

Christian Culture

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Luther Classical College Announces Academic Dean

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

With thanksgiving to God and prayers for His continued blessing, we rejoice to announce the appointment of Luther Classical College's Academic Dean.

Dr. Ryan MacPherson has accepted the position of professor and Academic Dean at Luther Classical College. Dr. MacPherson has had a long and fruitful career as professor of history at Bethany Lutheran College. A beloved teacher, a frequent speaker, and a tireless advocate for Christian culture, Dr. MacPherson will be a blessing to both the faculty and students of Luther Classical College.

"Dr. MacPherson is the perfect man for this appointment," writes President John Hill, the Chairman of the Curriculum Committee at LCC. "His experience teaching at the collegiate level, his work on LCC's Curriculum Committee, and his zeal for classical education and Lutheran doctrine have already brought much joy to the founding of LCC. We thank God for leading Dr. MacPherson to accept this appointment as professor and Academic Dean."

Ryan MacPherson earned his Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Notre Dame in 2003. His career at Bethany Lutheran College has spanned twenty years. During this time Dr. MacPherson has developed curricula for several different majors, making him especially suited to lead academic affairs at LCC. His zeal for the truth has also led to his becoming the founding director of the ELS' Center for Apologetics and Worldviews (www.els.org/apologetics). Always practical and concerned for the living out of the Christian faith, Dr. MacPherson also helped to found the Hausvater Project, which provides resources for fathers to lead home devotions (www.hausvater.org).

Ryan is very happily married to his beloved wife, Marie. God has blessed them with nine children, seven of whom live with them still on earth, each named for a Bible concept: Grace (17), Rose (15), Price (13), Newman (10), Joy (8), Steadfast (5), and Mercy (1). Ryan and Marie share a common passion for Lutheran theology, the liberal arts, and traditional hymnody.

Dr. MacPherson is well known across several Lutheran synods. He has appeared as a guest on Issues, Etc. and spoken at a variety of congregations and conferences. His publications and presentations reveal a passion for theology: creation, natural law, vocation, marriage, catechesis, the two kingdoms, and the Lutheran theology of political resistance against tyranny. For an archive of his projects, visit www.ryanmacpherson.com.

Since the Fall of 2021, Dr. MacPherson has served on the Curriculum and Academic Affairs Committee for Luther Classical College. "It has been a joy working with the LCC team, envisioning a classical, Lutheran curriculum that will prepare students for godly service in their families, in their congregations, and in the broader society," says MacPherson. The college's plans for a trade partnership program interest Dr. MacPherson as much as the classical emphasis. "Many of my closest brothers in Christ are blue-collar workers who lead their families in prayer, serve on church council, and have been of great encouragement to me in difficult times."

We are overjoyed to welcome Dr. MacPherson as our Academic Dean and the very first member of the faculty of Luther Classical College. May our gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless Dr. MacPherson's work among us as He has blessed it for so many years at Bethany Lutheran College.

Dr. MacPherson will commence his duties as Academic Dean on August 1. He requests your prayers as his family relocates to Mount Hope Lutheran in Casper, Wyoming, and as Bethany Lutheran College and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod seek successors for his current positions. "May God bless Lutheran higher education at LCC, at Bethany, and at the Concordias, for the sake of the rising generation and of generations yet to come," he says, "that the saving truths summarized in the Small Catechism may be cherished and spread as we await Christ's return."

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Christian Preus, Chairman of the Board of Regents



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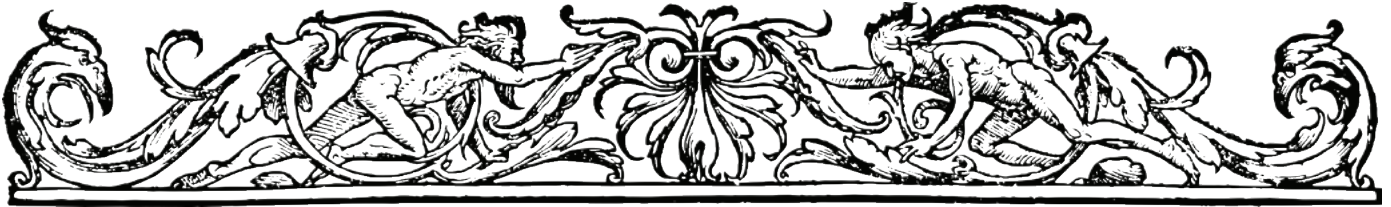
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Sanctified Imagination



once-sanctified imagination has been surrendered to an unsanctified culture. However, Christ revealed in the Word and Sacraments enables Christians to reclaim their imagination as a domain for understanding the world according to the Gospel, the world in accordance with truth.

Twenty years ago philosopher Charles Taylor introduced the idea of the “social imaginary.” Social imaginary, Taylor explained, consists of the set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols through which people come to picture or “image” what their society is like and what’s possible (what can be *imagined*) within their society, that is, imagined within the given plausibility structures of that society. “Given plausibility structures” means that there are limitations, of course, to what the prevailing modern society wants everyone to believe constitutes modern reality. Those limitations are conceptual and moral in nature, directing the imagination to desired outcomes—outcomes that agree with the values, institutions, laws, and symbols of modern society’s plausibility structure. It’s a self-reinforcing loop.

Conceptually, modern society is godlessly secular, a product of evolution and human progress. In terms of morals, modern society is also shamelessly immoral. These two things—the conceptual and moral—set the parameters for today’s social imaginary: No God; No limitations upon the human will other than those set by humanity itself. Yes, it is a self-reinforcing loop and one that does not countenance anything outside the ring of humanity as authentically plausible.

Contemporary imaginations, consequently, are not unbounded and free, but very much captive to what society’s plausibility structure permits to be expressed as reality—a reality without God and a morality without transcendent reference. Everything in modern society is now adjudicated by some form of this rationale:

What is human is natural.

What is natural is good.

Therefore what is human is good.

There is therefore a moral value attached to what may be imagined. Within today’s plausibility structure, the implausible is bad; the plausible is good. In other words, anything implausible disagrees with the values, institutions, laws, and symbols of modern society. Conversely, what aligns with the society’s values, institutions, laws, and symbols is celebrated. All such adjudications of good and bad, tasteful and distasteful, permissible and impermissible are rendered by humanity and informed by nothing other than humanity. Humanity, not God, sets values, commissions institutions, defines laws, and apportions symbols. The social imaginary operates within the range of those values or else it is alienated, condemned, or canceled. The imagination itself becomes a byproduct of the prevailing forces of modern society: godless secularism driven by consumption and the pursuit of human rights. Ironically, for all the assertions of human rights and free will, it seems as if nothing is more bound than the modern imagination. Five hundred years ago Luther battled Erasmus over the will. Today the battle is for the imagination. Thus far, it’s been a lost battle.

So, for example, if society has determined such and such a thing implausible (say, the exclusive salvific claims of Christ Jesus), then humanity adjudicates it as distasteful to promote Christianity publicly and immoral to teach it to children or evangelize others. Put differently, the Christian is not to imagine the possibility of his unbelieving neighbor getting baptized. Positively, if modern society favors a particular view of human sexuality, then it is reinforced throughout all strata of humanity from the youngest to the oldest, and it will be found in every civic domain from entertainment to advertising, from education to public policy, with the requisite symbols added. Churches are

pressured to conform or face being alienated, condemned or canceled. Then again, when churches do capitulate, their distinctiveness as the kingdom of God is lost and they become no different from secular institutions.

Institutions (usually driven by economic factors or pressures of value conformity) capitulate to the parameters of the plausibility structure or, in other words, they become merely human institutions with no interest to connect with transcendent realities. The social imaginary comes to envisage education as a secular endeavor, promoting irreligious values. Films, music, literature, and even consumables (like clothing) manifest and materialize the social imaginary. And so the social imaginary holds sway over many formerly faithful Christians, who find it more plausible to imagine themselves in a Tesla or their toes in the sand of Cancun, or even their cremated ashes scattered over their favorite lake, than to imagine the blood of Jesus in the baptismal font or their bodies resurrected on the Last Day.

More recently, Carl Trueman employed the idea of social imaginary to explain how modern people have come to the notion of self.² The idea of being a “self” has changed due to a massive shift in the social imaginary, explains Trueman, from the commonsense reference to our basic consciousness of ourselves as individual people (i.e., an awareness that I am not you) to a radically reoriented notion of where the “real me” is to be found—it is found within my self. Hence the need to “find my self,” not by understanding the objective identity markers of my existence (e.g., my biological sex, my baptism, my ethnic and national decent and culture), but by looking within. Trueman writes, “The modern self assumes the authority of inner feelings and sees authenticity as defined by the ability to give social expression to the same.”³ In other words, today’s prevailing values, institutions, laws, and symbols provide a framework that allows a person’s identity to be imagined from within, rather than given from without.

Trueman narrates the great shift in social imaginary as it applies to commonplace understanding of human sexuality. What was once objectively determined is now subjectively self-determined and celebrated by a society that has facilitated such imagining and codified it in law, institutions, and public symbols (e.g., rainbow flags). In other words, the social

imaginary saturates a community with norms to a point in which people can only imagine that this is the way the world really is and can imagine that it can only be that way. The social imaginary sets forth a “just so” conception of the world that is received without deep reflection.

Institutions fortify what can and (ethically speaking) should be imagined (i.e., what’s permitted). To imagine otherwise would be anti-human—the ultimate sin, the real heresy. The transformation of the body becomes a decidedly this-world phenomenon according to the social imaginary, while the resurrection of the body is relegated to the category of the implausible. The loop reinforces same-think. The social imaginary conditions the imagination by being all pervasive, all the time, in such a way that it seems as if it is the only reality. Church or the Kingdom of God, on the other hand, occurs for perhaps sixty minutes once a week and must fit in with the supposedly greater “reality” as determined by modern society.

Our fellow parishioners are conditioned nearly 24/7 to imaginatively exercise themselves within today’s plausibility structures. Simply put, unless the imagination is

taught otherwise, parishioners imagine modern society is reality.

And this indoctrination of the social imaginary starts at a young age. Christian children are enrolled in public school systems with decidedly non-Christian plausibility structures (progressivism, Darwinism, Marxism, etc.). In addition to normalizing an atheological reality, such schools hold the imaginations of children captive within that domain. Children are told what their society is like and what’s possible (what can be imagined) within their society. What is more, they are also conditioned as consumers through brand allegiance that starts with diapers, fortifying an imagination captive to the values, institutions, laws and symbols of godless, immoral modern society. They are taught to imagine that all persons hold the right to self-naming and can remake themselves by the goods they consume. Hence the brand labeling of, well, everything—and the associated morality consumed thereby. By this brand (be it a university, sports team, vehicle, purse, or gated community) I imagine my virtue is signaled and my belonging is legitimated . . . for the moment.



The imagination, created by God and powerful enough to alter lives and forge cultures, must be harnessed by modern society within certain values-laden domains, like the entertainment industry and educational institutions, lest by way of its inherent spiritual bias it gravitate toward the transcendent. And so Star Wars and Disney, Marvel and DC Comics, hold sway over large swaths of Western imaginations. Likewise, the same can be said for television and the movies, which stultify imaginations that were once stimulated by reading stories instead of watching them. If there is to be creativity, then let it be expressed through Star Wars Lego or Comic-Con cosplay or, relatedly, an endless series of selfie photos and videos whereby we imagine ourselves adjusted, belonging, successful, happy—all in accordance with the unsanctified values of modern society and lived out on its truncating platforms.

But there was a time when the imagination was unbounded, liberated by Christ Jesus. That imagination was sanctified, and it readily interacted with and interpreted a thoroughly



Preaching and teaching the Word made flesh liberates the imagination from this world's false and crippling vision of reality, and once again brings the imagination into an encounter with the one and only true and living God through Immanuel, "God with us."

enchanted world. There was no lid on the cosmos. Instead, there was predictable engagement with the transcendent. God was imagined among us, through Jesus Christ. No place was this more so than in the Divine Liturgy. There, within the "communion of the saints," the baptized heard the real voice of Jesus in the words of Absolution and the reading of the Gospel. More fantastic still was His bodily presence under the bread and wine—the same Jesus "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate" was manifest on the altar. The very architecture lent itself to stirring up the imagination. Above the altar, columns and a canopy framed the space, giving the impression that a window of heaven was open,

and that which was at center within that frame invaded the Earth, hence the suspended crucifix above the vessels for Holy Communion.

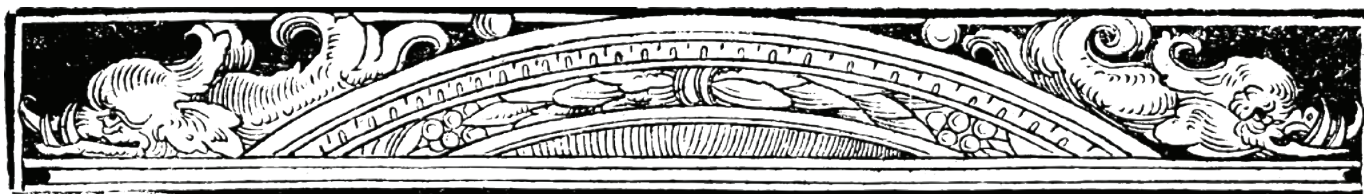
The sermon aided the imaginations of the congregants to perceive Christ incarnate in their midst: Himself a meal; Himself the Sacrificed Lamb abiding before the heavenly throne of God, now earthly present and presiding at the Lord's Supper in the supreme act of self-giving. The sermon was the vehicle by which the congregants were to see reality, the truth determined not by their inner feelings but by God Himself, and so to imagine what really is, that they had been baptized in the blood of Christ. The sermon also unleashed the sanctified imagination to see the reality of Holy Communion where the flesh and blood of Christ are distributed as the medicine of immortality, the viaticum, the overlap between the visible and invisible. Preachers preached to the imagination, rather than surrendering it to rationalistic Bible study or practical applications or leaving it to the social imaginary. The cult of "the Word made flesh," especially in Holy Communion, fueled the cultural imagination of Christians and it spilled over into their understanding of reality, for it was the ultimate and determinative reality. Unlike how the world is now supposed to conform to one's inner determinations of the self, the reality of Christ speaking and being bodily present grounded the Christian's being and liberated the imagination to see God in charge throughout the Earth.

In that moment when Jesus entreated the Father to "sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth," he obligated all faithful preachers of the Word of Truth, that is, the Word of Christ (the Word that is Christ), to bring imaginations captive to Christ and so release them from the stultifying forces of idolatry. Preaching and teaching the Word made flesh liberates the imagination from this world's false and crippling vision of reality, and once again brings the imagination into an encounter with the one and only true and living God through Immanuel, "God with us." ❧

Rev. Dr. John Bombaro is LCMS Eurasia Director of Theological Education in Prague, Czech Republic.

End Notes

- 1 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007).
- 2 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).
- 3 Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 22.



Transgenderism & the End of the Church Growth Movement

"I don't really push them on it too hard because, after the wedding, I want them to trust me."

A few years ago, I overheard a fellow LCMS clergyman make this statement when discussing the question of whether pastors should officiate marriages for cohabitating couples. Should we require such couples to move out before they formally become man and wife? Should we require that those who have already joined themselves as one flesh rush to the justice of the peace before having their wedding ceremony in the church? Should we require those who are in a state of sin to repent before clothing them in God's blessing?

"No," the pastor would have told you. Such harsh measures would have pushed them away. In order to ease them into accepting God's Word, first he had to develop a trusting relationship with them. In a sense, this approach to premarital cohabitation is the Church Growth Movement boiled down to its essence.




While it can be a challenge to define theological trends and fads in real time, theological opiners tend to describe the Church Growth Movement as a congregation-growing methodology rooted in appeals to statistical trends, analytics, and social research. Crunch the numbers and you'll identify what is hindering people from worshiping with you and fellowshiping with you. Make whatever changes the numbers dictate. Change your liturgy, your preaching, your focus, maybe even your name, and the kingdom will grow. Discipleship by data.

On the surface, this is how CGM advocates would describe their movement. I would argue, however, that CGM is not so much

a corporate methodology as it is a personal ideology. It's the belief that disciples are best made by filtering religion through relationships. People need Jesus, but they need you to make Jesus comprehensible and accessible. That's





why you push all the trappings of formality aside in your services to make more room for your approachability. People need God's Word, but they need you to make them feel comfortable with it. That's why they need your tender and affable personality to shine in your preaching. People need to repent, but they need someone they trust to issue that call to repent. That's why they need you to spend five years treating them like an abused dog that needs to be won over before you can tell them that they are in immediate danger of hellfire. People need the truth. Eventually. But until you've sufficiently earned their trust, it's best for you to avoid speaking that truth too boisterously.

For the last half century, the Church Growth Movement has used this approach to successfully avoid coming into full blown conflict with the sexual revolution. What do you do when a woman divorces her husband without scriptural grounds? Well, she'll just leave if you place her under discipline, and then word will get around that you're a harsh and unloving pastor and your congregation will stop growing. So just keep quiet about it. Talk with her behind the scenes, be gentle with her, and maybe in time she'll see what she did wrong. Until then, it won't really cause a scandal. You have a big church. Most people don't know her and won't know what she's done. It's not like divorced people *look* divorced.

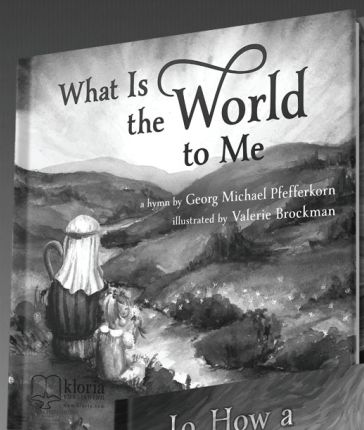
And it's not like you can tell a young woman is living with her boyfriend by *looking* at her. And it's not like you can tell a man is going to give a toast at his lesbian daughter's wedding by *looking* at him.

Problem is, a teenage girl who identifies as transgender looks transgender when she adopts a masculine haircut and attire. She sounds transgender when she asks to be referred to as her self-chosen boy name. By her mere appearance, she causes a scandal in the congregation. If she kneels at the altar to receive the sacrament while dressed in a way that indicates defiance of God, this is as much a problem as two men holding hands as they approach the communion rail. In such circumstances, you don't have the luxury of patience. You don't even have the *appearance* of the luxury of patience. Such an act demands an immediate response from the shepherd so that the sheep may know how to view the matter rightly.

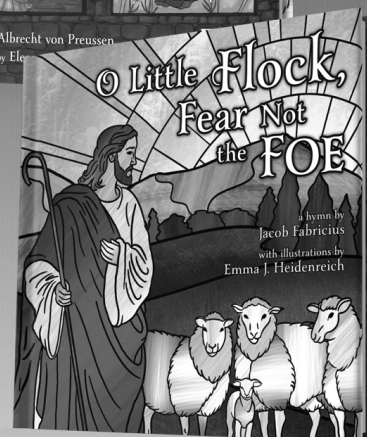
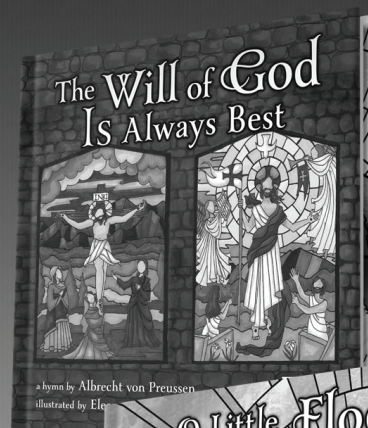
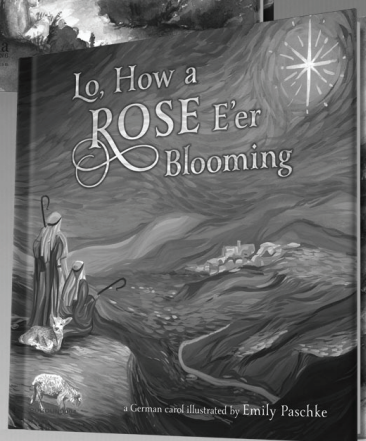
A woman who identifies as a man is not male, and we cannot confess her to be so even if our desire is to be gentle and hospitable. When she asks, at the beginning of the conversation, that you use a masculine name or masculine pronouns in referring to her, she is asking you to share her false ontology, to deny God as her creator, and to crown her as the author of her own maleness or femaleness or something-inbetween-ness. The only faithful answer a Christian can give to such a request is an immediate "no." Just as we can't agree with our Muslim friend that Jesus was merely a prophet of Allah for a time before we confess His divinity, we can't patiently deny God's lordship over Becca until she trusts us enough to hear that she's not really Bryce. Lies cannot prepare anyone for the truth.

Therefore, in a sense, the transgenderism craze has done the Church a great favor. It has made clear something that has always been the case. The reason congregations don't grow is because people don't believe. Certainly, unfriendly congregations are unlikely to bring in new members and crumbling buildings that smell like mold and remain empty six days a week are unlikely to attract converts. But on a fundamental level, the reason congregations don't grow is because people love their sins, hate their Savior, and are not hearing a clear confession that will call them out of the darkness and into God's marvelous light.

The only solution to that problem is the Word of God. Not the Word filtered through our winsomeness or gentleness. Not the Word applied once we in our infinite wisdom have determined the time is finally right for us to speak it to those whose trust we've won. The Word applied with haste. The Law preached in all its sternness. The Gospel preached in all its sweetness. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."



4 HYMNS IN 2 BOOKS



Likewise, the transgenderism craze has laid bare the failure of the church growth movement. Following the data, you did what people asked and got rid of your stuffy liturgy, your off-putting judginess, and your unreasonable catechetical expectations. You offered services on different days so they could have their kids worshipping at the altar of sports on Sunday morning. You boasted a 3,000 to 1 ratio of members joined to members excommunicated. What did that yield? Not a crop of disciples ready to run the race and endure the attacks of the devil with faithfulness, but a spiritual culture where churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike expect you to fold whenever they take the next step in the sexual revolution. You ignored their divorces. You ignored their premarital cohabitation and intentional childlessness. You ignored the rainbow flags they flew on their Facebook avatars during Gay Pride month. You'll affirm their trans kids.

Transgenderism has called the Church Growth Movement's bluff. Therefore, it's time for the Church Growth Movement to fold, to admit that it has always been more concerned with earthly growth than eternal faithfulness. Likewise, it's time for all of us to turn from the self-idolatrous thinking that has fueled the Church Growth Movement. It's time

to repent of trusting our own kindness and gentleness and patience and winsomeness to kindle faith where the Word of God alone was supposedly insufficient. It's time to decrease so that Christ can increase. It's time to start speaking the Word with the boldness of the prophets instead of viewing our own personalities as the means of grace that will much more effectively bring people to faith.

A young woman lost in the darkness about what it means to be male and female doesn't need Pastor First Name to practice "pronoun hospitality" to prevent her from crying. She needs an actual shepherd to tell her she needs to cry out for the mercy of Christ, who will always come to her rescue. So it is for all people when they are caught up in divorce or fornication or any other sin. They don't need Faithwindz Community Grace Center to make space for them while they faithwalk together. They need an actual church to speak God's actual Word, sharper than any two-edged sword, that they may be pierced with God's holy Law and healed with His eternal Gospel. 🕊️

Rev. Hans Fiene is Pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Crestwood, MO and the creator of Lutheran Satire.





The Disrespect for Marriage Act



ongress's repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (H.R. 8404) threatens Christian culture above and beyond Roe's reign of terror. In response to Roe's usurpation of legislative power, Congress held on for five decades, refusing to match federal law to the Court's illegitimate ruling. Not only that, but through the Hyde and Church amendments, as well as President Reagan's Mexico City policy, both the legislative and executive branches shielded taxpayers and medical professionals from participating in the carnage.

But now, less than two decades since Lawrence (2003) began the collapse of marriage jurisprudence, Congress has codified the rubble left by Windsor (2013), Obergefell (2015), and Bostock (2020). It did not, however, codify a new definition of marriage after revoking God's. Federal law now offers no boundaries whatsoever on what in the future may be deemed marriage. Even the number of persons involved is up for negotiation.

This vagueness is deliberate. H.R. 8404 ensures that any person or institution that "may deny...full faith and credit" to any state's current or future redefinition of marriage will face crippling lawfare. Its "Private Right of Action" allows any activist to bring civil suit against those withholding approval from the latest lie that worships the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Justice can bring limitless investigational power and legal resources to the fight without any obligation to apply the law evenhandedly.

This powerful financial cudgel can bankrupt those with the temerity to contradict the sexual state—even should they

prevail in court. Like the Johnson Amendment (1954), H.R. 8404 is intended to mute the voice of God in the public square. Unlike the Johnson Amendment, it demands not only silence, but a false confession. How many Lutheran businessmen, students, and government workers will approve same-sex marriage by word or deed to avoid costly litigation from trolling activists and a weaponized Department of Justice?

Misguided politicians bartered away God's definition of marriage in return for institutional protections, but not individual protections. In so doing, they agreed to label dissenters as discriminators. Even legislators who "know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die" made a political calculation to "give approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32). In so doing, they set an ungodly example that myriads more Christians will likely follow.

Satan is behind all of this. He has always thus offered favors to those who will fall down at his feet (Mt. 4:9). This murder of souls—not the economic harms—is the demonic intent of H.R. 8404. How ought Christians to respond?

First, we must warn all Christians against soul-destroying bargains with the devil. "To go against conscience is neither right nor safe" (Luther). No matter what the financial or political cost, Christians are called to give the good confession. We must withhold approval from every ungodly practice—including any word or deed that legitimizes same-sex "marriage."

Just as Christians in the first centuries of the Church refused to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar, we must discipline ourselves and teach others that living out God's

Word is inseparable from any obedience we owe to the state. Public declarations of our religious opinions are meaningless to fellow Christians or to pagan neighbors if they are contradicted by our public actions.

Therefore, preachers and teachers must begin with self-examination. Says the Lord: “[Y]ou, son of man, I have made a watchman...Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If...you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand” (Eze. 33:7-8). Just as prophets from Elijah to Obadiah addressed pagan nations with the same authority as they addressed God’s people, preachers are called to address both Church and world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was simply confessing the words of Ezekiel when he said, “Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” The false dichotomy that leads legislators to make public law against their personal convictions and entices corporate climbers to seek promotion by parroting falsehoods infects us all. It is the same dichotomy that constricts the proclamation of God’s will for marriage and for the sanctity of life to vanishingly narrower confines.

The true Church on earth will never concede the public square to the pluralism that posits coexisting realms of “truth.” But deep confusion has been sown by the false

doctrine of “separation between Church and state.” Perverting the scriptural doctrine of the two kingdoms, the old, evil Foe lied about a godless, secular realm unworthy of the Church’s attention. There never was such a realm. Where we were promised a religion-less public square, we found in its place an ever-growing list of topics deemed “political” and off-limits.

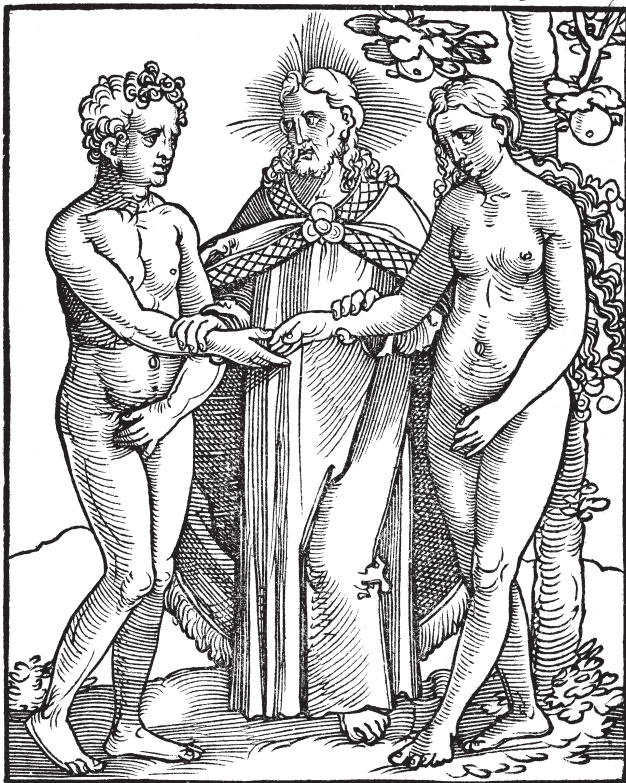
Against this, the Church must reassert the seamless interconnection of public and private life. This will come at a cost. Decades of deferred payments will come due. Faithful confession from the pulpit and pew will be subject to the financial cudgel now signed into federal law. Church institutions that are deemed not religious enough will be besieged by lawfare. Christian professionals and businessmen will face fines, loss of clientele, even loss of license for refusing to live a lie.

Praise God! God Himself has brought us to this place and time. As the days grow darker, the truth about marriage shines ever brighter. As love grows cold, the warmth of hearth and home becomes ever more inviting. As the loneliness of social media enslaves, the ties that bind set us free. Unlike any time in human history, the simple act of human marriage is both the unspoken longing of every human heart, and a distinctly Christian confession.

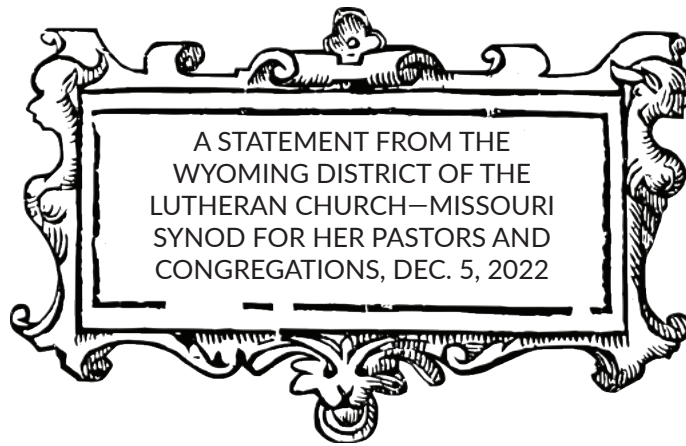
Praise God that He allows us both to live in holy matrimony and to confess it to our sad and lonely neighbors. While Satan vainly seeks to stamp out true joy and laughter, God has given us to laugh and, through this joyous confession, to lead sad souls into the feast. The dour mobs that outlaw happiness are to be pitied more than feared.

This beautiful Christian vision of marriage (Ephesians 5) has been preserved for us to cherish and to proclaim—no matter the financial, legal, or societal costs. In fact, God means for good even the evil intended by H.R. 8404 (Genesis 50:20). Fellow Christians who are robbed, beaten, and labeled as *hostes humani generis* (haters of the human race), will be comforted, embraced and financially supported by congregations that value the simple act of telling the truth.

In this blessed environment, we will relearn the unity of sacred and secular, and the generosity of the first Christians (Acts 2:44-45). “And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the Kingdom ours remaineth” (TLH 262:4). ♡



Rev. Jonathan Lange is Pastor of Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Evanston, WY and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Kemmerer, WY.



The following statement, written by Rev. John Hill, President of the Wyoming District of the LCMS, responds to H.R. 8404, known among us as the "Disrespect for Marriage Act," which repealed the "Defense of Marriage Act" and rejected God's definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman for life. It is a call especially for Christians to see that the United States government is not promoting neutrality in its legislation on marriage but has instead set forth a secular and wicked religious stance, in defiance of the Creator of heaven and earth. It is also a call for us to see what a beautiful thing God's institution of marriage is, how God means it for our good and for everyone's good, and that it is worth fighting for, even suffering for, especially when we see this marriage is a reflection of the marriage between Christ and His Church. – The Editors

God created man as male and female and instituted marriage as the lifelong conjugal union of one man and one woman. By this design for mankind God continues to create the fruit of children, gives companionship in marriage and family, and provides help against lustful desires. God gave marriage to be the fountainhead of goods that He intends for all children and adults, for all communities, and for all churches.

These truths about marriage are not private religious opinions. The Biblical teachings on marriage are taught by nature itself. They have no particular traditional, national, ethnic, or cultural character to them. They are universal truths. They apply to all people of all places and all times. They are the foundation and source of all just civil laws for marriage and family. Every legitimate government is bound by God to promote and defend them.

H.R. 8404, "An Act to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act," rejects this foundation for just and good laws. It proposes to repeal "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," to replace God with government and His laws with unnatural laws. It requires that lies about man's nature and about marriage be established with favored legal status.

All legislators who voted for H.R. 8404 have publicly repudiated the works and will of the one true God. By this legislative action they have established a favored, secular religion which is openly set against the Holy Triune God. They have rejected God as the only source of just laws, that is, of justice, goodness, beauty, and every civil good. Legislators who claim that Christian doctrine permits or even requires the passage of H.R. 8404 have compounded a sinful vote with a false confession.

The governmental establishment of an unnatural, unbiblical definition of marriage does not obligate Christians to give it any faith or credence. Christian love does not permit us to live a lie. All Christians are called to confess the truth of marriage even if this law brings down civil and financial penalties on them. "We must obey God rather than men." By upholding the lifelong, conjugal union of one man and one woman we defend God's plan for protecting people from the loneliness, pain, and other evils that follow from the destruction of the family.

God the Father sent His Son to be born of a woman within a marriage, to be born under His eternal law. By His crucifixion and resurrection He obtained eternal redemption and life for all. The Church

rejoices with every Christian that Jesus offers this redemption and this healing as an answer to all evil, loneliness, and pain. We bring the good news to every sinner that Jesus invites you into the true family of God through faith in Him. We acknowledge that the passage of H.R. 8404 will give the enemies of Christ the legal means to afflict faithful Christians and churches with many evils. Yet by God's grace in Christ we will continue to proclaim God's truth, live according to God's Word, love all our neighbors as God teaches, and bear the malice of others with fortitude. For we have a never-ending source of comfort and hope in God our Savior. God teaches us to strengthen one another's hearts to have hope "through the endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures" (Romans 15:5). Jesus Himself bids us "rejoice and be exceeding glad" when we are persecuted for the truth of Christ (Matthew 5:12). And He says, "When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). God grant us peaceful hearts, cheerful minds, and bold courage to speak and live according to His Word.

In Christ's name,

Rev. John Hill,
President of the Wyoming District
of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod



The Children of This World are Shrewder



he following translation was first printed under the title “Die Kinder dieser Welt sind klüger, denn die Kinder des Lichts in ihrem Geschlechte.” It is from the October 15, 1863 issue of *Der Lutheraner*. The author is Rev. Johann Paul Beyer. Beyer served as a long-time Missouri Synod parish pastor. He also held leadership positions such as Secretary of the Synodal Conference, President of the Eastern District, and Synod Vice President. He was also founder and editor of the *Lutherisches Kinderblatt*, which was a publication for Lutheran youth.

In his parable of the unjust steward, our Lord Jesus says, “For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8). Beyer contends that control of the press is where we see this most manifest. We might find the old Missourians quirky

in their opposition to things like dancing and theater, but one can hardly argue how easily we have let the secular press have full access to our homes and our children, and how this has been poisonous to faith in the heart. This is a problem which spans generations because it is the most effective way for the devil to spread his kingdom.

Beyer could not have envisioned the television screen and the smartphone, which have only expanded the easy access which he laments that Christians have given to the world’s press. But the problems that our more modern technology pose should not be so new and vexing to Christians. The problem has always been the same. In this world we operate on an uneven playing field. The media is unchristian at its core, and Christians at least must recognize this. Its doctrine of “tolerance” is not an enlightened discovery of a new day, but a tired mantra which has been exploited for generations.

Beyer quotes Jeremiah 23:29, which says, “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” God give us faith to take these words to heart. Christians must have determination to resist the flow of garbage information which damages the soul, and treasure the pure fountain which is God’s Word. We and our children will be better for it.

The Children of this World Are Shrewder than the Children of Light in their Generation

Unfortunately, it is true. One does not even need to take it on faith, for one can see it with the eyes and grasp it with the hands. For example, we give all the effort, dedicate power and health, spend money and goods—all in order to mitigate unbelief and lead people to God. And what do we have for success? We have this, that unbelief remains as before. It rules the masses, and on top of that it ridicules our self-sacrifice and even casts it into suspicion. We spend serious money to build churches and Christian schools, high schools, and seminaries. We do so to this end, that the devil’s kingdom is diminished and the kingdom of God should grow. But what is the fruit? From congregation to congregation throughout almost the entire country sounds a cry from the mouth of Christians concerning the frivolous, addicted, proud, if not entirely corrupted and unbelieving youth.

We have our church newspapers and in more modern times also political newspapers, which are under the leadership of men who are both Christian and gifted. But how is this going? At least now and then pastors will write for the church papers, and many Christians receive them. But as for the political papers, almost the only people who write for them are hired to do it. So many people read these

papers, that they can make a living this way. Among us it takes a great deal of money and much sacrifice. Then when the year is done, little or nothing seems justified.

How then does it go for the unbelievers? They don’t spend anything for schools. If they do happen to build them, first they see to it carefully whether they will bring in what they cost. The churches in which sheer unbelief is preached do the same thing. They do this with their newspapers too, which have the goal of teaching garbage about God. They make an attempt, and if nothing comes of it, they call it quits. Even so, these churches blossom and lure the masses. How does this happen? One would like to find an explanation for this, that the heart of the natural man is always a natural companion of unbelief, and that the task of making unbelief serviceable to the devil is easy. Is it not the Word of God which is a light that penetrates the darkness, and a hammer which shatters the rock in pieces? How then? That is the question. How do the apostles of unbelief and their disciples begin, without cost or effort, to make the powerful blows of God’s Word unfelt among the masses? How do they obscure the bright light of the Gospel? Yes, this is exactly the point in which the children of this world are shrewder than the children of light. This is the point in which we Christians, in order to say it mildly, let our foolishness shine.

With our help, in any case through our negligence, the unbelievers have almost exclusively taken the press into their service. There they preach continuously: Tolerance! Love! Then throughout the year they print many books of paper about stories of Christian intolerance and lovelessness, and they offer many warnings of the same. Christians also read these things, and they finally believe them so firmly, that they regard it a right to read and support such newspapers. Conversely, they believe it an injustice not to be able to read them, and they regard it an offense when someone would warn them about these newspapers. In this way the schoolbooks of unbelief come into the house in the form of daily, weekly, and monthly papers. Young and old read these and glean wisdom (more like deadly poison) out of them. While one goes to church a few times a week in order to hear God’s Word in a rush, he spends six or seven times more with such a godless newspaper, in order to read the newspaper-sermons of unbelief at leisure. He even reads them out-loud to others and discusses them. Is it any wonder, how unbelief comes into the house and then into the heart! Such a procedure is like adding one piece of wood to the fire, and then immediately dumping seven buckets of water upon it. That ought to burn well!



But perhaps I am guilty of making an overstatement, for many will say that the political newspapers write nothing concerning religion, as they always explain at the outset. You are correct, fellow Christian. They write nothing concerning religion. If they wanted to do that, first they would have to understand something about it. The truth is that they write everything against religion, and then they discuss their own, which they understand quite masterfully. The proof is here in my hand. Here I have today's newspaper, the Sunday edition of a "reputable newspaper" to boot. Flipping through (back to front Hebrew style, because Jews of the "Great Brotherhood" work on almost every newspaper) we find no less than 11 balls and concerts recommended to the reader, and also a theater. Fathers subscribe to these newspapers, and their sons, daughters, and workers read them. And then one wonders why the youth do not go to church anymore and do not want to be productive at home. Closer to the front prior to the police report there is reported back word concerning a court case. You know how a judge is tasked to protect the integrity of the law. Here the newspaper is battering the judge's character. Conversely, the lawyer, who tried to intimidate the judge, is highly praised. This is certainly not in harmony with the doctrine of our most holy faith: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." Closer to the front still there is a selection from a lewd novel, in which a lovesick young lady plays around in men's clothing. Someone recognizes her, and she takes a knife in the hand to kill him in order to cover up her offense. This is certainly not in accord with God's words, "A woman without discipline is like a ..." (Proverbs 11:22) and "Beloved, never avenge yourselves" (Romans 12:19). Finally, right on the front page there are stale jokes and sayings of our "civilized time." For example:

"Be careful, a saying of virtue to share,
even if you mean well and think you only care;
For whoever puts forth the name of virtue in a way
not delicate earns quickly for himself the title of
hypocrite."

"Give way to others in everything, and be kind;
just not in your feelings and in your mind."

"The devil has departed this world, for he knows well;
it is men who make this place a burning hell."

"That heartfelt devotion in God,
which burns intensely, and is spread abroad;
That sweet, ecstatic idleness
(meanwhile your whole house is a mess);
This is nothing more—I say without jesting,
than a way to get your senses tickling."



Dear Christian, open your eyes. Say to yourself: what are these mundane verses? Are they not poisonous arrows, targeted at and printed for those people specifically, who still have a shimmer of the fear of God in them and a love for God's Word? Christians read such telegrams from hell and even pay for them, even after they have prayed "hallowed be Thy name" and "Thy kingdom come." Just so they invite the devil's kingdom to come. Why do they do this? Because one time they heard or read that in the 19th century one must be tolerant in regard to the world. Meanwhile, what do the unbelievers do, who impress this doctrine upon people? Yes, they are shrewder than the children of light. They don't pay a cent for a religious newspaper, nor would they give one hour to read one. If you would come with your religious newspaper and recommend that they subscribe, because they must be tolerant, they would regard you as a fool. They would gladly accept religious tracts for the same reason that this Sunday newspaper lies in front of me. It's not to read them, but because one can always use old paper. And is this procedure not wise in its own way? They do not want to become Christians. They are enemies of the faith. They keep it at a distance, just as one would never ingest something bad for the body. Now I think that one should learn from the enemy. So let us finally become so shrewd that we never again pay the devil's apostles for him. We can be well-equipped without their rag, if we truly wish. If they stick a newspaper for us in the bag or under the house doors, we want to be just as shrewd as they are with the religious tracts. "One can always use old paper." ❧

Rev. Ryan Loeslie is Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Dimock, SD.

Dear Conscience, Rest!

Anna Hahn, 2022

8.7.8.7.D.

O mein Gewissen
Nathanael Hahn, 2022

1. Dear con - science, rest! For thou art blessed, At peace thro' Je - sus' mer - it.
2. Lord, in Thy sight is dark - ness light; My sins are set be - fore Thee.
3. Thy Word, O Lord, is sweet - ness poured When fires of hell I'm feel - ing.
4. Let none de - lay: con - fess and pray! Re - pent as thou art bid - den.

Thy ev - 'ry sin He car - ried in His sin - less flesh, to bear it.
The right - eous - ness that I pos - sess Would co - ver me most poor - ly.
Thy com - fort will my an - guish still When all my bones need heal - ing.
The god - ly one to Christ will run And safe in Him be hid - den.

I - ni - qui - ty no more shall be Ac - count - ed thy pos - ses - sion:
Be - neath Thy hand I can - not stand While my trans - gres - sions grieve me;
If si - lent I should wast - ing lie, O make me ev - er driv - en
Though wa - ters rise be - fore his eyes, The Lord pre - serves him sure - ly;

Thy Bro - ther said, "My blood I shed To cov - er thy trans - gres - sion."
To Thee I fly! O hear my cry! Thou on - ly canst re - lieve me.
To par - don seek, and hear Thee speak, "Thy sins are all for - giv - en."
No flood of wrath shall reach his path: The door is shut se - cure - ly.

Lord, to my heart Thy Word impart
And give me understanding,
That I hold near in love and fear
Whate'er Thou art commanding.

My Savior, Thou wilt ever now
With steadfast love surround me—
My soul is Thine! Thy joy is mine;
With gladness Thou hast crowned me.

Free recording, sheet music, and bulletin
inserts available at [cc.lutherclassical.org/
dear-conscience-rest](http://cc.lutherclassical.org/dear-conscience-rest)



Psalm 32 NKJV

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.

For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah

I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You
In a time when You may be found;

Surely in a flood of great waters
They shall not come near him.

You are my hiding place;
You shall preserve me from trouble;

You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah
I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will guide you with My eye.
Do not be like the horse or like the mule,

Which have no understanding,
Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle,

Else they will not come near you.
Many sorrows shall be to the wicked;

But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous;
And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!





Prospectus for Luther Classical College

Location: Eleven acres on the campus of Mount Hope Lutheran Church and School, Casper, WY. With a population of c. 60,000, Casper has two conservative, liturgical LCMS congregations of about three hundred members each.

Setting: The college will begin with a campus center, our "Old Main," which will house classrooms, offices, and a common area for students to gather. Houses for student living will also be built on campus as the student population grows. The Wyoming District Office is just south of Mount Hope Lutheran Church and has the beginnings of a theological library.

Prospective Opening: Fall, 2025

Purpose: The college will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education to Lutheran students. Paramount will be the promotion of Christian culture, a stress on the priority of Christian marriage, family, and piety, and a cultivation of confessional Lutheran theology, liturgy, hymnody, and identity. With courses using the "great books" of the past for the core curriculum, the college will offer Latin, history, theology, literature, logic, rhetoric, music, geometry, biology, and mathematics, all within a purposefully Christian and Lutheran framework.

Need: The college years are typically the most formative years in a young adult's life. These are the years when they most often find their spouses, decide on a career, and make decisions that last a lifetime. There is desperate need for a college where conservative Lutheran young men and women can learn the truth of the Christian faith, be encouraged in genuine Lutheran culture, and meet pious, Lutheran husbands and wives. The return to a classical model, which hands down both traditional morality and clear thinking through study of logic, rhetoric, and the best of ancient literature and wisdom, will prepare students for life in church, home, and community.

Size: Because of its purpose to promote Christian culture in the Lutheran tradition, the college will be open only to Lutherans and remain small, never exceeding three hundred undergraduates.

Degrees and Opportunities: The college will offer an A.A. and a B.A. in Classical Liberal Arts. Generally, all students will take the same courses. The course work and culture of the college will help prepare students for life as Christians in their church, community, and family. Opportunities to student teach at a classical Lutheran school will be offered to those interested in becoming teachers. Men wishing to continue on to seminary will have an excellent foundation in knowledge of the Bible, Lutheran theology, Church history, apologetics, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, as well as the piety and humility needed for the pastoral office. For those who wish to pursue a trade (e.g. electrical, plumbing, architectural), the college is working on a partnership with Casper Community College to offer an A.A. in a trade and learn the necessary skills for gainful employment. We are working to establish apprenticeships with businesses throughout the country for those who graduate from our trade program. The college is in the process of seeking accreditation with a nationally recognized accrediting organization.

Cost of Attendance: Because large loads of debt encourage students to put off marriage and family in favor of making money, Luther Classical College will remain affordable. Tuition will be set at \$8,500 a year, with scholarship opportunities to help with payment. The Board of Regents will work to decrease, not increase, the cost of tuition as the college grows. In order to secure the independence and guard the doctrinal integrity of the institution, the college will not take any federal funds (including federally subsidized student loans).





LUTHER CLASSICAL COLLEGE

Individual Support

WAYS TO SUPPORT LUTHER CLASSICAL COLLEGE

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We can be bold to ask our Heavenly Father for all good things, knowing that He promises to hear us.

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Patron Program: Join our Patron Program and *pledge monthly gifts of \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100, or \$250*. Patron members help us to cover start-up and building costs in these years leading up to our opening. As a special thank you for pledging recurring support, we like to send Patron Program members LCC merchandise gifts from our online store.

Special Gift: We gladly accept donations of any size or frequency!

You can also ask your church to become a Supporting Congregation. With over 100 supporting congregations currently, we are looking forward to reaching 200 this year.

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1. **Online:** scan the QR code to be directed right to our website or go online to www.lutherclassical.org/support.
2. **Mail:** use the prepaid envelope included in this magazine to send a check or fill out your payment information and mail right back to us.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, all donations to Luther Classical College are tax exempt.

For questions about LCC and ways to support, feel free to contact our Head of Development, Samuel Preus, at s.preus@lutherclassical.org or the Board of Regents directly at regents@lutherclassical.org.



Sebastian Schmidt

Sebastian Schmidt (1617–96) was the foremost Hebrew scholar and exegete of the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy. He was a product of and testament to the excellence of classical Lutheran education. Born outside Strassburg on Epiphany, Schmidt had common origins. His father was a wheelwright and his mother died when he was only five. His pastor became his mentor and started teaching him Latin.

Later, and at the encouragement of his professors, Schmidt devoted himself to the study of eastern languages and went to Basel to study under the great Reformed scholar of Hebrew, Johann Buxtorf the Younger (1599–1664). His friends would come to call this his “Reformed Exile.” After serving various calls, he became a theology professor at the University of Strassburg where he remained his whole life, although he received many calls to prestigious appointments throughout his life.

Schmidt produced voluminous commentaries on both the New Testament and the Old Testament. His works show a fondness for Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz, and Johann Gerhard.

The crown of Schmidt’s efforts in exegesis, and his life’s work, was his complete translation of the Bible into Latin (*Biblia Sacra sive Testamentum Vetus et Novum*. Strassburg: Spoor, 1696). Though other Lutherans had corrected the Latin Vulgate or translated parts of Scripture, Schmidt was the only

Lutheran to attempt a wholly new and complete Latin translation of the Bible. It took him forty years to finish this translation (and he only just completed it before his death.) His aim was to be as clear, faithful, and literal as possible to the divinely inspired text. The use of Schmidt's Latin Bible should be encouraged among our Lutheran classical schools because it is *the* Lutheran Latin Bible translation. Because it is so literal, many throughout the years have recommended it as a sort of interlinear with the Greek and Hebrew texts.

Whereas Luther did the principal work of producing a German Bible for the people, Schmidt produced a Latin Bible for students. In this way Schmidt himself stands as a sort of final flourish to the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy and the golden age of classical Lutheran education.

Selection

This selection from Schmidt's commentary on Ecclesiastes shows his lifelong concern to educate students not just in knowledge, but for piety. After analyzing the Hebrew text, Schmidt lists a series of *loci communes* or teaching commonplaces and applications of Scripture. Below are a few from Ecclesiastes 12.

Eccles. 12:1: "(Yet) above all, remember your Creator in the days of your youth, when the evil days have not yet come, and the years of which you will say: 'I have no pleasure in them.'"

Commonplace I: *Everyone should always be mindful of God, his Creator, even in his youth, to fear Him piously and worship Him in holiness. Therefore, youth must be educated in the fear of the Lord from tender childhood.* In this verse our wise Preacher commands the fear and worship of God to youth when he says: "Yet above all remember your Creator in the days of your youth." After all, how will the youth flourish unless from an early age they are brought up in the fear of the Lord and accustomed to the true worship of Him, especially since "the heart of man is only evil from his childhood" (Gen. 6 [Gen. 8:21])?

Commonplace II: *Delayed piety in old age arises more from life's dreariness than from a sincere heart. Therefore it should not be put off until old age but earnestly pursued in the days of one's youth.* It has become a proverb known even to common Christians which says: *Paenitentia sera raro est vera* ("Late

repentance is rarely true"). What is later than that which is put off all the way to old age? Therefore our wise Preacher wants us to pursue piety towards our Creator before old age comes when he says in this verse: "Yet above all, remember your Creator in the days of your youth, when the evil days have not yet come, and the years of which you will say: 'I have no pleasure in them.'"

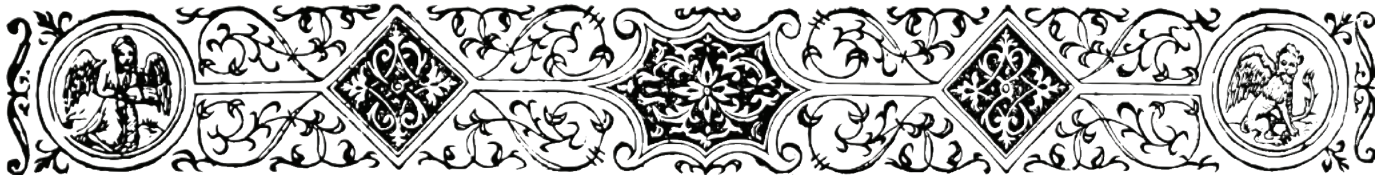
From Eccles. 12:8 ["Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all things are vanity."]

Commonplace I: *Nothing shows the vanity of all things in this world more (and especially the vanity of man), than death and the diligent consideration of it.* Certainly the Preacher has wisely considered the death of man in the verses leading up to this chapter and portrayed them elegantly. What then does he confirm and conclude in the end? Nothing else but the enormous vanity of all things, especially man himself, as he exclaims and says: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all things are vanity."

From Eccles. 12:14 ["For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."]

Commonplace I: *There is a judgment of God that is common to all people, yes to all rational creatures, both angels and men, even if the patience of God has delayed that day for a long time now.* Our wise Preacher solemnly affirms this here and inculcates it with an earnest affirmation when he says: "For God will bring every work to judgment." Thus he also earlier admonished the youth about this same judgment in 11:9: "Rejoice young man in your youth and let your heart do you good in the days of your youth...But know that God is going to bring you to judgment for all these things." Therefore, O man, even in youth and when you are happy, be mindful of this judgment. ❧

Rev. Joshua J. Hayes is Pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Palmer, KS and editor for Johann Gerhard's Theological Commonplaces (CPH).



Philipp Nicolai on the Theory and Practice of Eternal Life



Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608) was the third of eight children born to Theodore Nicolai and Catharina Rafflenboel in Mengerlinghausen on August 10th, 1556. Theodore was a Lutheran pastor who instilled a love for God's Word in his children, especially in the young Philipp. Philipp loved to go to church and hear his father's sermons. He often reread these sermons after church and exhibited at an early age a sharp mind and a keen interest in biblical Lutheran theology.

Philipp Nicolai received an excellent education. He entered Gymnasium in Dortmund when he was 15 years old and was instructed by the very men who had been first to leave the Roman church in Dortmund and join the Reformation. His education was therefore thoroughly Lutheran, receiving lessons on Holy Scripture, dogmatics, polemics, and chorale music from courageous defenders of the pure Gospel. He was also classically trained, learning the best of our Western heritage through study of philosophy, law, history, physics, language, composition, and the like. Nicolai's favorite subjects were poetry and polemics.

Already as a young man at age 17 Nicolai had nurtured his talents to become an excellent poet, composing for his class a Latin poem of 174 hexameters in which every single word of the poem began with the letter "c." He later composed another poem of 612 Latin hexameters a year before his death in which each word began with the letter "m."¹ This is certainly impressive in its own right, though few of us can wrap our minds around the value of such technical mastery of a now neglected art. And yet Nicolai was determined to use this mastery in service of the Church.

And so it makes sense that Nicolai should be best known among us as a kind of poet, having gone on to compose the two hymnic masterpieces by which we know him today. These are the "King and Queen" of our Lutheran chorales, namely "Wake, Awake" and "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star." Lutherans sing the first one on the last day of the Church Year and the second one on Epiphany. Both are popular choices for Lutheran weddings. Among scholars he is also known for his fiery polemical works against Papists and Calvinists with blunt and pithy titles like *A Brief Report on the Calvinists' God and Their Religion* or *The Mirror of the Wicked Spirit that Creeps Around in Calvinist Books*. And so we see the product of his two greatest interests passed down to us in his hymns and polemics.

But Nicolai's extraordinary achievements as a poet, hymnist, and polemicist, when considered in view of his life and ministry, are the ornate flourishes or pious refrains of the work that truly defined Pastor Nicolai during his own lifetime: preaching the Word of God. Nicolai's mastery of the high arts and his fierce zeal for defending biblical truth joined ranks under the command of a pious and faithful parish pastor who loved God's Word and loved to preach it like his dad, making him among the most gripping theological writers in history. Regarded by some as the *alter Chrysostom* (the second Chrysostom),² Nicolai was loved not only for his preaching, but also for his precious treatises on eternal life that dance like his hymns, cut sharp like his polemics, and read like the comforting sermons of a sincere evangelical pastor.

The following is a translation of an excerpt from Nicolai's preface to the *Theory of Eternal Life*, his masterpiece from this "sermonic" genre of his works. He wrote it in honor of Princess Sophia of Brunswick-Lüneburg in 1606:

Serene, high-born electress, gracious Lady: How great is the amiable kindness of our God with His precious gift and blessing of eternal life? For in this wretched vale of tears we are like poor pilgrims and foreigners who wander in a dark land and pit of death. They wander where it is pitch black and where many ravenous wolves, roaring lions, venomous vipers, lindworms, dragons, lizards, and blood-thirsty vagabonds rage in every place. These sorely grieve them by their dreadful mortal threats, so that they know not how to escape. There is, however, also a glorious palace upon a high mountain in this same land where a rich and benevolent king resides and lives with his noble friends and select guests in mighty joy. This king saw the wretched state of this people and out of sincere love sent to them his son to redeem them and call and lead them to his house of joy. And so the son descended with a bright light and radiance from the high castle, and from there he built a narrow bridge down from the castle to the people. He set many servants upon the bridge with burning torches and lanterns and bid the servants to shine light upon them and call out, "Come to me, all of you, and step upon this bridge, so that you may draw near to me and follow me. Then you will save your own skin, escape all of your misery, and join me in my father's house where there is fullness of joy and where rich nourishment is sufficient and complete. Only come here always and walk straight ahead, so that you may avoid serious injury by veering to the right or to the left and falling even to your death." Who would not most heartily and gladly follow such a tender voice, such a desirable and noble light of joy? And who would not consider it horrible blindness and foolishness to prefer wallowing in such a dismal pit to being released from that place to peer into the glorious banquet hall of this royal castle up on high?



Therefore this fleeting world (in which we children of Adam sojourn and wallow) is an unfortunate pit of anguish and kingdom of Satan, full of wicked spirits in the air below the heavens, and full of great misery, horrible errors, manifold offenses, and sheer dense darkness beneath our feet upon the earth. Indeed, we are surrounded by death in the midst of life, confronted with the jaws of hell in the midst of death, and in the midst of the jaws of hell we are assailed by our own sin. Yet here, just the same, the almighty God (who does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he turn from his ways and live) is not far from us. Nay, rather, He is near to us. For we live in Him and move in Him, and all things consist through Him and in Him. But despite the fact that He is so near to us, He nevertheless resides in a secret light where no man can go. We can hardly recognize (says the wisdom of Solomon) that which is on the earth, and we are slow to perceive that which is at our fingertips. Who then can seek that which is in heaven?

But what does the good and faithful God do in His secret light? His mercy is moved to pity by our affliction and death. He would gladly see our salvation and that we be brought home to Himself in the most joyous fatherland of eternal heavenly life. For this reason He comes to us from his secret throne. He builds a bridge going out, summons many torchbearers to stand upon it for the good of us poor and lost children of Adam, and thereby opens for us the doors and gates of eternal life. And He does this through Christ, His only-begotten Son, our only Mediator, who through His holy incarnation goes out from the Father, comes to us in the world, and through His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension becomes our road and bridge over the horrible and deep pit of death and eternal damnation to eternal life. He also institutes the holy

office of preaching and sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts. He is therefore our heavenly sun and light, and (as Zechariah says) like a Dayspring from on high that He might appear to them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and guide their feet into the way of peace.

I am (He says) the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14). This is the way. Walk in it whenever you turn to the right hand or to the left (Isaiah 30). I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved (John 10). I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8). Whoever will follow Me, let him follow Me, and wherever I am, there will My servants be also. And whoever serves Me, him will My Father honor (John 12). For My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life. And they will never see death, nor will any one snatch them out of My hands. The Father who gave them to Me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hands (John 10). Father, I desire that where I am, they also be there whom You have given Me, that they may see My glory, which You have given to Me (John 17).

The secure Epicurean world with her children does not understand such things. For they give themselves only to temporal goods, passing honor, pomp, and glory. They do not consider the horrible affliction and danger of body and soul in which they are plunged, neither do they consider the righteousness and eternal salvation to which God calls us in His mercy or the noble precious treasure that He richly offers and presents to us in His Word. The old Adam does not inquire about such things, but rather goes about only with the lust of his eyes and flesh and with the hardness of his heart. He thinks (as Scripture testifies), "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" (1 Corinthians 15), "that our barns may be full, supplying all kinds of produce; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; that our oxen may be well laden; that there be no breaking in or going out; that there be no outcry in our streets. Happy are the people who are in such a state" (Psalm 144). Oh, this is nothing but to say: "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us" (Isaiah 28). Indeed, "this is the way of those who are foolish, and their posterity who approve their sayings" (Psalm 49).

On the other hand, whoever is wise in God and grasps the eternal life to which we are called tastes and also sees

how kind the Lord is. He considers the mystery of eternal life a secret wisdom of God. He favors it above all earthly goods and diligently seeks it so that the kingdom of God suffers violence, because he takes it by force as a violent one (Matthew 11). He says with David, "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings (Psalm 36). Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psalm 73)."

Yet in the same way, a wise pilgrim (who in a dark land and valley of death seeks the bright royal house of joy upon the shining high mountain and diligently hastens toward it) must be attentive to two things: first, he must at all times retain sight of the brightly shining palace of joy, together with the high castle bridge with its torchbearers. Second, he must stay upon the right path and upon the bridge that is built down from the castle. Indeed, he must be careful never to veer either to the right or to the left. Therefore a Christian pilgrim in this world's gloomy vale of tears must also know and possess both of these things, namely, the *theoriam et praxem vitae aeternae*,³ that is, firstly, the mirror of eternal life,⁴ that he know how eternal life has been obtained, and secondly, the right way and course upon the path of eternal life, that he properly keep the right footing on this path and always drive the staff of his pilgrimage upon it. There is so much in store for him in both of these mysteries, and whoever rightly understands them and diligently observes them will be all the more satisfied. He would neither desire nor accept any silver or gold, any earthly joy or welfare over the *theoriam et praxem*, or over the contemplation and apprehension of eternal life. ❧

To be continued...

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1 For further reading on Nicolai's life, see Curtze, L. D. *Philipp Nicolai's Leben Und Lieder* (1859). Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, Print on Demand.

2 "the other Chrysostom"; John Chrysostom (AD 349-407) was famous for his great preaching.

3 The theory and practice of eternal life, i.e. the titles given to his two major treatises on eternal life, the first being that from which this excerpt comes (*The Theory of Eternal Life*) and the second being one published after Nicolai's death (*The Practice of Eternal Life*).

4 *The Theory of Eternal Life* (1606) is in nearly all of its topics an expansion of *The Joyous Mirror of Eternal Life* (1598), and it seems clear that Nicolai considers them to be the same work.



Review: *My Ántonia*

My Ántonia by Willa S. Cather
Book Front Cover

MY ÁNTONIA

BY

WILLA S. CATHER

Author of

THE SONG OF THE LARK, O PIONEERS! etc



OF all the remarkable women that Miss Cather has created no other is so appealing as Ántonia, all impulsive youth and careless courage. Miss Cather has the rare quality of being able to put into her books the flame and driving force of unconquerable youth.

MY ÁNTONIA is a love story, brimming with human appeal, and a very distinguished piece of writing.

WE unreservedly recommend it to all lovers of good stories and to those who appreciate the very best in fiction.

Houghton Mifflin Company



American author Willa Cather would like us to read her 1918 novel *My Ántonia* with classical eyes. In a revelatory passage, the narrator meditates upon a line from the Georgics, the Roman Virgil's poem about agriculture and rural living. The line is, *Primus ego in patriam mecum... deducam Musas*, "I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse to my country." And she explains the meaning,

'Patria here meant, not a nation or even a province, but the little rural neighborhood on the Mincio where [Virgil] was born. This is not a boast, but a hope, at once bold and devoutly humble, that he might bring the Musa, not to the capital, but to his own little country; to his father's fields, 'sloping down to the river and to old beech trees with broken tops.'

This hope, to bring the Muse to the Nebraska prairies as Virgil had to his own homeland, at once expresses both the intention of the novelist, and the inner tension of the novel.¹

The titular Ántonia Shimerda is an immigrant, who spends most of her life in these prairies as they are changed from wild frontier to cultivated farmland. The narrator, who calls her "my Ántonia," is Jim Burden, a lawyer from New York City. The narrative is Jim's memoir of his patria.

Jim and Ántonia both arrive in Nebraska as children, on the same day, probably in the 1880's. He is an orphan, moving with his grandparents from Virginia. She and her family are arriving from Bohemia. They are bound together by friendship from the start, though their lives take different paths. Says Ántonia to Jim, "Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us." Jim pursues learning and culture, making a great success of his high school commencement address and going on his way to study the classics at college in Lincoln and Harvard. But Ántonia, following the suicide of her father, spends her lifetime in confrontation with nature, cultivation of the land, labor, and fruitfulness.

The inscription under the novel's title, again from the Georgics, surrounds the hope of the Muse with melancholy: *Optima dies ... prima fugit*, "The best days are the first to



flee.” Following their childhood, Jim and *Ántonia* come together on three occasions, each steeped in nostalgia and the memory of bygone times. They are together once before Jim leaves for college, and once again before he enters law school. This second time, Jim comes home to find *Ántonia* jilted, raising her child, while she continues to work the land with her family. Finally, after being away some twenty years, marrying into society, and establishing himself as a prosperous attorney for the railroad companies, he returns to Nebraska again. *Ántonia* is married to a man named Cuzak, and they have many children and a farm together.

Neither *Georgics* nor *My Ántonia* present as idyllic the life of those who bring life from the ground. As both *Genesis* and *Ántonia* prophesy, things are hard. The earth yields its strength, but only to sweat and sunburnt, sinewy bodies. In the novel, life and land are both fruitful and unforgiving. Winter and wolves claim their victims. But despite the cost of her way of life, on his final journey home, Jim is moved by the rich vitality still present in *Ántonia*:

She still had something which fires the imagination, could still stop one’s breath for a moment by a look or a gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and harvesting at last. It was no wonder her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.

Cather’s admiring tone toward *Ántonia*’s agrarian life contrasts with the regretful one she takes through the reflections of Jim and about the industrialization of America that he comes to represent as a lawyer for the railroad. In contrast to his muse, at the novel’s conclusion Jim only faintly resembles his boyhood self. *Ántonia*’s life and fecundity reveal the sterility of his own marriage, and the railroad will bring technologically advanced but spiritually degenerate industry to the prairie gardens. Cather presents us with one of many moments of American loss of innocence, one which she herself witnessed and

which her novel elegizes. The generation raised by settlers and sodbusters returns to the patria with agri-business in place of agri-culture.

Readers may want to ask whether or not the novel implicates Jim’s study of Virgil—the very study Cather expects of her readers—in his own loss of innocence. The Muse who teaches him and us to view his better days mythically, symbolically, is the selfsame spirit who alienates Jim from them. *Optima dies...prima fugit* is certainly not the epigraph of *Ántonia*’s life, but it is surely that of the narrator Jim’s. While the pursuit of culture and education grants him the abstraction to stand outside these days, to poetize their grandeur and beauty, and to lament their flight, it is this very pursuit that leads him forever away from the georgic life he so cherishes in his *Ántonia*. ♡

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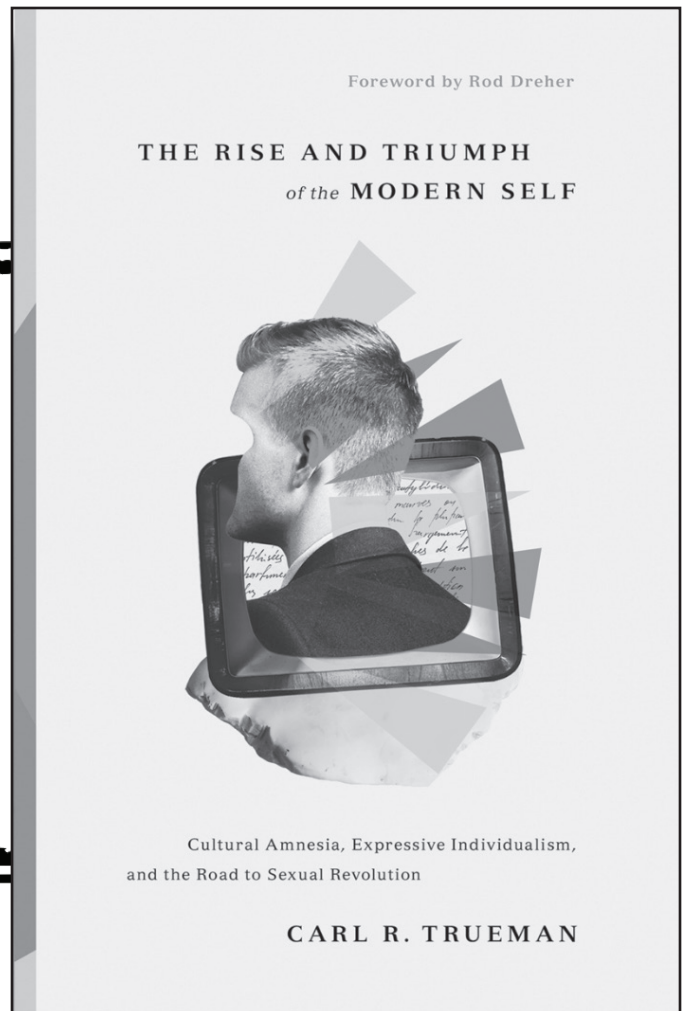
1 Here I must name my own muse. The inspiration and much of the research for this reading I have taken from my wife, Laura Henry (née Fehr), and the Bachelor’s thesis she submitted at Bethany Lutheran College in 2008 entitled, “I Will Be the First to Bring the Muse into My Country: The Influence of Virgil on Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*.”




Willa Cather

Review: The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self, Carl R. Trueman

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self by Carl R. Trueman
Book Front Cover



“ am a woman trapped in a man’s body.” A prominent example of this assertion is Bruce [Kaitlyn] Jenner who is a frequent guest on Fox’s most popular late night show, “Gutfeld,” and other popular Fox News programs. And Greg Gutfeld, the Breitbart-libertarian king of randy comedic critique of everyone and everything, doesn’t dare contradict or mock Bruce’s [Kaitlyn’s] claim that “she” was always a woman trapped in a man’s body. It’s just a given. Bow the knee. Obey the assertion. Or else! Greg Gutfeld knows the “or else,” so even he toes the line!

What has led to this? Why are we at the point that transgenderism, LGBTQ+, and this sexual revolution are so infallibly prominent and protected by federal law such as the Respect For Marriage Act? In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman correctly shows that this didn’t

just happen by chance. Instead, it is the result of centuries of intentional efforts, literary works, and philosophizing by many who despise and reject the biblical worldview. Trueman states: “At the heart of the book lies a basic conviction: the so-called sexual revolution of the last sixty years, culminating in its latest triumph—the normalization of transgenderism—cannot be properly understood until it is set in the context of a much broader transformation in how society understands the nature of human selfhood. The sexual revolution is as much a symptom as it is a cause of the culture that now surrounds us everywhere we look, from sitcoms to Congress” (pg. 20).

In order to put the sexual revolution in which we now live in a historical and a philosophical context, Trueman makes note of and draws upon three academics/ethicists—Charles Taylor (expressive individualism), Phillip Reiff (first, second, and third world cultures) and Alasdair MacIntyre (emotivism)—and then provides a historical survey of why

most everyone in Western civilization in the 21st century accepts without reservation the LGBTQ+ agenda.

The philosophical flyby ranges from Jean Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Charles Darwin to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and the Frankfurt School, besides men of letters, such as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake. Trueman notes the significance of Rousseau in the following way, and it provides the matrix for understanding all that follow in his train: “Our access to the true order of the world and our place in it is thus primarily inward” (pg. 124). The inward turn, the inner voice, free from anything external (chromosomes, the physicality of a body, the binarity of male/female, God Himself, His Word in Scripture, etc.), provides true, salvific authenticity and dignity. Crassly put: do whatever floats your boat! Whatever makes you happy! That is morality. That is truth. Inversely, whatever prevents a person from being happy is not only immoral but is capitally criminal (insurrectionist-domestic-terrorist-like), as Mr. Gutfeld instinctively knows while he sits across from Bruce [Kaitlyn] Jenner.

As you read Trueman’s book, which I highly recommend, keep your Lutheran and biblical wits about you. This will better help you to understand the hard data that Trueman provides, diagnose it, and then offer the God-pleasing solution. Bottom line, the historical and philosophical history that Trueman details and what we suffer now is the continuation of the satanic lie offered to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: “You will be like God knowing good and evil.” In Genesis 3 the satanic temptation went like this: “God is a liar. He’s holding out on you. Don’t be content to be creatures that live by faith in Him and His Word and sacrificial love for each other and the creation. Take matters into your own hands. You have better words! You can infallibly say what is good. You can inerrantly say what is evil! Be authentic by finding your inner self. Transcend your existence as a creature so that you shall be as God.”

Rousseau, Nietzsche, Marx, Hegel, Freud, et al. all follow this tragic and hellish “you will be like God” lie! The retired Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy brazenly propounded the devilish Genesis 3 propaganda in the 1992 *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey* majority opinion in which he wrote as Satan’s mouthpiece: “at the heart of liberty is the right *to define one’s own concept of existence*, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of life” (emphasis mine). What hellacious hubris!

What to do? Well, quite simply the church does what the Lord Jesus, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, has given her to do. This includes baptizing in the divine and saving triune name and teaching everything he has commanded (Mt 28:19-20), as well as preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Lk 24:47) and bearing fruit in keeping with repentance (Mt 3:8). This applies to us! Each of us needs to repent of believing the Genesis 3 satanic lie, trust Jesus and His Word, and lead holy and God-pleasing lives according to His Word, not ours. In such redeemed and restored lives, the Lord will have incredible use of us, His creatures, in our vocational tasks (male/female; husband/wife; father/mother) in order that we be salt and light, that others may observe our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. Jesus is Lord! Lord with us (Mt. 1:23; 28:20) as Lord for us!

Non desperamus! We do not despair! ❖

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My father, Robert David Preus, was the first graduate of Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. He attended Luther Seminary in St. Paul but chose not to graduate from Luther. Luther belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) and he did not want to join the ELC because of their teaching of synergism and other errors. So he transferred to the newly established Bethany Seminary in Mankato for his final semester. He graduated in 1947. Norman Madson was his teacher at Bethany Seminary. My father frequently praised Madson's preaching, telling me that he was the best preacher he ever heard. He preached the sermons in *Evening Bells at Bethany* from 1947 to 1952. Reading these sermons has confirmed my father's opinion. Madson's influence on my father's preaching is evident.

Madson shows deep knowledge of Christian doctrine. His sermons teach. He presents the teaching of the text in a clear, simple, and straightforward manner. Madson used to say that the truth is simple. It is error that is complicated. His sermons illustrate this belief. To bring one's theological erudition into service to fatherly, pastoral care is a skill that every good preacher cultivates. Madson exemplifies this.

Madson makes generous use of the great hymnody of the church. He frequently cites the great Lutheran hymns from Germany and Scandinavia. He quotes stanzas from both "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" and "Salvation Unto Us Has Come" in the same sermon, concluding the sermon by quoting this beautiful stanza from the hymn, "One Thing Needful."

Jesus, in Thy cross are centered
All the marvels of Thy grace;
Thou, my Savior, once hast entered
Through Thy blood the holy place;
Thy sacrifice holy there wrought my redemption,
From Satan's dominion I now have exemption;
The way is now free to the Father's high throne,
Where I may approach Him in Thy name alone.
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, 182:8)

Madson also makes generous use of American and English hymns and incorporates the poetry and history of our Anglo-American heritage. While reflecting the piety of our Norwegian Lutheranism in America in which he was raised, he also shows an eclectic spirit of inclusion of what is good and useful, regardless of its pedigree. He was a practical preacher.

My father is known for emphasizing that all theology is practical theology. This truth is evident in the sermons of his teacher. Madson does not simply parrot theological truths. He brings God's Word to bear on the hearers. His sermons feature the following:

1. A clear explanation of the doctrine that the text under consideration teaches
2. A persuasive appeal to this doctrine with application of the same
3. Speaking plainly in language accessible to his hearers
4. Emphasizing the pure doctrine centered in the Gospel of Christ's atonement and God's gracious forgiveness of our sins
5. An appeal to the certainty of faith and the assurance of eternal life in Christ

A sermon is practical when it teaches. Madson appeals to the text. In his sermons, it is the biblical text that teaches. To teach what the Bible teaches in plain words that people will understand is what preaching is all about. Madson's emphasis on pure doctrine was not the "bravado of orthodoxy" to which conservative Lutherans can succumb. He joined doctrinal certainty to the certainty of salvation. His sermons teach the vicarious satisfaction. They teach justification through faith alone. They teach Christ. Pure doctrine is food for the soul. Preaching Christ brings the assurance of eternal life in Christ. As I read through these sermons, I was reminded of the final thesis in C. F. W. Walther's *Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*: "In the twenty-first place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." It certainly predominates in these sermons.

The gospel of justification is central in Madson's preaching. He preaches it thoroughly and often. He is no gospel reductionist, reducing the divine truth to an imagined "gospel in the narrow sense" that cannot be articulated. His sermons are filled with exhortations to live the Christian life to which we are called when God justifies us. With antinomianism influencing so much preaching within the Lutheran Church today, Madson's sermons provide an evangelical Lutheran corrective.

Madson engages his hearer in all aspects of life. He doesn't avoid controversial assertions. He does not hesitate to identify the pope as the antichrist, and to warn his listeners of the threat of Islam. In a sermon preached in 1950, he

shows remarkable prescience: "The storm clouds which are gathering in the Moslem world are anything but reassuring" (Vol. 2, pg. 42).

Madson's sermons are not literary works or academic treatises. They are pastoral. But he shows great facility with the English language. He makes use of literary allusions. Neither flowery nor drab, he preaches in a lively, engaging style. He uses alliteration: "horrible hideousness of hypocrisy" (Vol. 1, pg. 65). His sermons are catechetical. He cites Luther's Small Catechism, assuming his hearers are familiar with it. He quotes the Formula of Concord, though his students would most likely not be familiar with it. Speaking clearly in plain language does not preclude speaking of high and holy mysteries. Madson's sermons raise the listener upward without dumbing down the doctrine that is preached. He achieves this by patient explication and by constant repetition. He teaches the teaching of the text by asking and answering questions. Reading Madson's sermons reminded me of what my father used to say about teaching theology. It consists in defining words. Words are defined by both saying what they do mean and saying what they don't mean, always clarifying. For those weary of dull, shallow, cliché-ridden homilies, or flowery moralism that ignores sin and gives only lip service to Christ's saving work, these sermons will be refreshment for the soul. They are clear Gospel preaching that a child can understand, and an old man can treasure.

Evening Bells at Bethany (Two Volumes)

Norman A. Madson

Published by Lutheran Synod Book Company

<https://bookstore.blc.edu/evening-bells-at-bethany.html>

<https://bookstore.blc.edu/evening-bells-at-bethany-ii.html>

Rev. Rolf Preus is a retired parish Pastor of 41 years.





Excellent Films for the Family: *A Child's Christmas in Wales* (1987)



ometimes a movie isn't a beloved family favorite because of its exhaustive or comprehensive treatment of a subject, but rather is treasured precisely because of a narrow focus or its ability to capture a very particular truth. *A Child's*

Christmas in Wales is such a movie. It is based upon the poem of the same name by Dylan Thomas.

While it is a Christmas movie, it certainly is not the ultimate Christmas movie. It isn't focused on the Incarnation, nor is it a grand tale concerning saints or heroes connected to Christmas. It is a small tale in both size and scope. The movie is only about an hour long, a PBS special, but well done. As was the poem, the movie is a nostalgic reminiscence of Christmases past from the perspective of a young Welsh boy. I let my children watch it twice during the Christmas Season, but not outside of it, in order to preserve the special link with the season.

The particular truth that this movie excellently conveys is the love of place—the sometimes fierce and painful longing for a particular country, a hometown, the contours of a land you know like the back of your hand, the neighborhood and fences, fields and yards that you've run through hundreds of times. The film captures rootedness in contrast to our shifting world where transience has been deemed necessary, novelty is called virtue, and uprootedness is assumed. Every man knows that he should love the street that he grew up

on with its seemingly unchangeable family and friends, home and hearth, games, toys, table, and food that formed his pattern of life year after year. The movie isn't focused on the spiritual aspects of the season, but rather concentrates on the familial act of gathering together for Christmas. The story is defined by and set within Christendom. It is

amazing to think that though Christendom was

The film captures rootedness in contrast to our shifting world where transience has been deemed necessary, novelty is called virtue, and uprootedness is assumed.

already crumbling 35 years ago, it was still assumed and much more powerfully present than today. The shared faith is especially present through music. From church bells and choirs singing in the background to Christmas caroling and hymn-singing at home, the shared faith of the families and town is expressed in song.

The story starts out with a young boy wanting a white Christmas and hoping for a present more fun than socks, "You can't play with socks... A Christmas Eve present has to be a toy or a book or something good." Children want to play and hear stories, and young Thomas finds a sympathetic ally in his grandfather who tells him stories of Christmas from the old times.

There is plenty of childlike fun and adventure in the film set to excellent poetry—hunting cats with snowballs, a supposed fire in the neighbors' living room, useless presents, and toy soldiers who fight back at you. There is mystery as well—young men marching off to the sea for unknown purposes and an unexpected voice joining in with late night carolers match the sense of fear and curiosity inherent in childhood.





Image from the movie

If music lifts our thoughts towards the eternal, food grounds us on the earth. Plenty of time is spent on all the special treats for the Christmas feast—hard candies, brandy and walnuts, tea and cigars, turkey, potatoes, and blazing pudding, port, elderberry wine, and iced cake, and candy cigarettes. Sometimes I think I grew up in a world closer to old Wales than to the totalitarian nanny state in which my children grow up. Yet anyone who has loved or longed for a particular place will be refreshed by this movie.

One especially noteworthy aspect of the movie is the emphasis on the wider family. Unlike atomized and easily isolated “nuclear families,” the family which gathers in the movie is a clan spanning different households and generations. It is heart-warming to see the antics of all the aunts and uncles and the fun they have together. “Were there uncles like in our house?” the grandson asks his grandfather. “There are always uncles at Christmas, the same uncles.” Of course, the uncles snooze after dinner, but they also play silly pranks on the women, acting like children. What was taken for granted is becoming uncommon. How much “unceling” happens anymore? How many have left their families and abandoned the faith? How many little familial feasts are dead, bereft of uncles? Clans and tribes are essential for passing down traditions and building Christendom. It is probably not too far to say that if men stop teasing women all society falls apart.

Nostalgia can indeed become a trap. Excessive sentimental yearning can lead to an idolization of the past and maudlin dreaming. Yet Christ has even redeemed nostalgia. In its best moments, nostalgia, or homesickness, and the sharp

memories and emotions it stirs, points us to that upon which all good things in this life should lead us to dwell. That which we ought to truly miss and long for is our great reunion in heaven with joy, wonder, mystery, and excitement surpassing even that of Christmases past.

The movie is very Welsh, and very few Lutherans are Welsh. In our resurgent Christendom we’ll shape, revitalize, and discover our own customs, but it is good to see what was and what can be as we rebuild. It is good to see a real, cohesive people gather in the same house over the generations, celebrate the Christmas feast, and sing their carols as they worship their Savior.

1. On to Bethlehem town;
Join the crowd and travel down;
Down the road that leads us to the cradle.
Come all who are able.
Come, come to the stable with
Hearts full of joy as we kneel and pray
Come and see the child,
With his mother Mary mild.
Come along and worship at the cradle.
(*On to Bethlehem Town*; Welsh Carol based on the
traditional Welsh Hymn, *Tua Bethlem dref*)

Rev. David Ramirez is Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Union Grove, WI and is on the Planning Committee for the Bugenhagen Conference.



The Pipe Organ: Herald of the Reformation

Celebrating the Pipe Organs in the Wittenberg Castle Church



In October 31, 2017, the pipe organs in the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany breathed and lifted their voices heralding the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The organs were in excellent voice, fulfilling their purpose—breathing, singing, and praising Christ with God’s people—as they have done for more than half a millennium.

The current pipe organ, standing as an ensign perched high upon the rear gallery of the Castle Church, was created by Friedrich Ladegast in 1863. Ladegast’s organ consisted of three manual keyboards and pedal keyboard with thirty-five stops.

Singing forth from the Castle Church chancel is a second pipe organ consisting of two manuals and pedal with eighteen stops. Schuke Organ Builders of Potsdam originally built the organ for the Wittenberg Preaching Seminary in 1965. When the Seminary relocated to the Castle, the organ was given to the Castle Church, refashioned by Schuke, installed, and dedicated in October 2016.

Late fifteenth-century documents confirm the existence of pipe organs in the Castle Church prior to the Reformation, whose purpose was intoning chant and polyphony as well as playing in alternatim with the

choir. When Martin Luther arrived in Wittenberg in 1511, the Castle Church housed two pipe organs. As the Reformation began, the purpose of the organ changed little because Dr. Luther believed Biblical chant and polyphony were a heritage of the Church worth preserving. When the congregation began singing Luther’s hymns, they too were intoned upon the organ.

During two centuries of service, the Castle Church’s Luther-era pipe organs witnessed increasing numbers of congregations singing the hymns of Luther and others. By the seventeenth century, the organ’s purpose expanded to include playing along with congregations as they sang hymns and liturgy.

In October 1760, war came to Wittenberg. The interior of the Castle Church was severely damaged and the two pipe organs were forever lost in the bombardment.

Up from the ashes the Castle Church was rebuilt. A new pipe organ with two manuals and pedal having thirty-seven stops was built by Johann Ephraim Huebner and installed in 1771. The Huebner organ served the Castle Church until the 1850s, then fell into disrepair, bringing us back to the current gallery organ built by Friedrich Ladegast in 1863.

When Friedrich Ladegast was selected to build a new pipe organ for the Castle Church, he sought to use as much of the Huebner organ as possible in the

new construction. But, alas, Ladegast found metal pipes in poor condition and wooden pipes worm ridden. The casework is all that was saved. Ladegast built an entirely new organ inside Huebner’s casework.

1892 celebrated the Reformation’s 375th Anniversary. Honoring the occasion, the Castle Church was refurbished, and Wittenberg sculptor, Wilhelm Lober, sculpted a neo-Gothic casework for the Ladegast Organ.

Times changed, shifting toward organs reminiscent of Baroque-era instruments. In 1935, the Ladegast organ was converted from mechanical to electric action, and pipes were revoiced reflecting the times. By the 1970s, the organ became technically and mechanically unreliable. In 1985, it was decided to restore the organ to the aesthetic of Friedrich Ladegast. Hermann Eule Organ Builders restored the organ with new mechanical key and stop action. Eule added a fourth manual keyboard, seamlessly blending new stops with those of Ladegast, completing restoration in 1994. Now the Ladegast and Schuke organs continue anew, heralding the Gospel in daily services and recitals unto future generations.

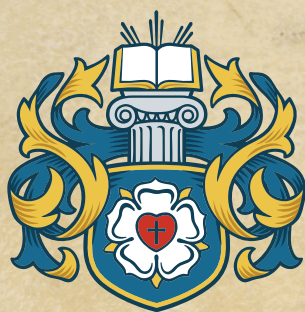
The pipe organ endures. Whether heralding or whispering, it is the created nature of the pipe organ to breathe, sing, and praise. Through Dr. Luther, God restored His Word, which reveals His grace and mercy in sending His Son for our redemption.

The Church sings this theology, thereby confessing it. Luther believed this theology is God's supreme gift to His people. Luther believed music was God's greatest gift, second only to theology. The pipe organ unites theology and music confessing Christ, driving it into the ears, mind, and heart. Therefore, let us catechize the children in theology, catechize them in music, and train them in the godly use of the pipe organ.

The pipe organ endures as the only musical instrument having inexhaustible breath, harkening unto God breathing the breath of life into humanity. Its wind harkens unto the Holy Ghost guiding Christ's Church into all truth. The pipe organ's power, from still, small voice to thundering fortissimo, washes over the Baptized in a sonic deluge transcendent of all else in the world of sound—save the Word of God—preparing God's people for Christ's appearing at the last trumpet. 🕊

Kantor Dr. Steven Hoffman is Kantor at King of Glory Lutheran Church in Cheyenne, WY.





LUTHER CLASSICAL COLLEGE

First Annual Christian Culture Conference

We are thrilled to announce Luther Classical College's First Annual Christian Culture Conference (CCC) on *The Bright Future of the Lutheran Church in America*. It will feature six beloved confessional Lutheran speakers offering their insight on topics surrounding our Lutheran culture.

The CCC will take place on June 6th and 7th, 2023, in Casper, WY. There will be limited capacity, but we hope to sign up as many as possible who would like to attend. Tickets are available at the LCC website.

Speakers and topics will include:

Rev. Dr. John Bombaro: *Christian Culture and the Home*

Rev. Hans Fiene: *Can Lutherans Get Along and Still Be Orthodox?*

Report from the Academic Dean of Luther Classical College

Rev. Dr. Gregory Schulz: *Wokism in the University System*

Mr. Timothy Goeglein: *Lutherans in the Public Sphere* (Banquet Speech)

Rev. Dr. Adam Koontz: *Past and Future of The Lutheran Church in the U.S.*

Rev. David Petersen: *The Bright Future of Lutheran Congregations in America*

We hope to see many of you in attendance this June! Register at lutherclassical.org/conference

Thank You for Your Support!

We would make a special thank you to The Roy D. and Ingaborg G. Randolph Memorial Endowment Fund, which generously donated \$10,000 to Luther Classical College in 2023. Their mission includes spreading, supporting, and strengthening the confessional Lutheran voice in doctrine and practice both in the Church and in the public square. We thank God for their commitment to this blessed cause and will by God's grace work diligently and faithfully toward this common end. Thank you to all of you involved with the Fund!

We also thank God that we hit the milestone of \$1,000,000 raised in 2022. Thank you to everyone for your generosity! If you have not yet joined the growing number of supporters, please consider a one-time or monthly gift. Visit our website or give via the envelope in this magazine. lutherclassical.org/support

Pre-Enrollment Guide Now Available

As potential students complete the Pre-Admission Form for Luther Classical College, they and their parents immediately ask what they should be doing to prepare for enrollment and admission. Help is now here.

"Preparing for Enrollment at Luther Classical College: A Guide for Parents of Prospective LCC Students" not only gives the basics of the enrollment process, but more importantly provides guidance for the prospective student's pre-enrollment education. Parents will find a broad range of advice on providing their children an education marked by the treasures of our Christian culture. The pre-enrollment Guide includes an overview of degree programs, admissions requirements, Q&A, pre-college reading suggestions and curriculum recommendations.

We eagerly anticipate the first class of students in 2025. It would be a joy if your child was among them. We welcome your questions and request your prayers and support as together we prepare for the best of a Lutheran, Classical education.

<http://lutherclassical.org/pre-enrollment-guide>