

# WYOMING DISTRICT

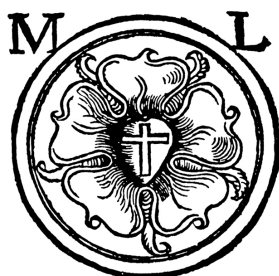
# ROUND-UP

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## WINTER 2025



### Reformation 500: Against the Heavenly Prophets

It was because of Luther's coworker, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, that Luther had returned from the Wartburg Castle in March of 1522. Karlstadt had proposed rapid and radical changes to the liturgy and church life of Wittenberg. He soon left Wittenberg and became a proponent of a radical reformation. It was especially in the teaching of the Lord's Supper that he opposed Luther. When Luther realized that Karlstadt's writings on the Lord's Supper had become widespread, he decided to respond with the treatise, *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* (AE 40.79-223), published in two parts in late 1524 and early 1525.

Luther begins the treatise by admonishing the reader first to "pray God for a right understanding and for his holy, pure Word," and second that we "be on our guard" (80). He then sets down five "articles of the Christian faith" as the touchstone for the discussions that follow. First, as a summary of the Second Use of the Law, is "the law of God, which is to be preached so that one thereby reveals and teaches how to recognize sin" (82). Second, when the law has alarmed the conscience with the revelation of God's wrath, "we are then to preach the comforting word of the gospel and the forgiveness of sins" (82). The next two articles summarize the Third Use of the Law: Third "is judgment, the work of putting to death the old man, as in Romans 5, 6, 7. Here works are concerned, and also suffering and affliction..." (83). Fourth, "such works of love toward the neighbor should flow forth in meekness, patience, kindness, teaching, aid, and counsel, spiritually and bodily, free and for nothing, as Christ has dealt with us" (83). And fifth, the First Use of the Law, "we ought to proclaim the law and its works...for the crude and unbelieving .... Thus they are compelled by sword and law to be outwardly pious" (83).

#### Part 1: About Images

Luther then turns to the subject of Part 1 of the treatise: On the destruction of images. Karlstadt was advocating the elimination of all religious images: paintings, statues, crucifixes, and the like. He called their use idolatry. Luther's main response is to teach from Scripture that anything but God that becomes the object of our worship and trust is an idol, and this idolatry takes place first of all not with images but in the heart and conscience. But the gospel comes "to instruct and delight the conscience," teaching that it is idolatry to have faith in images. And when the conscience is free from such idol-worship, then the images may remain. "But images for memorial and witness, such as crucifixes and images of saints, are to be tolerated" (91).

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Karlstadt's argument against images in church had been, in part, that images were forbidden by the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." Luther simply observes that it was making images into objects of worship that is forbidden—fearing, loving, and trusting images rather than God. He builds on the "five articles" in the introduction, especially the four that address the law, and shows the difference between divine, natural law and the laws given to the Old Testament Jews. "For to have a God is not alone a Mosaic law, but also a natural law, as St. Paul says (Rom 1:20)...." The Ten Commandments "are not Mosaic law only, but also the natural law written in each man's heart, as St. Paul teaches (Rom. 2:15). Also Christ himself (Matt 7:12) includes all of the law and the prophets in this natural law" (96-97). In the New Testament, whatever goes beyond this natural law in the Mosaic law is "free, null and void" (97) because it was given only to the Jewish people. Included here are the Sabbath Day requirement and the forbidding of images. Christians may use images as long as they do not in their consciences regard images as gods.

Luther praises the Ten Commandments as God's particularly "orderly and well written" (98) form of this natural law. He urges the Christian use of the Old Testament because of what it teaches. "Also, Moses tells us about the creation of the world, the origin of marriage, and many precious examples of faith, love, and all virtues. In the writings of Moses we also find examples of unbelief and vice, from which one can learn to know God's grace and wrath" (99).

Those who wish to destroy or remove images from church should note all the images in Luther's German Bible and other sound Christian literature. There is no problem with images themselves. In fact, images are an essential part of memory and imagination: "But it is impossible for me to hear [the passion of our Lord] and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart..." (99). Just as it is good to have an image of Christ crucified in my heart, so also it is good to have it in my eyes, to see and remember Him in this way.

Luther concludes this first part by addressing other matters involved with Karlstadt. He shows that Karlstadt does not have a rightly ordered call from God in his present service, and so he should be ignored. "For one is not to do evil for the sake of the good (Rom. 8:8). He addresses Karlstadt's complaint about using the term "Mass" (as we use it in the word "Christmas"—the Christ Mass) to refer to the Lord's Supper. Lutherans have always rejected the teaching that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice we offer to God for our sins. This is not what "Mass" means. Luther also addresses the liturgical practice of honoring the consecrated elements—the Lord's body and blood—in the Divine Service, again reminding us that where the heart and mind—the conscience—are right according to God's Word, the Christian has freedom in such matters, as long as it does not unnecessarily offend the neighbor's conscience (140).

#### Part 2: About the Sacrament of the Altar

In the second part of the treatise Luther does some major teaching about the Lord's Supper, and for this reason this writing is commended to us by name in *The Book of Concord* (SD VII.91). Luther begins by outlining "the fundamental idea" in this subject so that the Christian can better see the demonic spirit that is denying our Lord's teaching and gift of his body and blood in the sacrament.

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Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is affected by the outward. God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward. For he wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by him. (146)

The demonic, "factious spirit" wants to destroy this order and have us focus on the "inward spiritual" experience. "Do you not see here the devil, the enemy of God's order?" (147). Luther calls the means of grace "the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you" (147). The demonic perversion of God's order extends even to the Christian life, for they "place the mortification of the flesh prior to faith.... No one can mortify the flesh, bear the cross, and follow the example of Christ before he is a Christian and has Christ through faith in his heart as an eternal treasure." He continues, "When we acknowledge our sin, we hear of the grace of Christ. In this Word the Spirit comes and gives faith where and to whom he wills. Then you proceed to the mortification and the cross and the works of love" (149).

Luther then proceeds to the main point. He grounds all his argument on the Words of Institution of the Lord's Supper. "Where Holy Scripture is the ground of faith we are not to deviate from the words as they stand nor from the order in which they stand, unless an express article of faith compels a different interpretation or order" (157). At this point Luther explains the Words of Institution ("This is my body") point by point and corrects Karlstadt's errors.

Luther refers to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper taught in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. He reminds us that in the Lord's Supper we participate not in the suffering of Christ, but in his body and blood, as also the unbeliever does when he receives the sacrament (1 Cor. 11:29). We break the bread to distribute it, that is, to distribute the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), "so that they all in common and as one receive the one body of Christ and become partakers of it bodily" (181). Furthermore, "whoever eats this bread unworthily is guilty of profaning the body of the Lord because the body of the Lord is eaten in the bread, and sin is committed in the eating and drinking...., it is in the eating of the body and drinking of the blood of Christ that the unworthy one has offended and therein committed evil" (183).

Luther reminds us here that we must stick with the words. "Brother, the natural meaning of the words is queen, transcending all subtle, acute sophisticated fancy. From it we may not deviate unless we are compelled by a clear article of the faith.... For it is dangerous to play with the Word of God by which conscience and faith are to be guided. Therefore, interpretations of God's Word must be lucid and definite having a firm, sure, and true foundation on which one may confidently rely" (190). Luther warns us, "The ultimate goal of the devil is to do away with the entire sacrament and all the outward ordinance of God" (191).

Finally, Luther points out how Karlstadt fell into great error because he turned from Scripture to human reason for his doctrine. He gives many examples of the great folly that results from the rationalism of the "heavenly prophets." They replace God's Word with their own words. "There you have their theology: Others are to learn outwardly by their word, which they call an external witness. But they themselves are better and superior to the apostles, and pretend to learn inwardly in their spirit without an external Word and without means" (195).

As he refutes the errors of misled reason, however, Luther directs us back to the Word of God. "Even the devil knows full well and recognizes that the body of Christ is given for us, yet this does not help him." He continues,

The knowledge, however, does help if I do not doubt, but in true faith hold firmly that the body and blood of Christ is given for me, for me, for me (I repeat), in order to take away my sins, as the word in the sacrament affirms, "This is the body, given for you." This knowledge produces joyful, free, and assured consciences. (206)

In contrast, the devil "makes a pure commandment and law" out of the Word of Christ and turns the sacrament into "a work that we do" (206). But the sacrament is given "for you."

[This] cannot mean otherwise than that such breaking of bread and body takes place and is instituted that it might avail us and redeem us from sins. For Christ has placed the strength and power of his suffering in the sacrament, so that we may there lay hold on it and find it according to the word, "This is my body, which is given for you for the forgiveness of sins" (210).

Luther comes to the heart of the entire treatise. We "speak the divine, almighty, heavenly, and holy words which Christ himself spoke at the supper with his holy lips and commanded us to speak" (212). He continues,

Our teaching is that bread and wine do not avail. I will go still farther. Christ on the cross and all his suffering and his death do not avail, even if, as you teach, they are "acknowledged and meditated upon" with the utmost "passion, ardor, heartfeltness." Something else must always be there. What is it? The Word, the Word, the Word. Listen, lying spirit, the Word avails. Even if Christ were given for us and crucified a thousand times, it would all be in vain if the Word of God were absent and were not distributed and given to me with the bidding, this is for you, take what is yours. (212-213)

Karlstadt's focus on the work of the communicant in the Lord's Supper rather than the Word and gift of Christ "for you" turns the Lord's Supper into a "pure work and commandment" which we are to offer to God. There is no gift, no comfort, no life or health or salvation. "To him the words, 'for you,' are poison and bitter death. But they are our comfort and life. For they open the treasure to us and allow us to appropriate it" (213). And here he give us the classic description of the Lord's Supper:

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. For inasmuch as he had determined once to achieve it, it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after, through his Word, as can easily be proved from Scripture. (213-214)

If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the Word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.... Everything depends on the Word. (214)

Luther concludes by acknowledging a good result of this controversy, "For my part I courteously give them thanks from my whole heart and ask for none in return, because they have so greatly confirmed me in regard to this article of faith. For now I see that it is not possible to produce anything in opposition to this article" (222). He warns us against Karlstadt and the "heavenly prophets," who have no proper call and who boast of the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture. In the end, their teaching utterly fails, because "in no place do they teach how we are to become free from our sins, obtain a good conscience, and win a peaceful and joyful heart before God" (223). God grant us always to find these precious treasures in his gospel and sacraments for the sake of our dear Lord Jesus. Amen.

**Future Dates (see wylcms.org for information)**

May 1-3: WY District Convention, Ramkota, Casper  
June 3-4: LCC Christian Culture Conference, Casper  
June 5-7: Pastors Wives Retreat, C'Mon Inn, Casper  
July 22-24: Homeschool Retreat, Casper Mountain  
August 3-7: Lutheran Youth Camp, Lander

**"...REMEMBERING YOU IN MY PRAYERS..." (Eph. 1:16)**

For our active-duty chaplain, **Rev. Ryan Mills (Colorado)**.

For our seminary students, **Brandon Streeks, Nathaniel Mars, and Eddy Krez.**

**PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS**

**Rev. Travis Sherman (Grace, Gordon)** is serving **Grace, Merriman**, NE (Nebraska District). Pr. Hill met with the congregation on December 15.

**Redeemer, Harrison** (served by **Rev. Darren Pflughoeft, St. Paul's, Lusk**) and **Bethlehem, Crawford** (served by **Rev. Richard Mueller, Immanuel, Alliance**) have called a seminary candidate.

**Grace English, Pine Bluffs and Zion, Grover** (vacancy Pastor is **Rev. Joshua Scheer** as of January 1, 2025) are a dual parish and have called a seminary candidate in conjunction with **Our Savior, Cheyenne** (**Rev. Joshua Scheer, Rev. Marcus Baikie**).

**Grace, Greybull** (served by **Rev. Jared Korb, St. Luke's Worland**) is exploring a parish agreement with St. Luke's.

**Zion, Emblem** (presently served by **Rev. Kenneth Mars, Christ the King, Cody**) meets with President Hill March 2.

**Peace, Marbleton and Our Savior's, Pinedale** (served by **Rev. Dan Mulholland, Shepherd of the Valley, Fort Bridger**) have called a seminary candidate.

**Salem, Gurley, St. Paul's, Potter, and St. Paul's, Sidney** (**Rev. Ted Bourret**, who retires in May) have called a seminary candidate.

**Rev. Joshua Hayes (Kansas District)** accepted the call to serve as Assisting Pastor to **Trinity, Casper** (**Rev. Jon Olson**) His installation is June 1 4PM.

Donations for the Lander Camp Trailer are still being accepted. We have raised \$8,000 so far. The goal is to raise at least \$10,000 to buy the trailer and add a secure shelving system that could easily store the supplied needed for Lander Camp each year. Bethel Lutheran Church in Lander has graciously agreed to allow the trailer to be parked at their facility. If you are able to contribute, please send donations earmarked "Lander trailer" to the District office.

We are changing the way communications are sent to congregations and lay members. If you have received communication from us in the past regarding district events via email, you have automatically been added to our District Roundup distribution list. Congregations will continue to receive a PDF of the Roundup and the PDF will be available on the district website.

The Wyoming District Convention will be held May 1-3 at the Ramkota Hotel in Casper. The convention and convention banquet are open for anyone in the district to attend. All attendees who wish to attend the banquet must register for the dinner. The cost is \$23 per person. The Convention Workbook will be published no later than March 20. Information related to convention can be found using the Convention tab on the homepage of the website. Contact Tiffany at the District Office with questions.