

# Who Do You Say I Am?

Past and Present Threats to the Biblical Christology of the Nicene Creed

*David Waterstradt*

[Presented at the Chicago Pastoral Conference,  
Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church, Aurora, Illinois,  
Monday, January 15, 2007]

Why does Jesus make the cover of *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and even *Popular Mechanics*? Why is He the subject of best-selling fiction and blockbuster movies? Why is Jesus cited in support of presidential candidates, P.E.T.A., diet books, hybrid cars, and Alabama state tax reform?<sup>1</sup>

Everybody claims to know who Jesus was and what He would do.

The American public seems to have a pretty good idea of who Jesus was. 75% of Americans believe that Jesus was a real person; 77% believe that He was born of a virgin; 69% believe that Jesus was the Son of God; 67% believe that He was divine;<sup>2</sup> only 44% of Americans believe that Jesus was merely human and committed sins; and 80% believe that He rose from the dead. Of those who expect His return, 45% believe that it will happen in their lifetime. Jesus is even the public figure most Americans name as their personal hero.<sup>3</sup> But does this mean that our culture has an accurate picture of Jesus?<sup>4</sup>

According to popular opinion, Jesus is a political philosopher. Jesus is also an animal rights activist, a flag-waving patriot, an environmental crusader, a feminist goddess worshiper, an enemy of gun control, and an advocate for gay marriage. Conservatives and liberals, the religious and irreligious, the moral and immoral all claim Jesus as their own. Perhaps you're familiar with the "*Jesus Is My Homeboy*" line of t-shirts, bumper stickers, and other paraphernalia?

Everybody has a place for Jesus. Secularists, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Agnostics, Atheists, Hindus, Universalists, Wiccans, Baha'i, Sikhs, Taoists, and New-Agers all have some place for Jesus in their ideologies. He was a good man, a prophet, a teacher, a *deva*,<sup>5</sup> an *avatar*,<sup>6</sup> a consciousness, an enlightened being, or a divine spirit.

Everybody loves this Jesus because He is obscure, ambiguous, inoffensive, affirming, and pluralistic. This Jesus helps you find your purpose, reach your potential, realize your innate goodness, and achieve self-fulfillment, He was sent by an overindulgent-grandfather of a god from the great-big country-club in the sky to help us be all we can be. He said nice things, did nice things, and never hurt a fly. He lived to show us that we are better than we think we are. He died to show us that you can accomplish anything if you just apply yourself.

This Jesus of popular opinion might make a good aerobics instructor, but he makes a lousy Savior. In his book, "*The Jesus I Never Knew*," Philip Yancey remembers the "saccharine, obsequious" Jesus of Sunday School lessons and asks,

---

<sup>1</sup> Taken from an article about a University of Alabama School of Law Professor seeking to alter the Alabama State Tax Code entitled, "Who Would Jesus Tax? The Saga of Susan Pace Hamill's Alabama Tax Crusade."

<sup>2</sup> "The Religious and other Beliefs of Americans 2003," February 26, 2003. The Barna Group of Ventura California.

<sup>3</sup> "Religious Beliefs Remain Constant but Subgroups Are Quite Different," March 19, 2004. Princeton Survey Research Associates.

<sup>4</sup> 75% of Americans believe that Jesus was a real person while 80% believe that He rose from the dead?! Sorry about that – this discrepancy is the result of taking statistics from two different polls.

<sup>5</sup> In Hinduism, a *deva* is a demigod or minor deity, such as Agni, Indra, Soma, and Ushas. According to Hindu mythology, the *devas* are opposed to the *Asuras*. The conflict, between *devas* and *asuras*, causes the eternal churning of the "Cosmic Milk" upon which all Creation "floats."

<sup>6</sup> The manifestation of a Hindu deity (especially Vishnu) in human or superhuman or animal form; "the Buddha" is considered an *avatar* of the god Vishnu.

*How would telling people to be nice to one another get a man crucified? What government would execute Mister Rogers or Captain Kangaroo? Thomas Paine said that no religion could be truly divine which has in it any doctrine that offends the sensibilities of a little child. Would the cross qualify?*<sup>7</sup>

When someone asks, "What would Jesus do?" popular opinion answers, "Whatever you want." No wonder everybody loves this Jesus. What's not to love? This Jesus is everything the Jesus of Scripture isn't. And I most assuredly don't need to tell anyone here that the world needs the Savior, not the Jesus of popular opinion.

The Church cannot afford to reinforce this case of mistaken identity. In our preaching and teaching, it is not enough to give Jesus honorable mention and hope for the best. In a world where everybody loves the Jesus of popular opinion, the real Jesus must be proclaimed in all of His suffering, crucified, and risen detail.

*At the risk of seeming impious, we must recognize that even the Doobie Brothers can confess that "Jesus is just alright with me." When we (Lutherans) use the term God and the name Jesus, we invest those terms with all the proper historic Biblical content. Those around us in our culture do not. We are foolish if we believe that we are giving a Christian witness just because we use the terms God and Jesus in an orthodox way. When speaking in the public square, we must explicitly express the particularity of the Gospel message.*<sup>8</sup>

We must declare the "Jesus" of popular opinion—of culture—to be false. We must show the culture the real Jesus. We must condemn sin as the real Jesus does. We must comfort sinners as only the real Jesus can. We must be determined to know nothing—*nothing*—but Christ and Him crucified. We must tell the culture that the real Jesus is found in His Church.

The real Jesus asked, "*Who do the crowds say I am?*" (Luke 9:18) The survey results are still coming in and they are still wrong. The only way to change that is for the Church to answer Jesus' next question correctly, "*But who do you say I am?*" (Luke 9:20)

That's precisely the question the early church fathers endeavored to answer and the Church's answer is still found in the words of the Nicene Creed.

## **General Background**

In the first three centuries, the Christian Church found itself in a hostile environment. The separation from Judaism meant that Christianity was not an approved religion in the Roman Empire, which led to persecution. Sharing the Gospel (which came out of Hebrew thought and culture) with the Hellenistic world was a challenge. However, the greatest threat to the early Church was not from physical and political persecution. The greatest threat came from ideas that were in conflict with Scripture. The main, though not the only, representatives of those opposing ideas were Gnosticism and Arianism.

As the Church developed the Apostles' Creed into its present form, it was forced to wrestle with Gnosticism, a teaching which denied that Jesus was truly man. Nascent Gnosticism was already a concern in the days of the Apostles. The emphases of the Apostles' Creed reflect a concern with repudiating this error. Arianism arose in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Nicene Creed was the Church's response to this threat. While Gnosticism was a fulfillment of the apostle John's vision of the beast out of the earth, Arianism was a manifestation of the beast out of the sea (Revelation 13), a heresy whose threat was far more political than theological. Rome, of course, was the perfect combination of both.

## **Athanasius**

---

<sup>7</sup> Philip Yancey, "The Jesus I Never Knew" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> David Adams, "The Church in the Public Square in a Pluralistic Society," *Concordia Journal*, vol. 28, no. 4 (October 2002), pp. 372-373.

Scripture is God's great gift to our darkened world which would know nothing of salvation apart from the Gospel message. Throughout history, God has preserved His Word through brave men who've stood up for the truth of Scripture when it was threatened by error; men who fought for the preservation of the Christian faith. Like Scripture, they too, are God's gifts to His Church.

Apart from the apostles and up until the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Athanasius was the greatest of these gifts in the New Testament church. He was born around A.D. 298, and lived in Alexandria, Egypt, the chief center of learning in his day. There he became a very well-educated man.

In A.D. 312, the Emperor Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Mulvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, Constantine converted to Christianity. In 313 he issued the Edict of Milan, which officially ended state-sponsored persecution of Christians and elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. "*One God one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor,*" became Constantine's motto. However, the new emperor soon discovered that the "one faith and one church" part of his program was being fractured by the theological disputes that resulted from conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ, long a point of controversy in the early church, but now newly challenged.

About 319 a presbyter, Arius of Alexandria, began to teach concerning the Word of God—the Logos (John 1:1)—that "*God begat him, and before he was begotten, he did not exist.*" Athanasius was at that time a newly ordained deacon, secretary to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, and a member of his household. His reply to Arius was that the begetting, or uttering, of the Word by the Father is an eternal relationship between them, and not an event in time. Thus, Arius was condemned by the bishops of Egypt. He traveled to Nicomedia, an ancient city in northwest Asia Minor, near the Bosphorus, in present-day Turkey, from which he wrote letters to bishops throughout the world, stating his position and furthering the controversy.

The Emperor Constantine undertook to resolve the dispute by calling a council of bishops from all over the Christian world. This council met in Nicaea, just across the straits from what is now Istanbul, in the year 325. There were 317 bishops in attendance. Athanasius accompanied his bishop to the council and soon became recognized as a chief spokesman for the Scriptural view that the Son was fully God, coequal and co-eternal with the Father.

The main task of the Council was to formulate a creedal statement to express the consensus of the bishops. They first tried to find a formula from Holy Scripture that would express the full deity of the Son, equally with the Father. That effort failed because the Arians cheerfully agreed to all such formulations, having already interpreted them to fit their own views. (Anyone who has conversed with members of the Watchtower Society, who consider themselves the spiritual heirs of Arius, will know how this works.)

Finally, the Greek word "homo-ousios" (meaning "of the same substance, or nature, or essence") was introduced chiefly because it was one word that could not be twisted to represent the Arian position. Some of the bishops present, although in complete disagreement with Arius, were reluctant to use a term not found in the Scriptures. But eventually they realized that the only alternative was a creed that both sides would sign, each understanding it in its own way. It was clear that the Church could not afford to leave the question of whether the Son is truly God or simply a god undecided so a majority of the Council moved to adopt a statement which is a shorter version of what we now call the Nicene Creed. In it they declared the Son to be "*of one substance with the Father.*" At the end, there were only two holdouts, Secundus and Theonas of Egypt who had dissented from the earlier condemnation under Alexander. The party of Athanasius was overwhelmingly in the majority. The western, or Latin, half of the Empire was very sparsely represented, but it was solidly Athanasian, so that if its bishops had attended in force, the vote to accept the Council's wording of the Nicene Creed would have been still more lopsided.

No sooner was the Council ended than its consensus began to fall apart. Constantine had expected that the result would be unity, but found that the Arians would not accept the Council's decision. Largely because of the political upheaval that threatened the empire, many of the orthodox bishops were prepared to look for a wording a little softer than that of Nicaea, something that sounded orthodox, but one that the Arians would

accept. (One cannot help but think of the events between Luther's death and the Formula of Concord in 1580.) All sorts of compromise formulas were worked out, with all shades of variation from the formula of Nicaea.

In 328, Alexander died, and Athanasius succeeded him as bishop of Alexandria. He refused to participate in these negotiations, suspecting (correctly, as it turned out) that once the orthodox party showed a willingness to compromise, they would end up giving away the store. He defended the full deity of Christ against emperors, magistrates, bishops, and theologians. For this, he was regarded as a trouble-maker by Constantine and his successors, and was banished from Alexandria a total of five times by various emperors. Hence the expression "Athanasius contra mundum." ("Athanasius against the world.") The parallels between Athanasius and Luther are striking.

Eventually, Christians who believed in the Deity of Christ came to see that once they were prepared to abandon the Nicene formulation, they were on a slippery slope that led to regarding the Logos as nothing more than a high-ranking angel. The more the bishops experimented with other possible wordings, the clearer it became that only the Nicene formulation would preserve the Christian faith in any meaningful sense. Thus the Nicene Creed was re-affirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 381, a final triumph that Athanasius did not live to see (the wording of the Nicene Creed, as we have it today, was also settled at this Council).

As far as the bishops were concerned, the theological issues had been resolved, but the overall situation was complicated by the fact that, after Constantine, there were several Arian emperors, not counting the Emperor Julian, who was a pagan. However, Julian correctly recognized that the most effective way to fight Christianity was to throw all his weight on the side of the Arians. Julian funded Arian missionaries to convert the Goths, who had become the backbone of the Roman army (then composed chiefly of foreign mercenaries) with the result that for many years Arianism was considered the mark of a good army man. The Goths were a real military and political threat to the Empire (they sacked Rome in 410 A.D.) The conversion to orthodox Christianity of Clovis, King of the Franks, in 496 denied the Arian Goths the military supremacy that might have enabled them to crush Athanasian Christianity.

Of the two great enemies of biblical Christianity, Gnosticism and Arianism, Gnosticism has proved the longer lasting and greater threat. The Arian position has been revived in our own day primarily by the Watchtower Society, which explicitly hails Arius as a great witness to the truth; but Arianism has posed little threat to orthodoxy since the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **The Nicene Creed Today**

The Nicene Creed is the most ecumenical of creeds. The Eastern orthodox churches, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and most Protestant churches join in affirming it.

As we consider the Creed itself, note especially its clear statement of biblical Christology and its equally clear rejection of Arian heresy. Also note its clear rejection of some modern heresies as well.

Incidentally, the English translation of the Creed in *Christian Worship* comes from the English Language Liturgical Consultation, which is a very ecumenical group that includes the ELCA and the LC-MS. The only changes our hymnal committee made to the ELLC translation was to substitute "fully human" for "truly human" in the Second Article and "Christian" for "catholic" in the third article. The ELLC was determined to come up with English translations of the creeds faithful to the Greek of the original documents and not influenced by current theological positions. They have succeeded.<sup>9</sup>

### ***We believe in one God,***

The use of "we" in the Nicene Creed rather than the "I" of the Apostles' Creed comes out of its origins. The Apostles' Creed had its roots in baptismal confessions of faith, where "I" was natural. The Nicene Creed was the statement of the Church confessing its faith as one body. In worship, the Church has always used the

---

<sup>9</sup> Taken from an on-line article entitled, "About the Consultation on Common Texts" at [www.commontexts.org](http://www.commontexts.org).

Apostles' Creed in connection with baptism, which always applies to an individual, while the Nicene Creed is used in connection with the Lord's Supper, an inherently shared action.

Here, too, the church affirms the Trinitarian teaching of the Scriptures in the phrase "one God."

***the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.***

Jesus' role in creation was crucial to the Arian heresy. It was important to the Athanasian group to make clear the role of the Father in creating everything that existed. If the Son is "God from God" and thus also the Creator, then the Athanasians had to make it clear that God the Father is the Creator of all.

***We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,***

The Athanasians' choice of "Lord" is evidence of the care and thought given to every word used in the Creed. They could have used "God," thus paralleling the First Article (and done the same in the Third Article). However, that could have confused the issue of the Trinity by speaking of three Gods. The use of the biblical word "Lord" makes clear that Jesus is God without leaving any room for confusion.

It is common among WELS people when reciting the creed to ignore the comma in this first phrase of the Second Article of the Nicene Creed and the first phrase of the Apostles' Creed, "*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.*" In a confessional church such as ours, we should perhaps be a little more careful to avoid a practice that will cause those confessing to miss a point the council of Constantinople thought was so important.

***the only son of God,***

Here and elsewhere (such as John 1:14,18) where the Greek has *μονογενης*, English translations must choose between "the one and only" or "the only begotten." The Greek is ambiguous.

***eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,***

Arius was fond of saying, "*The Logos is not eternal. God begat him, and before he was begotten, he did not exist.*" The Athanasians replied that the begetting of the Logos was not an event in time, but instead was the description of an eternal relationship. Nothing in the Scripture suggests that there was a time when the Son was not. To the contrary, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*" (John 1:1-2)

***true God from true God,***

Here the Church affirms in her confession both the doctrine of the Trinity and the teaching of the Savior in John 10:30, "*I and the Father are one.*"

In contrast to the Arian heresy and the world's befuddled understanding of Jesus' identity, Scripture presents a clear and uncompromising confession of Jesus as God incarnate for the salvation of the world. The Council reflected that with these words from the Creed.

***begotten, not made,***

This line was inserted to repudiate the Arian teaching that the Son was the first thing that the Father created, and that saying the Father begets the Son is simply another way of saying that the Father has created the Son.

Arius said that if the Father has begotten the Son, then the Son must be inferior to the Father, as a prince is inferior to a king. Athanasius replied that a son is precisely the same sort of being as his father, and that the only son of a king is destined himself to be a king. It is true that an earthly son is younger than his father, and that there is a time when he is not yet what he will be. But God is not in time. Time, like distance, is a relation between physical events, and has meaning only in the contest of the physical universe. When we say that the Son is begotten of the Father, we do not refer to an event in the remote past, but to an eternal and timeless

relationship between the Persons of the Godhead. Thus, while we say of an earthly prince that he may some day hope to become what his father is now, we say of God the Son that He is eternally what God the Father is eternally.

***of one being with the Father.***

Jesus is Lord. He is none other than the LORD of the Old Testament, the God of Israel. He is not depicted merely as an agent or representative of the LORD but as one who shares in the mysterious reality of the true God by virtue of being the Son. He is Emmanuel, "*God with us*" (Matthew 1:23).

This line: "of one essence with the Father, of one substance with the Father, consubstantial with the Father," (in Greek, HOMO-OUSIOS TW PATRI) was the crucial one, the acid test. It was the one formula that the Arians could not interpret as meaning what they believed. Without it, they would have continued to teach that the Son is good, and glorious, and holy, and a Mighty Power, and God's chief agent in creating the world, and the means by which God chiefly reveals Himself to us, and therefore deserving in some sense to be called divine. But they would have continued to deny that the Son was God in the same sense in which the Father is God. And they would have pointed out that, since the Council of Nicaea had not issued any declaration that they could not accept, there was room for their position inside the tent of Christian doctrine. Arius and his immediate followers would have denied that they were reducing the Son to the position of a high-ranking angel. But their doctrine left no safeguard against it, and if they had triumphed at Nicaea, even in the negative sense of having their position acknowledged as a permissible one within the limits of Christian orthodoxy, the damage to the Christian witness of Christ as God made flesh would have been irreparable.

***Through him all things were made.***

This is a direct quote from John 1:3.

***For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human.***

The purpose of the Savior's mission and incarnation is made plain by the Church in this phrase.

The Christmas season issue of *U.S. News and World Report* a few weeks ago carried an article on Jesus which suggested Jesus was more of a teacher than a Savior. "*To the Gnostics, or at least to many of them (there were various schools, with names like Sethians, Marcionites, Valentinians, and Thomas Christians), Jesus was not the son of Yahweh sent to redeem fallen humanity through his death and Resurrection; he was an avatar or voice of the oversoul sent to teach humans to find the sacred spark within.*"<sup>10</sup>

That's a view that still finds ready acceptance in the world of American spirituality. Americans love the idea of religion but are leery of any particular religion. This is especially true of Christianity; it's too particular, too specific. Americans want vague spirituality. In American spirituality, "god" is generic, man is basically good, and your problem isn't your sin but your unrealized goodness (just ask Joel Osteen). In American spirituality, "salvation" doesn't require a savior, just a little self-help (see the above comment of Jesus as "the voice of the oversoul"). So the view of Jesus as more of a teacher and less of a Savior is a much easier characterization for 21st Century Americans to accept than the idea that we need saving and that only God could accomplish the task. Teachers can be accepted or rejected in part or in whole. Saviors allow no such latitude.

***For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.***

---

<sup>10</sup> "The Gospel Truth – Why Some Old Books Are Stirring Up a New Debate about the Meaning of Jesus," by Jay Tolson, Newsweek, December 18, 2006.

The New Testament clearly proclaims that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the defining events which reveal who He truly is. We often look to the nature or healing miracles in order to understand the identity of Jesus. They are important, but Jesus routinely discouraged people from talking about them. Instead, He repeatedly talked about His suffering, death, and resurrection. *"From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life"* (Matthew 16:21; see also 17:22-23 and 20:17-19). All of this happened just as Jesus said it would and we are told, *"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."* (Romans 4:25)

The words concerning the Savior's return and His kingdom having no end put the lie to the "Left Behind" crowd. The early Christians saw no earthly kingdom between the Savior's ascension and His coming again to judge the earth. This is an idea without justification in the Scriptures and without precedent in the life of the Church orthodox.

***We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,***

The same confession about the divinity of the Holy Spirit is made in this third article as was made of Jesus in the second article. This was not a matter of dispute at Nicaea or Constantinople. The pause we make at the commas surrounding "the Lord" in this article should remind us that the comma following "Lord" in the Second Article should be observed as a matter of confession.

***who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,***

Once again the phrases express and support the biblical teaching of the Trinity. The Athanasians saw that Arianism was an attack on the Trinity.

***who has spoken through the Prophets.***

This line was directed against the view that the Holy Spirit did not exist, or was not active, before Pentecost. It supports the unity of the Old and New Testaments. No one in the Church disputed the existence of the Holy Spirit and His activity in the New Testament Church.

***We believe in one holy Christian (catholic) and apostolic Church.***

Many will remember the questions that arose in the days before *Christian Worship*, most likely on Trinity Sunday, when we confessed at the beginning of the Athanasian Creed, *"Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic (emphasis mine) faith,"* and at the end, *"This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved."* In parentheses at the beginning were the words (*"i.e., universal, Christian"*). The *Christian Worship* hymnal committee made a decision that even with the explanation, the word "catholic" simply means Roman Catholic to our people. What is lost with the disappearance of that word is an opportunity to explain that the visible Church was once united in its confession of faith, and that the divisions since that time are about justification and the three solas of the Reformation.

***We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.***

How many Evangelicals, who profess to accept the Nicene Creed, realize that the view of the Athanasians was so decidedly sacramental? What a clear-cut rejection of the "ordinance" view of the decision theology sect! In baptism, God washes away our sins. That was clearly the view of the Council at Nicaea. Baptism is what God does for us (pure Gospel), not what we do for Him (i.e., an "act of obedience" or the testimony of a born-again heart). Intellectual honesty requires Arminians to recognize by these clear words that they have broken their connection with the Church of the Nicene Creed. Holding to an ordinance view of baptism and thus rejecting infant baptism has no support whatsoever in the history of the early Church.

***We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.***

(Time for a little "tongue-in-cheek" commentary.) Whoa, Athanasius, some in the Christian world today are disappointed with what you and your fellow bishops wrote about the last things. There is not a word about the Great Tribulation, the rapture, the thousand year reign of Jesus in Jerusalem and Armageddon. You should at least have said something about the dead in Christ being raised a thousand years before the unbelieving dead. The way you described the resurrection, people could easily believe that all the dead would be raised on the last day. You people must have been under the delusion that you were living in "the last days." That time is reserved for us today. Why, the Jewish State would not be established for another 1500 years, and you never even heard of Russia. How could you possibly think that such a simple statement about the end times could sum up everything the Church believes about the end of this world? You must have listened to that guy who said, *"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you."* (1 Thessalonians 5:1)

## **Confessionalism**

It's nearly impossible to consider the Nicene Creed and the threats against its Christology without giving some thought to Confessionalism in a broad sense. The Christian Church—from the days of the Old Testament prophets, through the apostolic leaders and writers of the New Testament, to the Post-Nicene fathers—was aggressively confessional in character. The Scriptures' emphasis on correct teaching is seen in the stubborn resistance of the prophets to the compromises God's people wanted. Elijah said it so well, *"How long will you waver (lit. "go limping") between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him. But the people said nothing."* (1 Kings 18:21) It is seen again in the Savior's unwillingness to be connected with the various strains of First Century Judaism, His warnings against false prophets and His insistence on God's Word, the whole Word and nothing but the Word. His Apostles reflected that concern in their unabashed insistence on apostolic teaching, especially in the Pastoral Epistles.

These men saw theology as doxology—the art of praising God by apprehending His revelation—and they made that their work. (Truly a refreshing thought in our world where theology is seen as a do-it-yourself creation of your own personal view of God.) The early church fathers wrestled mightily with these issues and produced wonderful statements still in use today. What a blessing we have in the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds! In short, they—by the grace of God—settled the controversy surrounding the divinity and humanity of Jesus as well as the mystery of the incarnation for all Christendom; for the person of Christ has never been in serious debate since. That's remarkable considering all the other doctrines that have been so fiercely debated in the Church to this day. While Gnosticism and Arianism (especially Gnosticism) still spook about the religious world and will, no doubt, not disappear until Jesus returns on Judgment Day, the confessions of the church have been a rock-solid foundation against false doctrine for most Christians for over a millennium and a half.

Would that the Formula of Concord had been as successful in dealing with the heresy of work righteousness! Paul warned that work righteousness would not be easy to handle. *"Don't you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding (the man of lawlessness) back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming."* (2 Thessalonians 2:5-8)

Since shortly after the days of the Apostles, the misunderstanding of justification by faith has plagued the Church. That continues. The "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2) endures and will until Jesus returns. Evangelical believers fail to see that their decision theology is also *"the power of lawlessness...at work"* (2 Thessalonians 2:7). There is no essential difference between Thomas Aquinas' teaching in the *Summa Theologica* that nothing God creates can be completely evil and Billy Graham's altar call to unbelievers who still have enough of the image of God remaining in them to be able to make a decision for Christ. We thank the

Lord ...for inspiring the apostle John to write, "*Yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God*" (John 1:12-13), ...for inspiring the apostle Paul to write, "*It is God who works in you both to will and to act according to His good purpose*" (Philippians 2:13) and *No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 12:3), ...for Luther who wrote *The Bondage of the Will* clearly exposing Aquinas' work righteousness, ...and for the confessors of the Reformation from the Augsburg Confession to the Formula of Concord.

And let us also give thanks for men like Athanasius and those at the Council of Nicaea who stood up for the truth. The Nicene Creed united the Church, provided a solid, Biblical foundation for a Scriptural understanding of the Person of Christ, and enabled orthodoxy to triumph. Since the days of the Apostles, its ratification in 381 is a pinnacle in the history of the Church, exceeded only by the Reformation itself.

## **The Enemies of Confessionalism Today**

Two major principles in both culture and in the Church oppose biblical confessionalism today—rationalism and pietism. They affect individual believers and the Church as a whole.

### ***Rationalism***

Rationalism is certainly not new. It makes man and his mind the measure of all things—exactly what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. However, until recently (relatively speaking) humans had no explanation for the functioning of the world and the mysteries of life. The natural knowledge of God, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen in the world around us. But for the early centuries of recorded history, humans foolishly exchanged the truth that God was the Creator for the lie that they could make images of God from their own understanding.

With the Renaissance and the explosion of knowledge about the natural world, educated men became more aggressive in glorifying human reason. The Deism of the Eighteenth Century was a step along the way. "Deism is a system of belief which holds that the universe is a self-sustained mechanism from which God withdrew immediately after creation."<sup>11</sup> To Deists, God is the watchmaker who puts everything together, but then stays conveniently locked away in His divine ivory tower, allowing the universe to operate on its own and giving humans free reign over all creation. Deism was influential, but did not rule the cultural roost until the Twentieth Century.

Two developments made a certain kind of cultural dominance of rationalism possible. First, Darwinism removed the last great mystery of nature for rationalists—that being life, and especially human life. Now there was a "respectable" explanation for life that permitted the leading people of learning to remove God from nature altogether. Second, modern means of communication and universal education allowed those same leaders to dethrone Christianity from its position of cultural leadership. The people who control education and the media have no room for God and religion in the world of science, economics, public life, and education where human reason reigns. In individual lives, God and religion are tolerated, as long as they do not affect things in public life.

Rationalism's effect on the WELS was limited historically by language and confessionalism. The battles between modernists and fundamentalists in the latter part of the Nineteenth and the first part of the Twentieth Centuries had little effect on the German-speaking Wisconsin Synod. We were hardly touched by the unbelief of rationalism and the battle against "modernism" as it was known.

However, our people, especially our youth, do confront rationalism in today's modern culture. Growing up in the bosom of a believing family and a confessional church, young people run into a spiritual buzz-saw that begins in high school and continues into young adulthood whether they attend college or not. Unlike past times during most of the New Testament era, the world around us does not assume faith, but views it, at best, as a

---

<sup>11</sup> Lutheran Cyclopedia, Concordia, pp. 288-290

choice people make. As a result, many young adults see the world-view of their parents, their fellow Christians, and their church as irrelevant or somehow quaint when compared with what they meet in their day-to-day lives. It doesn't help that Christians have made so many compromises with the world—especially in the area of materialism—that young believers are ill-equipped to face or even recognize the clash between their faith and the culture around them.

Often the Church doesn't recognize the cultural ascendance of rationalism. We approach people with the assumption that everyone really knows he or she *ought* to be a Christian, but just hasn't recognized it yet. How many times have you been asked, "Pastor, I don't know how people can survive without faith in Jesus. Isn't that just crazy? How do they get through life?" But there are plenty of people out there who are convinced they're just fine without the Gospel and our young people are meeting and marrying them. Our times are not even like those of Paul, when most people basically had a spiritual view of life and could recognize the superiority of Judaism or Christianity. People educated under a system that assumes the human mind has all the answers aren't automatically open to a view of life based on God's revelation.

Gospel communicators must understand the culture they work in, but most of all they have to understand the breadth and depth of the Scriptures. Today's people may be influenced by rationalism in many ways, but God alone has the answers to life's biggest questions. The Church's confessional stance from Elijah to Paul to Athanasius to Luther is the only approach to lost sinners that is true to the Scriptures and filled with hope, joy, peace, and life. *"We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength"* (1 Corinthians 1:23-25). In our day and age, we surely cannot afford to be timid or apologetic in our preaching and teaching ministries!

### ***Pietism***

Pietism and confessionalism are opposite of one another and antagonistic. In the long view of the history of New Testament understanding, this continuum—pietism/confessionalism—is more important than the so-called liberal/conservative model that has often defined things in recent decades. The importance of the pietist/confessional continuum is often not recognized because of the complete triumph of pietism in American Protestantism. A century ago, confessions of faith were significant in defining the religious scene in protestant America. When *Christianity Today* was first published in the 1950s, doctrine was the defining characteristic of churches. Recently an article in *Christianity Today* noted that style of worship was more important than doctrine in defining who's who among Evangelicals.

Besides ourselves, some percentage of Missouri congregations and pastors, and some relatively small Reformed groups (the Orthodox Presbyterians, for example), there are no confessional protestant church bodies in America. Pietists are triumphant. There are liberal pietists and conservative pietists, but there are virtually no confessional protestant churches.

Despite these rapid changes we still often define our general view of churches on the liberal/conservative continuum. This leads us to be drawn to "conservative" Evangelicals of various stripes, failing to recognize how far away from them we are on the pietist/confessional continuum.

Since pietists disdain confessions, it is hard to clearly define them, but here are some of the characteristics of pietism:

- feelings are more important than teaching,
- the subjective is more relevant than the objective,
- the arena of salvation is in the hearts of people now, not in Jerusalem 2000 years ago,
- worship is basically what we do, not what God does,
- how we worship is more important than what we teach,
- any method that influences people can be used to further the Kingdom of God, not just the Means of Grace,

- Baptism and Communion are not sacraments (things God does to and for us), but ordinances (things we do in obedience to God's commands),
- prayer is viewed as a Means of Grace,
- an inability to distinguish between Law and Gospel.

I recently received a flyer in the mail inviting me to River Valley Christian Fellowship's Worship Seminar in Kankakee, Illinois, on the last Saturday of this month. The opening paragraph, written by the Seminar leader, was striking.

"Some years ago when our daughter, Amy, was very young, I was putting her to bed one evening. The last thing I said to her that night before standing up to leave her room was, "Don't forget, Amy: love Jesus every day." I liked the sound of it, so I said it again the next night. And then the next, also.

The following evening I received an unexpected response. After I had once again reminded her to love Jesus every day, little Amy looked up from her bed, pointed her finger at my nose and said, "Don't you forget, Daddy: love Jesus every day."

With a catch in my voice and a tear in my eye I responded, "Thanks for reminding me, Amy. I need to hear that."

Not that this brochure is any big deal, but that little story inside makes quite a point. "With a catch in (his) voice and a tear in (his) eye..." I can think of a lot of things worth getting choked-up about, but a call to work-righteousness, is not one of them. "Thanks for reminding me, Amy. I need to hear that."(?!) Poor kid; night after night the last thing she heard was an admonition from the law. But notice how perfectly little Amy understood what her father said to her. She pointed a finger at his nose and spoke the law right back to him! With a catch in his voice and a tear in his eye, he should have responded, "I'm sorry I've been pointing you to yourself these last days, Amy. What I really want you to know is how much Jesus loves you. That's what we both need to hear."

In the same brochure there is a blurb about the main speaker at the Seminar.

When it comes to the topic of worship, Tom Kraeuter is one of the most respected teachers in the Body of Christ today. His biblically-based teaching crosses nearly all denominational lines. Tom is a dynamic speaker and a gifted communicator.

I wonder what the prophet Elijah, the Apostle Paul, or Athanasius would think of someone whose "biblically-based teaching crosses nearly all denominational lines"? I'd be curious to know which denominational line his biblically-based teaching doesn't cross. At least he's a dynamic speaker and a gifted communicator!

This is typical pietism. It is a leaven that has virtually wiped out confessionalism in America's protestant churches. And we would do well to remember that *"a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough"* (1 Corinthians 5:6). Do we really believe that our use of worship and other materials that are pietistic in nature<sup>12</sup> will not have an effect on us? As someone once said, "You can't warm yourself by the fire without coming away smelling like smoke."

In his paper, *"Our Use of Reformed Materials,"* Professor James Dannell, from Martin Luther College makes this observation:

There are a number of areas where we need to pay especially close attention. Perhaps the greatest is in the area of music, both for the children of our elementary schools and high schools, as well as for our adult choirs. One hears selections at times that are, shall we say, less than Lutheran. Many, if they don't say the wrong thing, say nothing at all. They are just short, catchy and easy to sing, little ditties—exactly what people want. They appeal to the emotions. One thinks for example of the "Wee Sing" cassettes. Well-intentioned people have given them to my children as a gift. The kids enjoy listening to them and can learn the songs very quickly. As I was preparing for today, I played the cassette through with an ear for

---

<sup>12</sup> See the attached article from the Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel.

the theology being taught. In the entire tape I did not hear one single clear and explicit reference to the cross of Christ, His dying there for the world, or the forgiveness of sins. The closest thing I could find in the area of justification was the song, "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." That's the closest the tape came to a biblical, Lutheran teaching on the Means of Grace too. Now granted there may be some songs on there that don't really teach anything wrong. There may be some songs that I could use in a certain setting. But a whole "Christian" tape that never really gets around to talking about Christ too much?! Don't you think that ought to send up at least a little red flag?!<sup>13</sup>

In his book, *"The Fire and the Staff,"* Pastor Klemet Preus comments on the use of "Praise Music" in a Lutheran service:

Jesus did not give us the Word and Sacraments in the Divine Service so that we could undergo "Ego Renewal." Yet these songs promote such self-centeredness by focusing endlessly on me, my feelings, my gifts, my sacrifice, my, my, my.

It's not that these songs always contain false doctrine. Most contain no doctrine. It is not, in and of itself, a sin to sing them. But a steady diet of this type of song would never feed the thirsty soul with the forgiveness we have in Christ. So why are they used?

I have a friend in California who started a Saturday evening praise service. I asked him why. His reply: "To attract the unchurched. They can relate more to the simple praise songs. Hymns from the hymnal are too difficult to sing, and these are simpler."

I have heard this reasoning a dozen times from a dozen pastors or church leaders who prefer praise songs to the church's historic hymns. Ironically, in the vast majority of songs that are sung at the praise services, the "unchurched" are hearing nothing of value about Jesus. We think we are making it easier for them to become Christians when, in fact, we are making it almost impossible. To know Christ one must learn what He has done. This doesn't happen in most praise songs.

The pastor has three or four chances to choose hymns for the Sunday service. For the sake of the lost, for the sake of those saved, and for the sake of our Lord Jesus, choose carefully. If your hymn selection is made on the basis of Christ-centered saving lyrics, you will gravitate away from praise songs and toward the church's historic hymns.<sup>14</sup>

In the information I was given for this paper, the Program Committee asked, "By what other winds of teaching is Satan trying to blow Christians here and there—anywhere away from Christ? By what cunning and craftiness are men deceitfully scheming to overthrow sound biblical Christology?" Could the answer to those questions be found in Pietism creeping into our midst through a cavalier approach to worship and a use of less-than-orthodox materials in our congregations?

Pietism is a powerful force in America today. In 2006, *Time* magazine put a mirrored piece of paper on the cover of its *Person of the Year* issue because its editors selected "You" as the person of the year. The "me-centeredness" of pietism is the spirit of our times. In our desire to reach out to people we must be careful not to reflect this self-centeredness in our worship and preaching which would cloud our confession of Christ. We are not called to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed. Jesus asked, "*Who do you say I am?*" Enlightened by the Holy Spirit we can echo our confession in everything we do: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16).

Just as Athanasius stood firm in his day, despite being banished by Roman authorities five times, we today must stand firm for confessional principles whether they are popular or not. And we must understand the faith given us in the Scriptures as well as Athanasius did in his day. It isn't enough just to hold to the truth. We are called to be faithful servants of the truth.

May God bless us to that end!

---

<sup>13</sup> Professor James Dannell, "Our Use of Reformed Materials," pg. 10, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on-line essay file.

<sup>14</sup> Klemet Preus, "The Fire and the Staff," pp. 149-150, Concordia Publishing House.

---

## Why You Are Not An Arian

---

You believe that Jesus Christ is true God because the Scriptures ascribe to Him...

### Divine Names

**1 John 5:20** We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

**John 20:28** Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

**Romans 9:5** Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

**Matthew 17:5** While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

**John 5:18** For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

**Titus 2:13** ...while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...

**Romans 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

**Acts 20:28** Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**John 1:14** The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 1:18** No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known

**Colossians 2:9** For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...

**1 Timothy 3:16** Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

**Romans 1:3** ...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David...

**Luke 1:35** The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

**Galatians 4:4** But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law...

### Divine Attributes

**Hebrews 1:3** The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

**John 1:1-2** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

**Hebrews 13:8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

**John 21:17** The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

**John 2:24** But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.

**1 Corinthians 4:5** Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

**Matthew 28:18** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

**Matthew 28:20** "...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**John 1:43-51** The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

## Divine Works

**John 1:3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

**Colossians 1:16** For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

**Hebrews 1:3** The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

**John 5:21** For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

**John 5:28** "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice..."

**Genesis 3:15** "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

**John 5:27** And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

**Matthew 9:6** "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home."

**John 2:1-11** On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

**Luke 5:18-26** Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat

through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

**Matthew 8:23-27** Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

**John 11:38-44** Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

**Matthew 28:6-7** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

**Matthew 9:1-8** Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

### Divine Honor

**John 5:23** ...that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

**Hebrews 1:6** And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

**Philippians 2:10** ...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...

**Revelation 5:12** In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

---

## A Timeline of Selected Persons and Events in the History of the Christian Church<sup>15</sup>

---

**323 BC** - Alexander the Great dies. Alexander conquered all the territory from Greece and Egypt to the borders of India. He spread Hellenism (Greek culture) throughout this territory.

**31 BC** - Octavian defeats Anthony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. He becomes "Augustus," the first Roman emperor.

**4/3 BC** - Possible years of the birth of Jesus Christ.

**AD 29/30** - Possible years of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Birth of the Christian Church.

**AD 50-100** - Most or all of the documents collected in the canon of the New Testament are written during this period.

**AD 100-200** - Height of Gnostic influence on the Christian Church. Gnostics tended to deny the incarnation and that God is the Creator.

**AD 144** - Marcion is condemned. He believed in two gods: the good god who saves us and the creator god who is not good, but is only just and perhaps evil.

**Ca AD 165** - Justin the Apologist (a defender of the Christian Church) is martyred. He proclaimed that the Word was present in all wise and pious persons, but present in its fullness only in Jesus Christ.

**Ca AD 200** - Irenaeus dies. He opposed Marcion and the Gnostics by averring his belief in God's economy, which included the creation, and in the incarnation, centering on the recapitulation of the human situation in Jesus Christ.

**Ca AD 225** - Tertullian dies. Unique among the church fathers because he wrote in Latin, Tertullian was the first to use the word *Trinity*. He also developed the formula of "one substance, three persons" to describe the Trinity, as well as the formula "two natures, one person" to describe Jesus Christ.

**AD 254** - Origen is martyred. An immensely important theologian in Alexandria, Egypt, he stressed an allegorical approach to interpreting Scripture. His speculative views would intensify later theological controversies.

**AD 312** - Battle of Mulvian Bridge. Constantine defeats Maxentius and eventually becomes sole Roman emperor. He begins the favorable treatment of Christians within the Roman Empire, and he founded Constantinople as a Christian city.

**AD 325** - Council of Nicaea. The first of seven ecumenical councils, the Council of Nicaea was called by Constantine. It condemned Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ, and it affirmed that Jesus Christ is *homoousion* ("Of one substance") with the Father.

**AD 373** - Athanasius dies. As archbishop of Alexandria, he was a stout defender of the Council of Nicaea and of the use of *homoousion* to describe Jesus Christ. Athanasius was exiled five times.

**AD 381** - Council of Constantinople. This is the second Ecumenical Council. It produced the Nicene Creed, known more precisely as the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan" Creed. This creed states belief in the Trinity, including the *homoousion* of Jesus Christ and the Father.

**AD 395** - Theodosius I dies. He was the last man to rule a unified Roman Empire. A devout Christian, Theodosius outlawed pagan sacrifices, thus establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. He also called the Council of Constantinople.

**AD 430** - Augustine of Hippo dies. An important theologian of the Western church, He was known as "the Doctor of Grace" because of his strong affirmation of human sinfulness and the need for God's grace. He opposed Pelagius, who stressed human goodness and free will. Augustine's views drove him to teach predestination.

**AD 431** - Council of Ephesus. Recognized as the Third Ecumenical Council. It condemned Nestorius of Antioch, who had become archbishop of Constantinople. He had been charged with denying the unity of Christ. The Council also condemned Pelagius.

---

<sup>15</sup> Taken from "The Great Jesus Debates," Concordia, pp. 163-167

**AD 449** - Another council at Ephesus, though not recognized as ecumenical. It affirmed that there was only one nature of Christ in the incarnation, which enraged the Roman church (the Western church) and others. It has been called, "the Robber Synod."

**AD 451** - Council of Chalcedon - It is recognized as the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Its statement of faith recognizes both the two natures of Christ and His personal unity.

**AD 553** - Second Council of Constantinople. Also called Fifth Ecumenical Council, this assembly failed in its attempt to recognize the monophysites with the affirmations of Chalcedon.

**AD 680** - Third Council of Constantinople. The Sixth Ecumenical Council proclaimed that Jesus Christ, who has two natures, must have two wills, with the human will obediently following the divine.

**AD 749** - John of Damascus dies. This important theologian of the Eastern church was involved in the Iconoclastic (picture-breaking) Controversy. He insisted that when one denies that physical matter can convey spiritual reality, then one also denies the incarnation.

**AD 787** - Second Council of Nicaea. The Seventh, and final, ecumenical council affirmed that though God alone should receive true worship, icons can be venerated.

Original Story URL:

<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=545518>

### *Old time rock 'n roll*

Traditional hymns get fresh beat as interest grows in contemporary church services

By **TOM HEINEN**

[theinen@journalsentinel.com](mailto:theinen@journalsentinel.com)

Martin Luther wrote the lyrics centuries ago, but the eighth-note rock rhythms that pulsed through St. Marcus Lutheran Church on Christmas Eve clearly proclaimed that this was new terrain for "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come."

Such sounds would have been verboten in the distant past within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, known for staunch theological conservatism.

But new ways to deliver God's message have been evolving.

Exploration of modern musical forms and instrumentation also has been happening for years in other branches of Lutheranism, and in other denominations, sometimes sparking what have been termed "worship wars" as contemporary and traditional approaches to music and worship vie within congregations.

At St. Marcus, 2215 N. Palmer St., traditional hymn lyrics are retained for its alternative service at 6:30 p.m. Sundays. Even the familiar tunes usually are there – just with a blues, pop, folk or rock 'n' roll setting, all played by the "house" band Koiné.

Pete Reese, 32, a string bass player from Milwaukee, describes the music as "bombastic pop, to classic rock, to folk. Even a touch of metal, a touch of punk here and there."

"We don't consider ourselves a praise band," said Brian Davison, 28, of Milwaukee, the band's vocalist and the church's youth and music minister. "We call ourselves a worship band or a church band. All our songs come from old hymnal songs from the Lutheran tradition, and others. We are trying to give new life to some of the old hymns that taught so well and had such beautiful words."

### 'Natural drive'

Take the Luther hymn, for example.

"The song has natural drive to it," said Milwaukeean Benj Lawrenz, 31, the band's creative spark, electric and acoustic guitar player, and grandson of Carl Lawrenz, a theologian and former president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon.

"It's the shepherds explaining to the world what they have just seen with the angels. So there's a lot of energy to the lyrics. And the music has a lot of energy behind it. If you play it in an upbeat tempo, it just pushes you forward, like the shepherds were being pushed."

That hymn was one of several from the synod's 1993 book, "Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal." Adding brief narratives and Scriptural readings, the service told the Old Testament history that led up to Christ, the events around his birth and the sacrificial purpose for which he came.

"A lot of times people leave Jesus in the manger, and it's just really nice and cuddly at Christmas," Lawrenz said. "They forget that this person came to die for the sins of the world and not just to be a ploy to sell Christmas merchandise."

There is theology behind retaining traditional lyrics, which are seen by some as more accurately reflecting Scripture.

"You have to get the difference between the way the evangelicals and Lutherans look at theology," said James Tiefel, dean of chapel and a professor of worship and homiletics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. "The evangelicals will say that a human being has to make a decision to become a Christian. And so the way you get him to make that decision becomes very important. You have to find a way to raise his emotions or convince his intellect. Lutherans will say the Holy Spirit works through the word (Scripture) to create a Christian."

There has been some experimentation with full-blown praise bands in WELS churches for at least 10 years, but it is not widespread, Tiefel said.

One of the noteworthy WELS examples nationally is St. Mark Lutheran Church in De Pere. About 80% of the music that its praise band plays comes from top-selling contemporary Christian music. The church, which has a \$150,000 audio-visual system with two big video screens, has nearly 2,000 members and needs to expand beyond the new facility it built a few years ago, said Phil Boileau, its minister of music and family.

A growing number of WELS churches nationally are making at least some use of contemporary music and instruments beyond the organ, according to Tiefel and the Rev. Bryan Gerlach, administrator for the WELS Commission on Worship. At least 150 have gotten instruction at Gerlach's School of Worship Enrichment.

## 25% offer alternative service

Wayne Mueller, first vice president of synod mission and ministry for WELS, estimates that 25% of the denomination's 1,263 congregations offer some type of regular alternative worship.

He thinks the push for contemporary music is coming from 35- to 40-year-olds, and that younger people prefer tradition. He also cites a study that correlates membership growth with the percentage of a congregation's people involved in Bible study.

Unlike many other mainline denominations, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has had stable membership instead of losses. There were about 317,000 baptized and confirmed members 16 and older in 1990, a majority in Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. Now there are about 315,000, Mueller said.

Formed in 1993, Koiné, the St. Marcus band, took its name from an ancient Greek term for the language of the common people. With Seth Koch, 25, of East Troy as a newly added replacement on drums, and Seth Bauer, 26, of Waukesha on piano, the band recently released its second CD. Koiné has played at more than 70 churches in the region.

From 15 people at the first Sunday night services, attendance now averages about 150, with many more for special services, said the Rev. Jim Skorzewski, who conducts the alternative services and assists Senior Pastor Mark Jeske in shepherding the diverse, growing congregation. Many are 18 to 35. Sunday's service drew about 300 worshippers.

## Growing congregation

St. Marcus has grown from about 500 members four years ago to about 800, Davidson said. The home of Jeske's "Time of Grace" television and radio ministry, the church has a 280-pupil school with a waiting list, a gospel choir, bible study groups for men and women, a bible-based Wandani Youth Outreach program and other groups for various age ranges.

The original concept was to reach out to African-Americans in the church's central-city neighborhood, a few blocks east of N. King Drive, near North Ave. But drawing on talents within the congregation and adding a couple of outside musicians resulted in music with more appeal to young adults and college students, and from a wider area.

"We get a sprinkling of everything, but not the target group we sent out for," Skorzewski said. "It's like God just said, 'I think it would be really cool if you went this way.' "

From the Dec. 25, 2006 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεόν, πατέρα,  
παντοκράτορα, πάντων ὁρατῶν τε καὶ  
ἀοράτων ποιητήν.

Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν  
υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ  
πατρὸς μονογενῆ, τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς  
οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς, θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς  
ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ  
ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα,  
ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα  
ἐγένετο, τὰ τι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν  
τῇ γῆ, τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους  
καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν  
κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα,  
ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, παθόντα καὶ  
ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, ἀνελθόντα  
εἰς οὐρανοὺς, ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας  
καὶ νεκρούς.

Καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα.

Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας· ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, καὶ  
πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν, καὶ ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ  
ὄντων ἐγένετο, ἢ ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως  
ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι, ἢ τρεπτὸν ἢ  
ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ,  
ἀναθεματίζει ἡ καθολικὴ καὶ  
ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία.

We believe in one God, the Father,  
almighty, maker of all things visible  
and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of  
God, begotten from the Father, only-  
begotten, that is, from the substance  
of the Father, God from God, light  
from light, true God from true God,  
begotten not made, of one substance  
with the Father, through  
Whom all things came into being,  
things in heaven and things on earth,  
Who because of us men and because  
of our salvation came down and be-  
came incarnate, becoming man,  
suffered and rose again on the third  
day, ascended to the heavens, will  
come to judge the living and the  
dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was  
when He was not, and, Before being  
born He was not, and that He came  
into existence out of nothing, or who  
assert that the Son of God is of a  
different hypostasis or substance, or  
is subject to alteration or change—  
these the Catholic and apostolic  
Church anathematizes.

CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED

C-PANUM 381 A. D.

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἓνα θεόν, πατέρα,  
παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς,  
ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ αοράτων.

Καὶ εἰς ἓνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ  
θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς  
γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ  
φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,  
γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ  
πατρὶ, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς  
τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν  
σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ  
σαρκωθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας  
τῆς παρθένου καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,  
σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου  
Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ  
ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς  
γραφάς, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,  
καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ  
πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας  
καὶ νεκρούς· οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται  
τέλος.

Καὶ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον καὶ  
ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον,  
τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον  
καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν καὶ τῶν  
προφητῶν· εἰς μίαν ἁγίαν καθολικὴν καὶ  
ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν. ὁμολογοῦμεν ἕν  
βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν·  
προσδοκῶμεν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν καὶ ζωὴν  
τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. ἀμήν.

We believe in one God, the Father,  
almighty, maker of heaven and  
earth, of all things visible and in-  
visible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-  
begotten Son of God, begotten from  
the Father before all ages, light from  
light, true God from true God, be-  
gotten not made, of one substance  
with the Father, through Whom all  
things came into existence, Who  
because of us men and because of  
our salvation came down from  
heaven, and was incarnate from the  
Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became man, and was crucified  
for us under Pontius Pilate, and  
suffered and was buried, and rose  
again on the third day according to  
the Scriptures and ascended to  
heaven, and sits on the right hand  
of the Father, and will come again  
with glory to judge living and dead,  
of Whose kingdom there will be no  
end;

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and  
life-giver, Who proceeds from the  
Father, Who with the Father and  
the Son is together worshipped and  
together glorified, Who spoke through  
the prophets; in one holy Catholic  
and apostolic Church. We confess one  
baptism to the remission of sins; we  
look forward to the resurrection of  
the dead and the life of the world to  
come. Amen.

## Bibliography

- "The Catholic Encyclopedia (on-line)" - [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org).
- Cloute, James T. *"The Origin and Terminology of The Nicene Creed"* – Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary On-Line Essay File.
- Gawrisch, Wilbert R. *"Who Is Jesus Christ - Current Issues in Christology,"* Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2002.
- Jahn, Curtis A. (editor) *"We Believe In Jesus Christ - Essays on Christology,"* Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1999.
- Johnson, Douglas W. *"The Great Jesus Debates - Four Early Church Battles about the Person and Work of Jesus,"* Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2005.
- Koehler, John P. *"The History of the Wisconsin Synod,"* Faith-Life, The Protestant Conference, 1970.
- Lange, Lyle W. (editor) *"Our Great Heritage,"* pp. 418-553, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1991.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *"A History of Christianity, Volume 1 - Beginnings to 1500,"* Harper Collins Publishing, San Francisco, California, 1975.
- Lueker, Erwin. (editor in chief) *"Lutheran Cyclopedia,"* Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1954.
- Neve, J.L. *"A History of Christian Thought, volume I,"* Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1946.
- Preus, Klemet I. *"The Fire and the Staff"* Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2004.
- Reim, E. *"The Historical Background of the Ecumenical Creeds,"* - Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary On-Line Essay File.
- Yancey, Philip. *"The Jesus I Never Knew"* Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995.