the ACELC.

Work continues on preparing study guides to go with the film project. There are to be 10 study guides to match the 10 error documents. As of this day, the first 7 guides are finished and available at the website above.

The document *Seven Theses on Holy Communion* is being re-worked. Recall that Trinity went through the draft of this document in Adult Bible class and we had some serious reservations about it. Other congregations had similar input. Pastor Poppe is working on an amended version.

It was decided that non-LCMS congregations would not be allowed to join ACELC, even if they were from synods in altar fellowship with us. Members of non-LCMS churches will, however, be allowed to join as (non-voting) associate members.

ACELC is now a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, so now donations are tax-deductable.

My term and Pastor Poppe's term on the Board of Directors expired this year, under the "staggered" system adopted last year. We were both re-elected.

New Business:

1. A motion to accept and submit a resolution to the 2019 synodical convention was passed, which, in essence directs the president of synod to form a committee to work out a Biblical adjudication process to replace the current ineffective "Dispute Resolution Process."

2. I made a motion that addenda be prepared for each of the 10 errors documents, which were aimed at the laity and specifically an-

swered the question, "How does this error obscure the comfort of the Gospel?" After some conversations, I became convinced that the laity in the LCMS needed a slogan, and I'm using "I want my grandchildren to have the same Gospel comfort that I have had" as an unwieldy, working draft. Motion passed.

3. The ACELC bought and continues to own video equipment which could have been used to make videos of all the presentations and sermons. I thought this had been taken care of, but the videos were not made. Since I'm the chairman of the "Media and Technology" committee (a committee consisting of one person, who is fairly resistant to technology) this failure really falls on my shoulders. So I made a motion that the Board of Directors ensure that someone mans the camera at all future conferences. So now if we fail to make videos again, it will be an actual infraction.

4. Pastor Harris raised, again, the issue of having the ACELC Free Conference be truly a "free" conference, meaning that we should try to have the opposing viewpoints represented. Recall that we did this for the 2012 conference in Austin. This idea is controversial. One objection is that it might give the appearance of putting heresy on equal footing with orthodoxy. Another is that finding even one speaker to give the opposing view is a monumental task. In the end, it was agreed that the ACELC would "try as far as practicable" to make the conference more free.

Although they likely find our zeal tedious at times, I'm sure the balance of the ACELC is deeply appreciative of our membership. Thanks again for your support.

Marriage in a Godless Culture

West Point Circuit Presentation October 26, 2014. Rev. Philip Hale
St. Paul, Bancroft; St. John, Lyons

Continued from previous newsletter

Order of Creation

Marriage is of the world and man's bodily nature, not the Holy Spirit. As such, it is not regulated by the Church, but by society. This does not conflict with God's work. He is not bound by the preached Word, like we are, but He regulates and upholds all things. Government does not actually join the two into one, though legal protections uphold that divine union. Society must take it as a natural given of this world. Neither can the government prevent this permanent joining, since it happens also in a physical act. It does, however, have the role of governing the use of it. Marriage in itself is a worldly matter for the state to deal with, not the Church.

While thoroughly divine in itself, marriage is for this world only: "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mt. 22:30). When our bodies are glorified, the distinctive bodily characteristics are not destroyed, but the use of those bodies in marriage will stop. There is no "Christian" marriage, there is only worldly, bodily marriage.

Even where laws do not prescribe it, society has customs and some means of recognizing the public character of marriage and the voluntary entry into this estate. "To speak of marriage is to talk about humanity."¹ Even the 6th commandment "you shall not commit adultery" does not explain or encourage marriage, it simply assumes it.² This world must have marriage to continue and prosper. "Marriage is the most important legal contract in every society."³ It is more than a legal matter, it is the basis for this life.

Marriage is "an independent social institution ordained by God and equal in dignity and social responsibility with the church, state and other estates of society."⁴ In fact, it is older than the State or the

Church. "While marriage is a divine institution the form in which a marriage is contracted is determined by the society in which the marriage takes place; and while it is true that [consent makes matrimony], that consent must have the approval of the social organism in which it occurs before the marriage is valid."⁵ "Marriage has been described as biological act, as a legal contract, and as an economic arrangement."⁶ Oneness in body includes oneness in these outward things. Though marriage has nothing to do with salvation, the first Lutherans "were far removed from the thought of surrendering marriage to the profane, that is, to an order detached from God."⁷ Marriage is completely worldly, yet still holy and divine.

Who marries? Even though couples, ministers, and civil servants claim to "marry," God is the one who joins two bodies into one. He does not delegate this uniting, just as sure as He made everyone male or female. We do not get to choose what sex we want to be. God does not give that choice away. The word "the two shall become one flesh" cannot fail in its aim, though people do fail and break what God has joined. It is not human acknowledgment or acceptance of this divine word that makes it effective. We may say every marriage is a miracle, a divine working of God, because it is. God unites apart from faith or knowledge of Him.

Our Lutherans confessions say: "Since natural law is immutable, the right to contract marriages must always remain." But nature cannot be separated from its Creator and upholder: "a natural right is truly a divine right, because it is an order divinely stamped upon nature."⁸ Man may try to change nature (as transsexuals superficially attempt) and marriage, but both are as fixed as male and female, by God's design and present working.

Even today for all attempts to redefine a legal union, homosexual unions are not that popular. This legal change is really not about marriage, but a pursuit of equality and civil rights. But true marriage cannot be changed. People entering it can have false expectations and assumptions regarding this permanent fixture of creation. Man can rebel against it, but no other solution is workable, practically, for the survival of the human race. God has not made us for any other arrangement, so marriage will endure. But the Church must take it seriously, even if society doesn't. God declares: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Heb. 13:4).

Part Two

The influence of Christianity has been great since it was legalized in 312 A.D., though it seems to have mostly dissipated.⁹ But government and marriage are God's creations and "these stations must remain if the world is to stand."¹⁰ Every successful culture must die, and we are witnessing our nation's decay. We have more in common with the early Christians, when New Testament was written, than any other time. Early Christians were in basically the same counter-cultural position as modern biblical Christians, fighting against the killing of young children, the widespread use of contraception, "against sexual immorality, and against extravagant weddings, easy divorces, and routine remarriages."¹¹ The "early fathers also used the Bible to criticize prevailing roman practices of concubinage, homosexuality, infanticide, child abuse, arranged marriages, [and] raucous

weddings."¹² (Notice that big, expensive weddings are sign of the decline of marriage and family in the culture. The more that is made of the wedding day, the less is made of married life and its duties.)

In no way do we have a Christian society. A loss of morals and the breakdown of the family will eventually ruin our country. There will not be enough people to support the welfare spending of the state. To get people we must have children, but that goes against love and happiness today. It has also changed marriage from an institution for society into a private contract it is only about the two. Yet our hope is not in laws or government action, but in Christ who empowers it and allows this world to be populated and continue for a short time. It is passing away, but those in Christ live forever.

While a strong government would be more pleasing to us, it would not help marriage. Laws don't make people better they are for the evil-doers, to retrain them. The righteous in Christ have no need of such force, since "the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality" (I Tim. 1:9-10).

The government is presently having an identity crisis. It is rebelling against what God gave it to do, just like men and women don't want to be what they are. The state does not want to rule the body and promote posi-

tive order, but enforce an outward equality by law and tax code. But laws cannot grant status before God or erase our biology. The government obliges citizens and thinks it is granting freedom and equality by allowing divorce and homosexuality. This is really slavery to sin. Only God's Word can free, but this is an internal freedom, not a license to go against our very nature and bodies. "Civil servants" have really become "agents of affection," instead of servants of the law.¹³ Heterosexual-only marriage is now described as a type of racism. The government no longer protects the innocent: children and mothers (because women wanted to be treated like men). The government does not want to govern, in other words.

How is the Christian to react to the state not doing its job by promoting family and society? Marriage as God's work cannot be undone, even when laws allow sinners to separate what God has united. But we do not need to change the institution of marriage through laws, or encourage civil disobedience (by avoiding public marriage). Sinners have never loved marriage. Only the Gospel makes us guilt-free and renewed before the Father, so that it is possible to love God, including His work of marriage. Marriage will endure, even if many marriages do not. "In the state, because of the hard-heartedness of man, God suffers divorce to be issued even in such cases where He has not dissolved the marriage. These divorces, however, are null and void before the forum of the church, which is ruled not

by civil law but by divine law."¹⁴

We live in two kingdoms, one earthly ruled by the government, and one heavenly ruled by Christ through His Word. The Church is not about changing public laws, but instructing consciences. We do not force people to marry, but speak the Word of God. That means spiritual discipline also. Most public sins pastors deal with are related to the 6th commandment. But if we accept sin, we cannot forgive it. We were not baptized into sin, but to live a new life. Christ died in the body, so it matters what we do with our body. They are temples of the Holy Spirit. Sexual sin is sin against the body and drives out the Spirit. And without the Spirit there is no faith, therefore no forgiveness.

The Christian sees marriage as God's Work. Human infatuation (or believing in love) is not a solid basis for an enduring union. Rather, God's true love is shown in Jesus' suffering and death. In response, the married Christian bears his marriage troubles willingly. We are not to run away from God who unites in marriage. He made it and we trust He bless us in it.

Married Christians know where God wants them to bear their cross. An opportunity for good works is never far away. This institution is not a matter of internal nourishment (that benefits us), but an outward duty that God places upon man. "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him" (I Cor. 7:17). It is said also "But if the unbelieving

partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace"(I Cor. 7:15). Notice it says only the "unbelieving partner" breaks a marriage. A Christian ruled by the Spirit simply cannot do it. Whoever does we should not recognize as a Christian until they repent. Christ calls us to be faithful, not because our spouse deserves it, but out of duty to the living God.

When marriage is seen as God's work, it will also be seen as a God-pleasing way to live, apart from any personal benefits. What is law, legal constraint, and a prison to the world (a spouse is called a "ball and chain"), becomes a divine calling, a holy vocation to the Christian. Since God wills it, a wife becomes the most lovely possession on earth, "one that God has given me and has adorned with his word beyond others, even though she may not have a beautiful body or may have other failings. Though I look over all the women in the world, I cannot find any about whom I can boast with a joyful conscience as I can about mine: 'This is the one whom God has granted to me and put into my arms.'"¹⁵ This is not a spiritualizing of marriage, but we see that the God who saves us is also active in marriage. And He only wants the best for us in Christ.

To be continued

1 Wilhelm Maurer, Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 165.

2 Elert, The Christian Ethos, 77.

3 Bronislaw Malinowski, "marriage," in Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed. (1929), quoted in: Lenski, Marriage in the Lutheran Church, 8.

4 Witte, From Sacrament to Contract, 6.

5Johann Michael Reu, *Christian Ethics* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 266-67.
 6The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 261.
 7Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529-1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 291.
 8Ap 23:8,9,12; Kolb/Wengert, 249.
 9Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 44.
 10Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 37.
 11John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012; 2nd ed.), 75.
 12Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 54.
 13McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, 67.
 14Theo. Laetsch, "Divorce and Malicious Desertions," in *Concordia Theological Monthly* (Dec. 1932), quoted in Reu, *Christian Ethics*, 271.
 15Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 95.

Are the Errors We Face Serious?

Pr Dan Bremer Speakers Bureau Chairman of the ACELC

It is Sunday morning, I have a few minutes before church begins, and I decide to look at Friday/Saturday's mail. In my mail is the latest issue of the "Reporter." I begin to read. I see in it that enrollment for our Concordias have hit a record 36,250 students. I think to myself, "that's great since 2 out of 3 of my children graduated from Concordia, Seward, and another one will graduate this December." I read on. I see that there was a conference in Fort Wayne where 170 pastors and lay leaders gathered to discuss disasters and how we respond to them. That, too, is wonderful. We always need to learn how to respond when our neighbor is in need. That's part of our vocation.

If the truth be known this month's Reporter is full of many interesting, informative articles showing a very positive side to our synod's workings. I encourage you to read it if you haven't done so already.

But, then I came to a section that troubled me. On page 5 of the Reporter the editors included a section entitled, "More Than Oversight – COP meeting spotlights training, mercy, outreach, mission." In this article I read that the "COP meetings involve a lot more than oversight of administration issues – the council members evaluate weighty matters like theological training for church workers, mercy efforts and world mission..." The article went on to describe some of these "more than" issues. Licensed Lay Deacons, Lutheran Malaria, President's Report, pt. 1, Mission Update, Reflections on "China mission" and the President's Report, pt. 2 with all the subtitles. I'm sure that all these causes are worthy of our COP's time, no one would argue that, but I couldn't help but notice some glaring matters that are missing. What about the errors we face in our beloved Missouri Synod... where are those being discussed, and if they are discussed why can't those discussions be shared with the rest of us?

While I find the issue of "infant communion" a worthy study for our CTCR, one has to wonder why more pressing items aren't included? The ACELC has submitted three dissents to the CTCR and they have yet to officially respond to any of them, except to ask us to hold all three in abeyance for an indefinite amount of time. To be fair they said they would respond to one of the three which we resubmitted last April, and we will hold them to that, but aren't women serving as elders and presidents, laymen acting like pastors, and pastors participating with heterodox – and sometimes even non-Christians in worship services worthy of news?

It almost appears that the errors we face in our synod are not important enough to be taken up by our

leadership. China is, but not what we are facing as a synod.

As I read on I see that a special Reformation celebration is being planned for 2017. Great! Love to hear it! We need to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Church's Reformation. We should all be pleased with such an undertaking, but I fear that we are failing our forefathers and what they fought for – sometimes at the cost of their own lives – by not honoring the spirit of the Reformation. We seem to have forgotten that the Reformation was about the "truth that sets us free" and the errors that truth condemned.

If the Reformation only celebrated the pride we have in being Lutheran, then a celebration isn't necessary. If it's about raising more money for the LCMS, then a celebration isn't necessary. But if the Reformation is about the truth that Martin Luther rediscovered, the truth that had been obscured by centuries of faulty doctrines, the "truth that sets us free," then the Reformation does matter and needs to be celebrated.

But how can we celebrate this truth when we are refusing to deal with our own "faulty doctrines?"

Friends, the COP isn't entirely to blame here. We are the ones who have let this happen to ourselves. We, as members of the LCMS, have allowed ourselves to be placed in bondage once again by allowing Satan to secure a foothold in our churches. Our plea, as members of the ACELC, is that we deal with our issues; deal with our errors and bring them to light so that God's Word can have its way with us. It would certainly be in keeping with the spirit of the Reformation that we are about to celebrate.

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April 2015

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT |
|--|-------------------|------------|---|--|---|--------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | | | | Maundy Thursday Stripping of the altar/with communion | Good Friday Service of Darkness with communion | |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord | 5 pm confirmation | ←---Pastor | On | Vaca- | Tion----- | -----→ |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| ←-----Pastor | On | Vacation-→ | 10am Bible Class 6:30 Choir 7:15 Colossians | | | |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| Adult Class noon | 5 pm confirmation | | 10am Bible Class 6:30 Choir 7:15 Colossians | | | |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | |
| Adult Class Noon Chris ² dinner 5pm | 5 pm confirmation | | 10am Bible Class 6:30 Choir 7:15 Colossians | | | |

May 2015

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------|-----|-----|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| | | | | | | |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Adult Class noon | | Trustee's Meeting 6:30pm | 10am Bible Class 6:30 Choir 7:15 Colossians | | | |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| Adult Class Noon | | Elder's Meeting 6:30 | 10am Bible Class 6:30 Choir 7:15 Colossians | | | |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| Adult class noon ←----- | Couples | Trip | To the | Coast--→ | | |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| Adult Class noon | | | 10am Bible Class 6:30 Choir 7:15 Colossians | | | |

-----31
 Holy Trinity Sun
 Crawfish Boil
 Noon