

“... while we honor those in authority, our first allegiance must be to our Creator.”



From Pastor's Desk A Whole New Can of Worms

By Rev. Jason M. Braaten

Standing before an assembly of princes at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther famously said, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against my conscience. May God help me. Amen.” When he spoke those words, the blessed Reformer knew that his life was on the line. His strong defense embodies not only the courageous spirit of Lutheranism but of Christianity throughout the ages. Indeed, the apostle Peter himself, upon threat of imprisonment and death proclaimed, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). This means that while we honor those in authority, our first allegiance must be to our Creator. This means that Christians understand their duty is to render unto Caesar the things

that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. (Luke 20:25)

Christians gratefully recognize that temporal authority is a gift from God. We heed well the words of St. Paul who writes, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). Our Lord Himself did not come to establish an earthly kingdom but a heavenly one. While the government bears the sword, our only weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Christians did indeed come to “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:18), but their purpose has never been to foment revolution.

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Rather, we come to preach a message of forgiveness, a crucified and risen Savior, who has won for us salvation and who has taught us that every human life is precious to God.

Thus, as Christians and in accordance with Scripture, we pray for those in authority. We thank God for the gift of governance, and in all things we strive to act in accordance with the law. We seek in every way to be good citizens of this land and to fulfill our civic duties. Still, we must also say to our leaders and to the world that we are also subject to another law and answer to a higher court. We confess that on the last day Christ will come to judge us all according to His holy law. This law manifests itself in our conscience by which all people act according to their perception of what is right and wrong. (Romans 2:14-15) The conscience is the internal law, as it is written in our hearts. It is our perception of God's will. Now, it is true that our conscience may be uninformed or ill-informed. As Christians, we recognize that the conscience can err and, therefore, must be informed by God's Word, so that it may conform to God's will. It is true that on certain ethical issues people of good will come to different conclusions. In the New Testament we see instances of some who thought that eating meat sacrificed to the idols was a sin. Whether or not such eating was a sin was open to debate. What was not open to debate was the fact that to go against one's conscience is always a sin. To go against conscience is to say, within oneself, "I will disobey God. My will, not His, be done." For this reason, we must be especially respectful of conscience, for in doing so we show respect for the integrity and dignity of one another.

Now, we come to the present day debate, brought on by the "women's preventive care" mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius issued this mandate with the endorsement of President Obama. According to this mandate, Catholic institutions, including hospitals, schools, and charities, will have to pay for both contraceptives and abortifacients. Some have tried to turn this into a debate on women's rights and their access to reproductive services. And yet, we should be clear, this is not the issue.

This has been made clear by our Synod President, whose bold words echo those of Martin Luther. Appearing before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on February 16, 2012, Dr. Matthew Harrison, President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), testified, "The conscience is a holy thing," and then added, "We fought for a free conscience, and we won't give it up without a fight."

To some it may seem unusual to hear such words offered up by a Lutheran pastor in defense of a

presumably Roman Catholic teaching. Now, we should say without hesitation that as Lutherans we stand firmly against abortion and recognize it as a grave evil and a national tragedy. On this position we are in full agreement with the Catholic Church. We who proclaim Christ as the life of the world hold all life precious, from conception to natural death. Yet, there is still another issue which is at play, namely, that of conscience and of the religious liberty proclaimed in the Constitution of the United States.

As LCMS Lutherans, we operate preschools, grade schools and high schools. We take pride in our university system as well as our seminaries, and we perform countless works of mercy through our many charitable organizations. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's World Relief and Human Care brings needed supplies and resources to victims of famines and floods. At the grass roots level, Lutheran congregations operate food and clothing banks, provide shelters for the homeless, hope centers for the abused and medical care to the indigent. Through these and so many other ways we express our Christian faith and bring Christ's love to our neighbor.

According to this new ruling of the HHS, all employers will be forced to provide not only contraceptives but also drugs that induce abortion. Churchly institutions that do not serve primarily members of their own church would be subject to this new ruling, except with one "accommodation." This accommodation would allow churchly institutions to opt out of paying for this service, with the proviso that their insurance carriers would then pay for these things themselves, providing them at no cost to those covered by the institution's policy. Christians must recognize that this accommodation is not enough. Rather than an expression of freedom, the mandate is coercive. Indeed, the very idea of an "accommodation" is troubling. Thomas Jefferson asserted that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. Unalienable means that these rights cannot be given, given up or taken from us. According to our nation's own founding documents, the government has no right to pass laws that would abridge the exercise of our religious freedom. Indeed, as Christians, we recognize that religious liberty is a gift from God. Our own church, the LCMS, was founded by men and women who left their homeland so that they could exercise their religion freely and in accordance with their conscience. And we are grateful for all the men and women who have fought to preserve this same religious freedom.

According to this unconstitutional mandate, Christians who own insurance companies will be forced to offer contraceptives and abortifacients. Christian institutions will be forced to buy insurance from

companies that will also have to provide their workers contraceptives and abortifacients. While we do not share with the Catholic Church the same teaching on contraceptives, we do honor their right, according to the First Amendment, to practice their beliefs according to their conscience. Furthermore, we do stand with them entirely on the matter of abortifacients, which we hold to be the taking of human life. We fear that human life itself is being treated like a commodity. We are concerned with a mindset that thinks of human beings as a commodity, rather than as a precious good and a source of blessing in and of itself. At stake is the very dignity of our humanity.

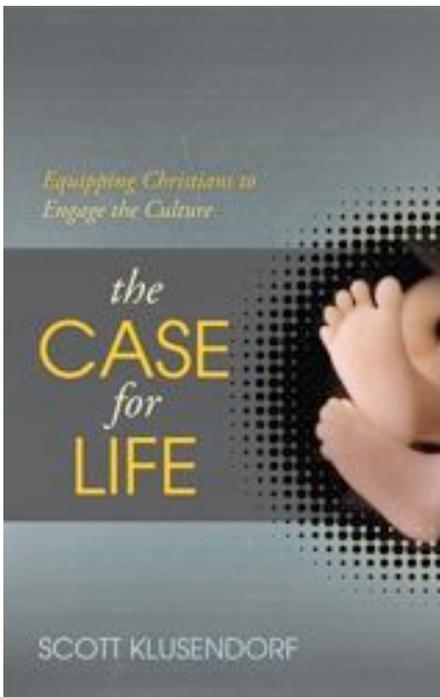
Furthermore, this mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is by no means an isolated incident, but is part of a troubling trend in which governmental entities are demanding that religious institutions abandon their own biblical principles or else discontinue their works of charity. For instance, Christian adoption agencies are already being coerced into providing adoption services for same-sex couples. Due to conscience informed by biblical values, some agencies refuse, and as a result, adoption agencies are closed down, children are not adopted into loving families and the whole of society suffers. Terrible precedents have been set and, if allowed to stand, will forever alter the landscape of our society. Accordingly, we must ask some fundamental questions as to what type of society we wish for our children and grandchildren. Do we want to live in a world where social activities informed by religious conscience are systematically exterminated? Do we want to live in a world where the social fabric is torn apart, and an overreaching government harasses the very people who knit together our society through acts of charity and

mercy? Do we want the public landscape wiped clean of religious hospitals, schools and charitable organizations?

The situation is critical. If this mandate is allowed to stand, the world will become a poorer place, those in need will needlessly suffer and our own message of Christ's love will be silenced. This mandate, and others like it, must be resisted.

What then can we, as Christians, do? For one, we must stand in solidarity with those under assault. As citizens of this nation, we must remind our leaders of the First Amendment, which states that Congress shall make no law that prohibits the free exercise of religion. We must teach our people that we have a right to life that comes not from the government, but from God. We must support those who put themselves on the line in defense of this liberty. And we must ourselves also be willing to stand up and pay the price of our convictions, whatever that price may be. While we do all this, we will continue to be good citizens. We will continue to engage in acts of mercy. We will continue to offer up prayers and supplications on behalf of our nation and its leaders, even as we pray that they would rescind this mandate. So, finally, we say with St. Paul, may we "always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man" (Acts 24:16). May God grant us wisdom and courage in the days ahead.

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The Book of the Month The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture

Pro-life Christians, take heart: the pro-life message can compete in the marketplace of ideas provided Christians properly understand and articulate that message. Too many Christians do not understand the essential truths of the pro-life position, making it difficult for them to articulate a biblical worldview on issues like abortion, cloning, and embryo research.

The Case for Life provides intellectual grounding for the pro-life convictions that most evangelicals hold. Author Scott Klusendorf first simplifies the

debate: the sanctity of life is not a morally complex issue. It's not about choice, privacy, or scientific progress. To the contrary, the debate turns on one key question: What is the unborn? From there readers learn how to engage the great bio-tech debate of the twenty-first century, how to answer objections persuasively, and what the role of the pro-life pastor should be.

From the President

About Joy

By Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

Several years ago at the advice of a dear friend I took a hard look at what might seem for me a rather unlikely topic: joy in the Christian life. "So many pastors and Christians have so little joy today," my friend observed. "These are difficult times."

At first, I scoffed at the prospect. Isn't joy a topic reserved for the slick TV preachers? Isn't it the domain of the "prosperity preachers" who get virtually every chief part of the Small Catechism wrong? Isn't joy more the mere foam on the beer rather than the tasty draught itself? But against my dour and better judgment, I determined, with a decided grimace, to open a Bible.

Soon I was racing through the pages, text to text to text. My memory was bolstered by concordances and commentaries piled about my Christmas vacation easy chair. I was dumbfounded to find the topic of joy shot through the Bible. I found joy and rejoicing pervading the Psalms (4, 5, 16, 30, 51). I found joy in the Prophets



"For Pete's sake, if I lack joy and we all do in one way or another, someone telling me to be more joyful is about as joy-inducing as a dental drill!"

(Isaiah 35) and in the Gospels (John 15:16). I found joy on the lips of Jesus (Luke 10:20) and in the lives of the people He touched (Luke 2:10). I found joy on the lips of Mary (Luke 1:47) and Zechariah (Luke 2:67ff.), in the womb of Elizabeth (Luke 2:41ff.), on the lips of angels (Luke 2:10). I found joy at the manger. I found joy at the resurrection (Luke 24:41). I found joy over life (Ecclesiastes 9), joy in the midst of death (John 11:14-15), joy in worship (Psalm 100). I found

joy amidst persecution and suffering (Luke 6:23; Col. 1:24). I found Paul's letters packed with joy (Gal. 5:22). There is even joy in repentance (Ps. 51:8). I found joy in references to faith and hope and love. I found joy over the gifts of friends, work, family, food, children and marriage. I found joy over new believers! And more important than anything else, I found reference after reference to the Lord's joy over me, sinner that I am (Luke

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15:2024). And guess what? I began to rejoice over it all!

If you, dear reader, are anything like me, you recoil at the tiniest whiff of compulsion, of a forced and coerced approach to joy. For Pete's sake, if I lack joy and we all do in one way or another, someone telling me to be more joyful is about as joy-inducing as a dental drill! Inspecting the Word of God on the topic, however, is quite a different matter. You see, the mighty and active word of God actually delivers what it talks about. Its Law actually damns (Jer. 23:29). Its forgiving Gospel actually forgives in the reading and hearing and preaching of it. "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12). And the very Word of God can create and sustain a joy the likes of which we've barely conceived. That's why it's vital for this life that we let the Word of God have its way with us, that we "buy while the market is open."

In the Bible, joy is much like faith itself. It flickers and wavers. At times, it appears to be snuffed out altogether. And yet through every storm and trial, the very things that threaten it actually kindle it and bring it to a blaze. Joy may be a simple smile at the blessing of another sunrise, a profound happiness at a family reconciled or a belly sore from laughing over an evening with old friends. As joy is tested and grows, we even learn to "rejoice in our sufferings," because we know they produce great things in our lives.

The Lord has created us for joy and has provided His Word to give it to us no matter what we face. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

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Education Corner

Going, Going . . . Gone: Why Are Young People Walking Away From Our Churches?

By Ken Ham

During the past thirty years of traveling the world and speaking in churches, I have been deeply burdened by distraught parents pleading for advice on how to reach their children who were brought up in the church but no longer attend. “How can I reach them? How can we get them back to church?” I have been asked time and time again.

I often thought how I would like to get into the heads of these young adults who have left church to understand how they are thinking. What caused them to walk away from the church they were brought up in?

Thirty years of teaching thousands of children and adults in churches has given me a big picture understanding of a number of issues—some of which greatly trouble me while some thrill me. For instance:

I have met so many young people who do not see the church as relevant and do not consider the Bible a real book of history that can be trusted.

I have found that most parents have delegated the training of their children to the Sunday school, youth group, or other Christian organization.

Whenever I ask a church audience if they have any questions, I find that they usually ask the same questions regardless of what country or church (conservative or liberal) I visit: How can we know the Bible is true and is God’s Word? Where did God come from? Where did Cain get his wife? Can’t Christians believe in millions of years, the big bang, and evolution as long as God was involved? Are the days of creation ordinary days or millions of years, and does it really matter? How could Noah fit all the animals on the Ark? To name but a few.

As I saw such patterns across America, Australia, Europe, and the United Kingdom, I was sure there must be a connection. Could it be that the lack of teaching apologetics in our churches, youth groups, Sunday schools, and Bible studies is a major reason why young people leave the church? But how do we determine if this is so, and when in their lives is this becoming an issue?





Immanuel's Sunday School teachers teach the Bible historically. Specific dates, places, and people are important. That's why the Bible is the only holy book with maps in it. Their focus is on the who's, what's, and when's. And then on the why.

As I talked with parents, an overwhelming number of them admitted they didn't know how to answer their children's questions—whether about dinosaurs, the age of the earth, or the origin of the Bible. I also found that most parents believe their children's Christianity won't come under attack until college.

A supporter of Answers in Genesis wanted to help us obtain real data from a respected and trusted researcher, who could do a statistically valid study that had to be taken seriously.

So we contracted with Britt Beemer, from America's Research Group,¹ to formulate questions and survey one thousand twenty-somethings (ages 20–29) who had gone to church regularly as children but no longer attend. They had to have come from a conservative church background so the results would reflect what's happening to children from Bible-believing churches. And what did we find?

The Survey Results

When?

The study found we are losing our kids in elementary, middle school, and high school rather than college.

Why?

Overall, the answer is the lack of teaching apologetics. The younger generations are not being raised to be able to answer the skeptical questions of our time, and so they begin doubting from a very early age whether they can trust the Bible.

What To Do About It?

“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Introduce apologetics curricula at all levels in church programs and at home. Parents need to take

responsibility for their children's education and teach them from the moment they are born.

What Do The Twenty-Somethings Want From Church?

They want Bible teaching. It is not music that will bring them back to church but solid teaching that makes the Bible relevant.

Are Sunday Schools Able To Handle The Situation?

Those who attend Sunday school are more likely to think God used evolution to create human beings, premarital sex is acceptable, and church is not relevant.

One of the shocks of the study was that, of these twenty-somethings surveyed, those who went to Sunday school were more likely to be antichurch and defend gay marriage and abortion than those who didn't go to Sunday school. Again, the basic reason comes down to being taught the Bible as a book of fictional stories rather than real history that can be defended in this scientific age.

Analyzing the Survey Results

As I have been explaining the survey results during interviews, some radio hosts have asked me, "But why the disconnect—after all, surely the churches are teaching the gospel to these children."

My answer is something like this:

"Yes, that is true, but let's consider where we get the message of the gospel. How do we know Jesus rose from the dead? We were not there to see the resurrection, and we do not have a movie of it, so how do we know it happened? We know because we trust the authority of the book from which we get the gospel—the Bible.

"We take the words of that book as God-breathed, letting them speak to us from God. But these young people have been brought up in a culture where Genesis, in particular, has been attacked. They have been taught the world was formed in millions of years through evolution. And sadly, most Christian leaders (Sunday school teachers and others) have told

these kids that Genesis doesn't matter, that they can believe in secular history over millions of years as long as they trust in Jesus. Ninety percent of these kids go to a public school where God, the Bible, and prayer have been thrown out. They are being educated in a secular philosophy—in naturalism.

"These children have been led to doubt that the Bible can be trusted in the beginning. They are not being taught how to take a stand for its authority from the very first verse. They are not taught the answers to the skeptical attacks on the Bible. So when the message of Jesus is taught to them, they don't really believe it because they don't believe the Book from which it comes."

I pray the book *Already Gone* will challenge the church to return to the authority of God's Word. The next generation in the church needs to be taught not just what to believe as Christians, but also why we believe what we do, and how to answer skeptical questions. Let's begin equipping the next generation to stand solidly on the authority of God's Word!

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In the News

Trends in Modern Bioethics

By Michael Avramovich

American philosopher George Santayana famously wrote in *Life of Reason*, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Whether history repeats itself, as Santayana suggested, or merely rhymes, as Mark Twain suggested, is a matter for debate on the nature of historic recurrence. I agree far more with Solomon’s aphorism that there is nothing new under the sun. As a current example of nothing new under the sun, Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva recently wrote an article published on February 23, 2012, in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, a peer-reviewed journal for health care professionals and researchers in medical ethics.

In the article, titled *After-Birth Abortion: Why Should The Baby Live?*, the authors say that parents should have the right to kill their newborn infants because infants are not people. Professor Giubilini, of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Milan, Italy, and the Centre for Human Bioethics at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and Professor Minerva, of the Centre for Applied Philosophy at the University of Melbourne, Australia, and the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, Oxford, England, write that murdering newborn infants should be legalized.

They write that in “circumstances occur[ing] after birth such that they would have justified abortion, what we call after-birth abortion should be permissible.” The authors prefer the



term “after-birth abortion” as opposed to “infanticide” because the term after-birth abortion emphasizes “that the moral status of the individual killed is comparable to that of a fetus (on which ‘abortions’ in the traditional sense are performed) rather than to that of a child.” The authors also do not like the term euthanasia for post-birth abortions as it is not necessarily the best interest of the child being killed that is the primary reason for his killing. (Really??) In other words, the parents would determine in their best interest to kill the newborn.

So, what do our erstwhile ethicists suggest are acceptable circumstances under which the newborn may be killed? This might include a situation where the well-being of the family is at risk, even if the newborn had the potential for an “acceptable” life. Downs Syndrome is an example cited by the authors. The authors write that while the quality of life of individuals with Downs Syndrome is often reported as happy,

“The authors prefer the term “after-birth abortion” as opposed to “infanticide” because the term after-birth abortion emphasizes “that the moral status of the individual killed is comparable to that of a fetus (on which ‘abortions’ in the traditional sense are performed) rather than to that of a child.”

“such children might be an unbearable burden on the family and on society as a whole, when the state economically provides for their care.” (Emphasis added.)

Thus, a newborn whose family (or society) can be socially, economically or psychologically burdened or damaged by the newborn should have the ability to seek out a legal after-birth abortion. The authors further contend that the moral status of a newborn as a potential person is equivalent to a fetus (which incidentally is merely the Latin word for an unborn child), in that it cannot be considered a person “subject of a moral right to life.” For those who might have an interest (the text of the article may be found here: <http://jme.bmj.com/content/early/2012/02/22/medethics-2011-100411.full>) .

So, why do I start this blog referring to history and that there is nothing new under the sun? Several months after the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, on July 14, 1933,



Many historians have long observed that the intellectual underpinnings for eugenics and social Darwinism that led to the heinous acts by the Nazis and others began in the philosophy and other academic departments of German and other European universities many decades earlier. As much as we might consider the proposal by Professors Giubilini and Minerva to be absurd and morally reprehensible presently, please remember that history might just rhyme.

LCMS LIFE CONFERENCE

2013

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the Nazis enacted the “Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases.” The law called for the sterilization of all persons who suffered from diseases considered hereditary, including mental illness, learning disabilities, physical deformity, epilepsy, blindness, deafness, and severe alcoholism. With the law’s passage, the German government also propagandized against the disabled, calling them “life unworthy of life” or “useless eaters,” as they highlighted the burden on society caused by the “useless eaters.”

Weeks before the German invasion of Poland, on August 18, 1939, the Reich Ministry of the Interior circulated a decree compelling all physicians, nurses, and midwives to report newborn infants and children under

the age of three who showed signs of severe mental or physical disability. At first, only infants and toddlers were included, but eventually juveniles up to 17 years of age were also killed.

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Facts and Figures; Dates and Times

Greeters List

4 Mar	Jim Dyer – West Joan Vukelich – East
11 Mar	Laverl Byers – West Becky Kappes – East
18 Mar	Tim & Teri Pollock – West Harold & Irene Wattjes – East
25 Mar	Donna & Gunnar Campbell – West Jim Dyer – East
1 Apr	Joan Vukelich – West Laverl Byers - East
8 Apr(S)	Becky Kappes – West Tim & Teri Pollock – East
8 Apr(9)	Harold & Irene Wattjes – West Donna & Gunnar Campbell – East
15 Apr	Jim Dyer – West Joan Vukelich – East
22 Apr	Laverl Byers – West Becky Kappes – East
29 Apr	Tim & Teri Pollock – West Harold & Irene Wattjes – East

Coffee Committee

Mar	Janet Stumeier
Apr	NEED VOLUNTEERS

Altar Committee

4 Mar	Theresa Fields
11 Mar	Theresa Fields
18 Mar	Theresa Fields
25 Mar	Sharon Allen
1 Apr	Sharon Allen
5 Apr	Sharon Allen
6 Apr	Mary Appleby
7 Apr	Mary Appleby
8 Apr (Sunrise)	Mary Appleby
8 Apr (9am)	Janice Arthur

Elder On Duty – Communion

4 Mar	Geof Danielson
11 Mar	Geof Danielson
18 Mar	Jack Appleby
25 Mar	Jack Appleby
5 Apr	Greg Nau
6 Apr	Geof Danielson
7 Apr	Josh Whitson
8 Apr (Sunrise)	Greg Nau
8 Apr (9am)	Geof Danielson
15 Apr	Josh Whitson
22 Apr	Josh Whitson
29 Apr	Josh Whitson

ATTENDANCE			OFFERINGS		
Date	Saturday	Sunday	General	Missions	Building
5 Feb	19	77	\$2,566.72	\$0.00	\$192.00
12 Feb	27	81	\$2,058.00	\$5.00	\$0.00
19 Feb	22	61	\$1,831.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
22 Feb Ash Wednesday	47	0	\$318.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
26 Feb	20	90	\$1,812.64	\$0.00	\$0.00
29 Feb Midweek	50	0	\$477.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Subtotal	185	309	\$9,063.36	\$5.00	\$192.00
Total	494		\$9,063.36	\$5.00	\$192.00

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Immanuel's stained glass window in the Narthex.