

WYOMING DISTRICT ROUND-UP

Wyoming District—LCMS

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"Here I Stand" on the Word in My Community

Here I Stand: Divine and Human Law

The opening scenes of Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* illustrate a theological distinction that informs our understanding of the laws of civil government and community. The plot of the movie turns on the shadowy law called *prima noctu* (a shortened and corrupted form of the Latin for "right of the first night"). If this law existed, it asserted that nobles had the right of bedding any bride in their territory on her first night of marriage, in this case, English nobles ruling Scottish villages. The movie illustrates how such an unjust law would have violated the entire fabric of household and community life, thus justifying armed rebellion against the illegitimate regime that allowed or enforced such a law.

Here is the illustrated distinction, seen as two kinds of law: There are many laws created by man, and there is the eternal and divine law which comes from God Himself. This distinction is explained and confessed in our Lutheran Confessions, especially Apology XXIII, "On the Marriage of Priests." We confess here that marriage is a divine law that is given to all men, including priests (pastors). The Roman Catholic Church had forbidden marriage to their priests in the 11th Century and were seeking to enforce this law upon Lutheran pastors during the Reformation. Our Confession states that the law forbidding marriage conflicts with natural and divine law and therefore must be abolished.

Because our present civil governments tend to treat all laws simply as expressions of power, we urgently need to recover our understanding of these two kinds of law. However, the distinction between the two tends to disappear in English, because the word "law" is used for both kinds of law. Not so in Latin! We will trace the two kinds of law by the Latin words that are used in our Confessions: *jus*, *juris* and *lex*, *legis*.

In Apology XXIII, the Latin word *jus*, *juris* means "law," but it also is translated "right." This word is the root of English words like "jury" and "jurisdiction." This word describes the natural and eternal law of God, law that comes from God's own eternal nature and is taught clearly and definitively in Holy Scriptures. It finds its fullest expression in the "true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24) of the "image" and likeness" of God in man (Genesis 1:26–27). This divine law or right also informs and undergirds the entire creation. In other words, this Law is imprinted in the fabric of the whole creation.

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We cannot abolish or change this law, any more than we can abolish or change the law of gravity. (Think of it, airplanes do not defy the law of gravity, but depend on using it for successful flight.) Divine law (*jus, juris*) describes inherent or concreated law, including both natural law and the revealed law of Scriptures.

On the other hand, all spoken and written laws are expressed with the Latin word *lex, legis*. This word is the root of English words like “legal” and “legislature.” We often call it “positive law,” meaning law that is posited or made by man. It includes all the various laws and statutes established by governments. It also describes oral laws and customs, many taboos, etiquette, and the like.

Every man-made law (*lex*), in order to be just and righteous, must somehow flow out of and express the eternal will and law (*jus*) of God as taught in Holy Scriptures and as described by natural law. Positive law may be as simple as a traffic law (*lex*) that serves to protect lives and maintain good order and peace. Much more is at stake when we are dealing with laws that either permit or destroy God’s works of fatherhood, life, and marriage. Think of the supposed law (*lex*) of *prima nocta* in *Braveheart*, or the actual law (*lex*) forbidding marriage to a certain class of humanity, that is, pastors (AC XXIII). These laws (*leges*) are inherently unjust because they violate the fabric of creation itself, the design and purpose for which God made man as male and female. It is the equivalent of a law (*lex*) that abolishes the law (*jus*) of gravity. Man has no such power. He seeks to make himself a god by such evil works. God’s wrath upon such wickedness is just.

We are currently plagued by a host of such unjust laws (*leges*) in our civil government and communities today: no-fault divorce, abortion, same-sex “marriage” and other sexual perversions, various transgender laws, and the like. Laws (*leges*) that enshrine such absurd defiance of divine law (*jus*) in our household and community life are evil. They expressly reject the God who created the world in righteousness and truth. They destroy the good design and purpose of His creation. Certainly, all sins offend God in this way and violate His purposes for us. However, unjust laws (*leges*) embed this sin within or against the very creatures and estates that God instituted for our good. When law (*lex*) which is supposed to restrain evil and punish sin is evil in itself, there remains no remedy for the evils among us. Again, God’s wrath is just.

Two immediate benefits may be gained in learning this doctrine. First, understanding this distinction helps us to recognize, define, teach, and confess when laws (*leges*) are just or unjust. Legalized abortion is an unjust law because it violates the 5th Commandment, God’s eternal law (*jus*) for man. No-fault divorce, sodomy, same-sex marriage, transgender mutilation, and the like, are unjust because they defy the law (*jus*) of marriage, which is instituted by God and embedded in man’s nature. Divine laws (*jura*) are not subject to human opinion, human desire, or human striving for political power and wealth. They are good because God engraved them upon our human nature, our persons, our bodies and souls. They are good because God is good.

Second, knowledge of positive law (*lex*) and divine law (*jus*) gives us the basis for action in loving our neighbors and communities. In our personal relationships, we know clearly what is evil. We know what to say to the erring brother or friend. We know what must be done to snatch him from the fire (Jude 1:23, Galatians 6:1). The certainty of divine and eternal law (*jus*) makes us bold to love those caught in such sin. In the same way, we can be bold and generous with our time and efforts to attend and address our city councils, school boards, and county commissioners (not to speak of state legislators, governors, and the federal government). We can confidently confess and teach that the laws and statutes (*leges*) they establish must correspond to natural and divine law (*jus*), for the good of all.

The Pastors gathered at Fort Robinson in Crawford, NE at the beginning of June for their continuing education class provided by Rev. Adam Koontz. While the pastors are in sessions, their families gather together for fellowship and fun with other families. Pictured below are some photos from their class and the fun of the families. .



The Headwaters Circuit held their first Family Retreat in June. With about 40 people attending, it was a great time to get away from the busyness of life and gather together for fellowship with other Lutherans. Activities included hiking, shooting with a trained range master, and much more.



REFORMATION 500: "Against Latomus"

Upon his arrival at the Wartburg for exile (May 1521), Luther began to work immediately on translating the New Testament into German. (More on that later.) His work was interrupted by the receipt of a booklet written by a Professor Jacob Latomus from the University of Louvain in Belgium. Because the booklet attacked the heart of the Reformation, Luther paused his translating for almost two weeks to prepare a reply. "Against Latomus" (AE 32.137–260) cleared away much of the confusion and error of the scholastic theologians and explained Lutheran theology on such beautiful doctrines as Scripture, original sin, law and gospel, sin and grace, and Christ.

Luther hammered home the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, **Scripture** alone. He emphasized the certainty and clarity of God's Word, "The Holy Spirit is quite capable of expressing his meanings in suitable words, so that there is no need for human inventions" (194). "The pure, simple, original sense should be sought" (167), that is, "what is required by grammar and its ordinary meaning" (247). "The integrity of Scripture must be guarded, and a man ought not to presume that he speaks more safely and clearly with his mouth than God spoke with his mouth" (244).

Our constant war against sin and error depends on our use of Scriptures. "In short, so certain are we of the pure truth of the Word, that we ought to die for it" (192). All doctrine must be drawn from Scriptures, including the teachings of the great theologians (like Luther!): "There is one teacher, even Christ, and the fathers are to be tested by the judgment of the divine Scriptures so that it may be known who has clarified and who has obscured them" (217).

In this treatise, Luther taught that the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*, **simultaneously righteous and sinful**. Latomus had rejected this statement: "Every good work is sin" (161). Luther replied with two Bible passages: Isaiah 64:6, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags" (161), and Ecclesiastes 7:20, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and sins not" (180). Luther was re-

jecting the idea that original sin in the Christian is no longer sin, and that the Christian can therefore do good works that merit God's approval because they no longer have the stain of sin. He was not rejecting good works or Christian obedience to the law. In fact: "The ordinary life of the righteous is nothing except pure good works" (189).

Sin is forgiven in the Christian, and yet he continues to be a sinner. How are these seemingly conflicting truths to be reconciled? The evil that remains in the Christian after baptism is still sin. Luther showed that Christians really "are sinners and really have sin, but it is not imputed to them because they believe and live under the reign of mercy, and because sin is condemned and continually put to death in them. This is a most glorious pardon which comes through baptism" (208).

He called these two teachings, "two perspectives," which must not be separated in this life: "According to one, all your works are polluted and unclean on account of that part of you which is God's adversary; according to the other, you are genuinely pure and righteous" (213). He added, "In the meantime, while this [forgiveness] is happening, it [sin] is called sin, and is truly such in its nature; but now it is sin without wrath, without the law, dead sin, harmless sin, as long as one perseveres in grace and his gift [faith]. As far as its nature is concerned, sin in no way differs from itself before grace and after grace; but it is indeed different in the way it is treated" (229). "So sin is truly sin, but because grace and the gift [faith/forgiveness] are within me, it is not imputed" (249).

These two perspectives on the Christian life led Luther to teach the great doctrinal distinction of **Law and Gospel**. "The divine Scriptures deal with our sin in two ways: in one way, through the law of God, and in another way, through God's gospel" (223). Note that the distinction here is directed to understanding the problem of sin in the Christian.

Luther taught the work of the Law beginning with Romans 3:20, "Through the law comes the knowledge of sin," that is, the knowledge of original sin in us and the wrath of God towards us. "The law reveals a twofold evil, inward and outward. The first, which we inflict on ourselves, is sin and the corruption of nature; the second, which God inflicts, is wrath, death, and being accursed" (224).

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The *2021 Homeschool Conference* will be held July 20-22 at the Lion's Camp on Casper Mountain. Presentations will be given by Anna Hahn, Rev. Rene Castillero, and Nathanael Hahn. Descriptions of their presentations are below. You may register for the retreat by visiting www.wylcms.org/hsretreat2021



Language Arts & Literature: God's Gift of Language (Miss Anna Hahn): God created man to know and speak the truth. This is accomplished through language, a divine gift, which distinguishes man from the rest of creation. Because it is so fundamental to our nature, all human education begins with the use of language. This presentation will explore how to teach students to rightly understand and use language in godly, beneficial ways.

History: God's Works in Human Events (Rev. Rene Castillero): The record of human actions and God's providential care throughout time is more than dates, names, and timelines. History is the record of God working out all things for the good of His Church. This presentation will explore ways to teach history so that students understand better the past as well as their role in the present.

Math and Science: God's Works in Creation (Mr. Nathanael Hahn): Because Christ orders the universe in an unfathomable beautiful way, we human beings are led to explore it. While we can understand much about God's creation through math and science, we also need a sense of wonder for those things we cannot grasp. This presentation will investigate how to teach math and science as Christian arts.



Wyoming Lutheran Youth Camp in Lander will be held August 8-12. The topic this year will be 'The Gospel of Mark'. WLYC is open to all children ages 10-18. Registration for campers and volunteers can be found online at www.wylcms.org/wlyc2021. For questions, please contact Rev. Castillero at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Sheridan, WY.

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The law did not condemn the actual goodness of outward works done even by unbelievers, such as “arts, talents, prudence, courage, chastity, and whatever natural, moral, and impressive goods there are.” In fact, God “rewards and bedecks them with temporal benefits” (225). But then the Law comes in: “Therefore it is only the law which shows that these [virtues] are evil—not, to be sure, in themselves, for they are the gifts of God, but because of that deeply hidden root of sin which is the cause of men being pleased with, relying, and glorying in these things which are not felt to be evil. This is now and always the innermost evil of sin, for trust, pleasure, and glorying must be in God alone” (226).

God’s gracious answer to the law’s revelation of the corruption of sin in man and the wrath of God is the Gospel. “The gospel also teaches and preaches two things, namely, the righteousness and the grace of God. Through righteousness it heals the corruption of nature. This is done by the true righteousness which is the gift of God, namely, faith in Christ. . . The companion of this faith and righteousness is grace or mercy, the good will [favor] of God” (227). Here Luther rejected the definition of grace that the scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas had derived from the philosophy of Aristotle. “I take grace in the proper sense of the favor of God [favor Dei]—not a quality of the soul” (227).

But the righteousness of faith and the grace and mercy of God are not abstract concepts or philosophical ideas. **Christ** is in them all. Righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. Faith is faith in Christ. The grace and mercy of God are God’s disposition towards us on account of His Son’s incarnation, atoning death, and justifying resurrection. The certainty of our righteousness and God’s grace is found only in Christ.

Luther teaches us to trust in Jesus Christ alone. “However, we need to be certain, and so God in his grace has provided us with a Man in whom we may trust, rather than our works. For although he has justified us through the gift of faith, and although he becomes favorable to us through his grace, yet he wants us to rely on Christ so that we will not waver in ourselves and in these his gifts, nor be satisfied with the righteousness which has begun in us unless it cleaves to and flows from Christ’s righteousness” (235).

Good works and the obedience of the law are certainly fruits of faith and the forgiveness of sins, and

through them “they neither walk according to the flesh, nor obey sin” (239). But Christ is always the first and the last, the foundation and the end of all that God gives us. “First of all, Christ is himself the *propitiation* [sacrifice of atonement] (as in Rom. 3[:25]). They are safe in his grace, not because they believe or possess faith and the gift, but because it is in Christ’s grace that they have these things. No one’s faith endures unless he relies upon Christ’s own righteousness and is preserved by his protection. For as I have said, true faith is not a . . . quality in the soul, but it is something which does not allow itself to be torn away from Christ, and relies only on the One whom it knows is in God’s grace.” (239)

THE NEXT ROUNDUP

The next Roundup will be delivered to congregations around July 20 (August 2021 issue). Included will be a summary of the 2021 Wyoming District Convention.

“...REMEMBERING YOU IN MY PRAYERS...” (Eph. 1:16)

For **Rev. Ralph Jaeger** (emeritus, Laramie), health.

For **Rev. Michael and Jennifer Wittrock** (emeritus) with health needs.

PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS

St. Paul’s, Sidney, is being served by **Rev. Allen Strawn, St. Paul’s, Bridgeport**) during the vacancy.

Rev. Travis Sherman (Grace, Gordon) is serving **Grace, Merriman, NE** (Nebraska District) while it considers its future.

Future Dates

July 20-22: Homeschool Conference, Casper Mountain
August 8-12: Wyoming Lutheran Youth Camp, Lander

District Convention Recap



At the District Convention, new Board of Directors members were elected. Pictured to the right are (from left): 1st Vice-President, Rev. Paul Cain; President, Rev. John Hill; 2nd Vice-President, Rev. Jonathan Lange; and 3rd Vice-President, Rev. Allen Strawn. Left picture: Secretary, Rev. Darrell Debowey.



Your newly elected Circuit Visitors are: (from left) Rev. Richard Neugebauer (Chimney Rock Circuit), Rev. Jais Tinglund (Yellowstone Circuit), Rev. Jon C. Olson (Powder River Circuit), Rev. Daniel Mulholland (Headwaters Circuit), and Rev. Andrew Dimit (High Plains Circuit). Not pictured: Rev. Scott Firminhac (Pine Ridge Circuit).

Rev David Bott (right) will serve as the Chairman-Elect for the Commission on Mission Services, and Rev. Travis Sherman (far right) will serve as the Chairman-Elect for the Commission on Congregational Services.



The Wyoming District Convention was held May 6-8, 2021 at the Ramkota in Casper, WY. The theme for convention this year was “Here I Stand Before Kings and Princes.” Essayists this year were President John Hill, Rev. Kenneth Mars, Rev. Dr. Christian Preus, and Rev. Jonathan Lange. Each of their essays will be available in the Convention Proceedings and under the publications tab on the district website. During the Convention, new officers were elected (pictured above). These men will serve in their elected positions until the next convention in 2025. Convention Proceedings will be published no later than July 8 and will be made available on the District website. Please be sure to check out the proceedings, paying special attention to the resolutions that were adopted during the Convention. A summary from President Hill will be included in the August roundup.



Welcome, Vicar Payne

Vicar Bryan Payne is from Oklahoma City, OK, but he grew up all over Oklahoma. His wife, Keah, is in the Distance Deaconess Studies Program at CTSFW and is also from Oklahoma. Their daughter, Rory, is starting second grade this year and their son, Dalton, will be in preschool. They speak English as well as Chichewa (the national language of Malawi, Africa) with their children in their home.

Vicar Payne received an undergrad degree from Oklahoma State University in Leisure Service Management and Non-profit Management (camp and park management). He completed a Master of Science degree in International Studies, with an emphasis on Cultural and Ecological Preservation, through the Masters International Program, jointly through Oklahoma State University and the U.S. Peace Corps. He and his wife spent three years in Malawi, Africa as Peace Corps Volunteers. This was also his fieldwork for his master's degree. Prior to leaving for the Peace Corps, he worked at multiple Lutheran Church Camps in various capacities. Most recently Vicar Payne managed a small environmental consulting firm in Oklahoma City.

He enjoys reading and working on computers, building them and maintaining them. His family loves the outdoors, camping, hiking, biking, kayaking, swimming, and climbing. But mainly they have a passion for serving God in whatever capacity that presents itself!

Vicar Payne is serving at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Cheyenne, WY under the supervision of Rev. Joshua Scheer and Rev. Marcus Baikie.

A recent string of scam emails have been targeting our Wyoming District Pastors and Teachers by impersonating President John Hill. This is called 'phishing' and the recent targeted offense is called 'spear-phishing.' These email scammers are getting even more crafty by creating new email accounts with his name and even inserting his picture to make the unwary recipient feel like the email is genuine. Please be vigilant, they are researching us! If you receive an email that appears to be from Pr. Hill, or from anyone for that matter, look for clues that indicate it might be a scam. Look to see if the language used is different, the email address is not the usual one, that a request might seem odd or vague, or if a link or attachment doesn't look quite right. Be suspicious! If you are suspicious, **DO NOT REPLY** to that email or open any attachments or click any links. Instead, create a NEW email to the sender's email address you know to ask if the suspicious email is valid. Sometimes it is best to make a phone call to verify the validity of an email. If you come across something suspicious from the district or Synod, please call the district office at 307-265-9000 to report it or email jsnyder@wylcms.org.