

The **LUTHERAN** **CLARION**



Lutheran Concerns Association
149 Glenview Drive, New Kensington, PA 15068-4921

March 2017
Volume 9, Issue 4

Natural Law and Women in Combat

Rev. Heath R. Curtis gave the below presentation at the January 2017 Lutheran Concerns conference at Fort Wayne, IN. A version of the paper was presented on March 27, 2008, at "Male and Female He Created Them: Women in Times of War," a conference organized by The Lutheran Center for Theology and Public Life, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, MO.

Where is The Church's Voice?

Before answering the question of what the Church has to say to the State in regard to women serving in combat roles in the State's standing or conscript armed forces, we must first answer the question: What does the Church have to say to the State about the State's business at all? A special blessing of the Lutheran Reformation is the clarity given to the distinction between the Church's business and the State's business – especially when the Reformation is viewed in its relation to the papacies of Alexander VI and Julius II. For example, the State has no right to dictate how the Church worships. Likewise, the Church has no authority to declare one nation at war against another.

And yet, it is not as though the spheres of Church and State are neatly separated like Stephen J. Gould's "non-overlapping magisteria."¹ For while the State cannot dictate the Church's worship, there are fire codes limiting the number of people who can reside in a given space at any one time. And while the Church has no power to drive a nation to war, it certainly must have some prophetic role in warning the State of an unjust use of violence.

So where does the Church derive her authority to speak to the State? On what issues should she have a voice? On what basis does the Church act when prophetically speaking to the State? The Word of God is, of course, the answer to that last question. A particularly clear light that sheds understanding on the Word of God, and a particularly precious gift of Lutherans to the whole Church, is the division of Law and Gospel. The Church has nothing to say to the State in regard to its operations on the basis of the Gospel. The Gospel does not regulate the Kingdom of the Left. The Gospel says to turn the other cheek and forgive your enemies: no government can operate by this standard. Rather, the State runs by the Law: an eye for an eye and destruction for one's enemies. This insight is the key to understanding the Lutheran acceptance of just war in Augsburg Confession XVI.

Natural Law

The Gospel is a peculiar thing in the classical sense of the term: it is peculiar to the Church and her calling to forgive and retain sins. The Gospel guides and gives meaning and form to the lives of individual members of the Body of Christ. But the State is a less peculiar, more general gift of God: the State governs all people in a given place and time. To govern them justly, a government must rule by the Law of God, which is good and wise. And if that is accepted, then we are near to the answer to our first question about what the Church has to say to the State about the State's business. The State is to run by the Law, that unchanging set of commands for how humanity is to live. To be able to say that there are good and bad governments is to admit that there is a standard to which all governments are held to account and that this standard is not arbitrary. Rather, this standard is comprised of those moral and ethical laws which comprise what theologians call the Natural Law.² This Law, as St. Paul says in Romans 1 and 2, is written on the hearts of all men and all human institutions are accountable to it.

It is this innate moral knowledge that allows children to say, "That's not fair" before they have ever heard of any written law or rules. This Natural Law is what the philosopher J. Budziszewski has provocatively called, *What We Can't Not Know*. He writes,

However rude it may be these days to say so, there are some moral truths that we all really know – truths which a normal human being is unable *not* to know. They are a universal possession, an emblem of rational mind, an heirloom of the family of man. That doesn't mean that we know them with unfailing perfect clarity, or that we have reasoned out their remotest implications; we don't, and we haven't. Nor does it mean that we never pretend not to know them even though we do. It doesn't even mean that we are born knowing them, that we never get mixed up about them, or that we assent to them just as readily whether they are taught to us or not. *That* can't even be said of "two plus two is four." Yet our common moral

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knowledge is as real as arithmetic, and probably just as plain. Paradoxically, maddeningly, we appeal to it even to justify wrongdoing; rationalization is the homage paid by sin to guilty knowledge. These basic moral principles, together with their first few rings of implications, are the natural law.³

St. Paul affirms that the natural law is real and that all human beings are therefore “without excuse” when it comes to judgment day. And yet, as Budziszewski notes, natural human knowledge of natural law is imperfect. Indeed, the Lutheran Confessions give an especially strong statement of the weakness of humanity in this regard: “[M]an’s reason or natural intellect still has a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as well as of the teaching of the law (Rom. 1:19-21, 28, 32), nevertheless, it is . . . ignorant, blind, and perverse.” (FC SD II.9. KW trans.)⁴

So the situation is this. Mankind is to live by the Law of God which governs human behavior, the Natural Law. This Law is known to human hearts as can be seen even from the gentiles. And yet, this knowledge is obscured by original sin, the brokenness at the center of humanity after the fall.

And now I hope you can see where the Church's duty lies in guiding the State in its business. The State's business is the Law, but that Law is only dimly known from nature. Happily, the Church has the key to clearing up our understanding of Natural Law. For, the Church has not only nature, but grace; not only natural (or general) revelation, but also the special revelation of Scripture. Therefore, the job of the Church is to prophetically and clearly proclaim Natural Law to the State.

Examples of How the Church Should Use Her Voice

Let me bring forward a couple of examples to illustrate what this prophetic proclamation of Natural Law entails. In 1996 the Republican led Congress of the United States and Democratic President William Clinton were working together to reform the welfare system in the country. What should the Church have had to say on this matter? To ask that is to ask what Natural Law has to say on the matter. Several things: you shall not steal; you shall not harm your neighbor; you shall not tread upon the poor; if a man shall not work, he shall not eat; etc.

These are fine generalities, but could the Church say something more directly to the proposed policies? A modern, Western, nationalized system of welfare is pretty far on the periphery of things spoken to by Natural Law. That is to say, cash payments to the poor are several steps removed from, and have a complicated relationship to, commands like you shall not steal and you shall not tread upon the poor. Does this mean increase cash payments to the poor or decrease them?

“The witness of world cultures, both ancient and modern, is near unanimous in speaking for the prohibition against women in combat: folks just know this law written upon their hearts.”

There are fine policy arguments on either side: some say the poor need more direct assistance, others point out that too much direct assistance leads to a cycle of dependency that ends up worsening the lot of the poor.⁵ Here the voice of the Church should simply say: “This is what the Law says, these are the general proscriptions it gives: now use your God given reason in working out the details of policy in your situation.”⁶

As policy comes closer to directly touching the precepts of Natural Law, the Church's voice should become correspondingly more direct and forceful. So the voice of the Church on abortion and euthanasia is very clear indeed: taking innocent human life is always wrong and it is the duty of the State to protect against this wrong.

Natural Law and Women in Combat

So, here at last we come to women serving in combat. I hope from that introduction you can see the sorts of arguments I won't be joining in. The Church has little to say to the finer points of policy regarding armies and soldiers. So, for example, I will be ignoring the old canards about the physical fitness of an Army and what it means that the US Army's push-up requirements for the youngest women is less stringent than it is for the oldest men. The Church has nothing to say here. There is no prescription in Natural Law for how strong a soldier must be. I will not delve into arguments about sexual tension in the ranks. I will not discuss, though I am, personally quite intrigued by, what it means that the Swedish military has recently bowed to pressure from women in its ranks to remove the phallus from the heraldic lion on the Nordic Battlegroup's coat of arms.⁷ (This is one metaphor, perhaps, that needs no further exegesis.) I am not interested whatsoever in measures of fighting prowess. I do not doubt for a minute that a smaller or larger number of women could be found who could adequately fulfill the duties of a soldier in combat in a modern mechanized army. Nor do I doubt the patriotism, good intentions, honor, and devotion to duty of today's military women. But it is not the Church's job to be concerned with the fighting prowess of a nation's armed forces. That is the job of the State to sort out according to its given situation and the dictates of reason.

What I am concerned with, as a representative of the Church, is how the Church can help clarify what the Natural Law has to say about who we are as men and women by mining her great resource: the Scriptures. It will be my contention that the will of God, known to all men through Natural Law and especially to the Church via the Scriptures is this: Men have the calling to take up violence for the just defense of the family and State, not women. Placing women into that role violates a deep truth about what it means for men to be men and women to be women. In a fallen sinful world, any number of dire and exigent circumstances can be imagined wherein it would be appropriate for women to step into this calling of violent action for the sake of life, but those are simply the exceptions that prove the truth of the rule.

Thank You Balance-Concord, Inc.

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Natural Law & Women in Combat: The Witness of the Nations

Such is my claim. But how do we know what the Natural Law teaches? That is a question of epistemology that philosophers spend tomes answering and I can hardly do it justice. For our purposes, it is enough to note with St. Paul that the Law is “written on the hearts” of mankind. So if the prohibition against women in combat is a part of Natural Law we should expect to find evidence for it in two places: the history of nations and our own hearts. So, for example, as we see murder and adultery outlawed in all cultures, we should also expect to see women in combat thus avoided. And yet, since this natural law is dimly understood by fallen mankind, we should also expect to see imperfect application of that law: so all cultures outlaw killing human persons, but not all cultures recognize those outside the tribe (or inside the womb) as human persons. And while some cultures have allowed a man to have four or six wives, no culture has allowed a man to have any woman he pleases.⁸

And so it is with women in combat. The witness of world cultures, both ancient and modern, is near unanimous in speaking for the prohibition against women in combat: folks just know this law written upon their hearts. Just as with the other portions of Natural Law, there are those cultures which apply the law imperfectly. Yet just as a cannibalistic culture does not negate the Natural Law against murder, so the Amazons⁹ do not negate the Natural Law against women bearing arms in combat under any but the most dire and exigent circumstances. The witness of all nations in all times and in all places is all but unanimous: men, not women, are called to be soldiers.

Natural Law & Women in Combat: The Witness of Your Own Moral Sense

And this prohibition is written on your heart as well. For what would you think of a man who, upon hearing an intruder downstairs at 2:00 AM said to his wife, “Let’s flip a coin, dear, to see who goes to check it out?” You would think poorly of him – or, at any rate, the vast majority of you would. Why? You may find that hard to articulate. It just seems, well, unseemly for an able bodied man to send his wife into danger, that is, into a situation where violence for defense may be required, rather than volunteering for it himself. That is how the Natural Law often strikes us: as an unexplainable distaste for something we feel to be wrong. Parents of small children are well acquainted with

the difficulty of explaining that distaste: “Why is it wrong to steal?” Because it’s unfair to take what someone else earned. “Yeah, but why is that wrong?” Because it’s unfair. “Yeah, but why is being unfair wrong?” It just is.

And then there are the “what ifs”—all the different ways in which we might change my 2:00 AM intruder thought-experiment. What if the woman is much stronger than the man? What if she is a black belt and he is a 90 lb. weakling? What if he is paralyzed or has already been incapacitated by the intruder? Indeed, what if this prohibition against woman in combat is simply a widespread but irrational hold over from a bygone era?

Those objections fall into two categories. First, there is the argument from exigence: if the man of the family is overrun, or disabled by his attackers, surely the woman has the calling to engage in violence for the defense of the family as well – every human person has that right and duty in such exigent circumstances. We encounter these arguments from exigence in any number of ethical quandaries. It is wrong to lie – but is it wrong to lie to a man brandishing a pistol when he asks you if you know where the mailman is? These are actually quite complicated discussions among moral philosophers. But at least this much is clear: these situations represent the exceptions that prove the truth of the rule. That the world is so fallen that one might have to speak untruth to save a life is not proof that we may speak untruth whenever we like. So also, with the favorite exceptions often brought forward in the debate on women in combat: that a tiny nation of 7 million Jews surrounded by 50 million Arabs who refuse to acknowledge their right to exist as a nation feels compelled to utilize women in the Israeli Defense Force is hardly proof that nations that are not in such exigent circumstances are on good moral footing to do likewise. So also this is where the Biblical stories of Jael, Judith, and Deborah¹⁰ belong: women wielding violence for the defense of the people due to exigence. The power of those stories lies precisely in the fact that they are exceptions to a rule strongly felt to be universal and just.

Natural Law & Women in Combat: The Witness of the Scriptures

But the other objection is somewhat stronger. Is the prohibition against women taking up organized violence for the defense of the state really a piece of Natural Law, or is it actually an irrational hold over from biology. Among monogamous primates males are, on average, 20% larger

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Get to Know the New LCA Board Members

During the January 16, 2017, annual LCA meeting, four new board members were elected. We welcome the following:



- **Mr. Mark Franke** is retired after 35 years as Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management at Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne, IN. Mr. Franke is a member at Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN, where he is congregation

president. He has served on many boards and committees both for his church and for his community. Mr. Franke has degrees from Indiana University-Purdue.

- **Dr. John F. Lang** is Director of Pharmaceutical Development at Endev Laboratories, Kannapolis, NC. He is an elder and treasurer at Point of Grace Lutheran Church in Cornelius, NC. He has served in various roles in his local parishes and is a frequent delegate to Southeastern District Conventions. John has degrees from the University of Illinois.

- **Dr. John Rahe** is a retired dentist. He is a member at Saint John Lutheran Church in Aurora, IN. He has served in many capacities for his church, the Indiana District, and his community. Dr. Rahe is a graduate of Indiana University.

- **Mr. Winfried I. Strieter** was an executive in the construction industry for 40 years, until his retirement in 2000. He is a member of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Perrysburg, OH. He has served in many capacities for his church, the Ohio District, and his community. He is a graduate of Valparaiso University.

Thanks to outgoing board members, **Mr. Scott Diekmann**, **Mr. John Klingler** and **Mr. Don Zehnder** for their years of service on the board. One of the above new members will fill the board position held by **Mr. Scott Meyer**, who went to be with the Lord in 2016.

and correspondingly stronger than females. So it makes sense that humanity, in the distant, benighted, and pre-mechanized past would reserve combat for men. It is even understandable that we would develop cultural rituals and mental habits that would enforce this and make leaving it behind seem distasteful. But, surely, today we can apply reason and make room for the exceptions to the rule. So is it really fair to say that “no women in combat” is a piece of unchanging Natural Law? Indeed, are male and female not merely biological facts rather than ontological, spiritual truths?

And here we meet up against the problem we noted above: while the Law is written on our hearts, our understanding is darkened by sin. From the witness of the nations and our own moral sense, it would at first appear that the prohibition against women taking up organized violence for the defense of the state is a part of Natural Law. But on further reflection, we find ourselves asking whether this is really just an irrational generalization based on the

average physical size of males and females. Is that all there is to it, or is there something more? Is it just that men tend to be larger and stronger than women, or is there something else to our being as male and female that urges us against women in combat?

Here is where the Church's witness to the Scriptures must be added. If this prohibition is really part of Natural Law, we should expect the Scriptures to clarify it for us in the same way they clarify other bits of natural law (e.g., is abortion really murder? is pornography as unlawful as adultery? etc.).

Where should we look in the Scriptures for what it means to be male and female and what this might say about our question? Certainly the opening chapters of Genesis must be examined. These demonstrate that man and woman are ontological categories defined by divine mandate and not merely cultural constructs. In their own way, these chapters also introduce the notion of male headship. And perhaps, if we had time to dig further, we could pry something else out of Genesis. And there are a host of passages in the Old Testament relating to war and men and women that are listed and worthily explored in *Man's Duty to Protect Woman* from the Presbyterian Church in America. Luther located the prohibition in Deuteronomy 22:5,

Secondly (v. 5), a woman shall not bear the weapons of a man, nor shall a man wear female clothing. The prohibition of a woman's bearing the weapons of a man and of a man's wearing female clothing does not apply to cases where this is necessary to avoid danger or to playing a game or to deceive the enemy. Nevertheless, such things are not to be done as a matter of serious and constant habit and custom, but due uprightness and dignity are to be preserved for each sex; for it is shameful for a man to be clothed like a woman, and it is improper for a woman to bear the arms of a man. Through this law, however, he seems to reproach any nation in which this custom is observed.¹¹

We would benefit greatly from a closer reading of all those Scriptures. However, in my remaining time, I want to cut to the chase and ask an even blunter question, the child's “Why?” Why on earth did God do this? Why did he make us male and female? Why didn't he have us procreate by parthenogenesis? Why not three sexes – one for each person of the Trinity? What is the essence of who we are as male and female and what, if anything, does that say about women in combat?

For that we go to the Apostle Paul and his reading of Genesis for the answer. It comes most directly in Ephesians 5:

... giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God.²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (NKJV)

For Paul, then, our being as male and female has an underlying meaning and purpose. It is not an arbitrary decision by the Creator. Rather, the decision to make us as we are, was a deliberate act of God so that we might have a living picture of the love of Christ and the Church. In the very nature of things, in who we are as male and female, there lurks a representation, a reflection, a shadow of

Christ and the Church. And Paul further illuminates this by specifically pointing out what the Christ-male role is: to lay down his life for the Church-female. The Church does not put herself at danger or lay down her life for Christ. That would be to turn the God-given nature of things on its head. Rather, Christ lays down his life for his Bride. Paul makes this the basis of human male-female relations: we should be the accurate

"We humans are not spirits, one cannot separate our natures from our bodies. To wield a woman's body for death is to misuse its nature."

reflections of Christ and the Church which we were created to be. And so, as it is for Christ and the Church, so it is for husband and wife, for man and woman (indeed, the words are the same in Greek as in many other languages for reasons that have been obvious – at least until our own day in Europe and North America).

It is here at Ephesians 5 that most of our contemporary questions about male and female can be answered. Same sex marriage? Nope, it violates the Christ-Church reality of which marriage is to be a reflection. Same goes for polygamy or polyandry: there is one Christ and one Church. (In another paper we might explore what this passage says about contraception as well.) Same goes for women in combat. The prohibition against women taking up violence for the defense of the state is not merely a concession to human biology, it is a confession of how God made us to be (ontologically) as male and female. To place women in combat is to transgress God's creation of male and female as a reflection of Christ and the Church. It is Christ who is called to lay down his life in sacrifice for the Church, not the other way around.

In short, Ephesians 5 is fertile ground: for it unlocks the mystery of the Natural Law, that is, the Why behind Natural Law. It tells us why the nations have always resisted women in combat. It tells us the foundation of our own

unwitting distaste at the idea of a man sending his wife downstairs at 2:00 AM to see what that noise was. It short, it answers the child's question about why right is right and wrong is wrong: because the right accords with who God is, and the wrong is contrary to his being.

Epilogue: Homer and the Amazons

I should also like to call to the witness box a representative of a pagan culture to testify in more detail to that culture's understanding of Natural Law and women in combat. The poet Homer remains unparalleled in Western literature in communicating the terror, glory, irony, and pain of war. And as on so many other topics, so also on the roles of men and women in war, Homer offers his insight with a poignant retelling of his culture's myths and histories.

The Greek name for the formidable woman-warriors from the edge of the world is *Amazon*. The first letter of that word is the alpha privative, as in amoral, thus the word means *breastless ones*. This refers to the well-known myth of Amazons: that during their rite of passage, the woman warriors had the right breast removed so that they could ply the spear and bow. The meaning of this myth is readily comprehended: to become a warrior, a woman had to abandon some part of her womanhood. And since no one is a human being save by way of being a man or a woman, the Amazons effectively dehumanize themselves for the sake of war.

This insight is the inheritance that Homer received from his culture—all contained in the mere name Amazon. It is what Homer does with this inheritance that displays both his contribution and his genius. At the beginning of book 22 of the *Iliad*, while Hector still has time to escape the wrath of Achilles by returning inside the walls of Troy, we read the following:

The old man [Priam] tore his gray hair as he spoke, but he moved not the heart of Hektor. His mother [Hecuba] hard by wept and moaned aloud as she bared her bosom and pointed to the breast which had suckled him. "Hektor," she cried, weeping bitterly the while, "Hektor, my son, spurn not this breast, but have pity upon me too: if I have ever given you comfort from my own bosom, think on it now, dear son, and come within the wall to protect us from this man; stand not without to meet him. Should the wretch kill you, neither I nor your richly dowered wife shall ever weep, dear offshoot of myself, over the bed on which you lie, for dogs will devour you at the ships of the Achaeans." (22.77-89. Samuel Butler trans.)

Moved by love of her son and terror at his impending death, Queen Hecuba loses all fear of shame and bears her breasts to beg her son Hector to save his life. As these breasts nourished Hector as a child, so now again they are wielded as weapons of life to save him from certain destruction. Hecuba is the anti-Amazon, the *Mazonata*. She demonstrates, by the symbol of her breast what the Amazons have done to their humanity: they have hardened their hearts and cut out life. For women are called to the service of life, not to the destruction thereof. Or, as the Christian Scriptures have it, "She shall be called Eve, for she is the mother of all the living."

We humans are not spirits, one cannot separate our na-

tures from our bodies. To wield a woman's body for death is to misuse its nature. It is, in the words John Paul II popularized in speaking of another aspect of Natural Law, telling lies with one's body. A woman in combat, say the Greeks via their myth, is as tragic as a mastectomy. Homer elaborates this further by the example of Hecuba and her use of her womanly body, her womanly nature, as a tool for preserving life.

Rev. Heath R. Curtis

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- 1 "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106 (March 1997): 16-22
- 2 C. S. Lewis calls it "The Law of Human Nature" in his treatment of the topic in *Mere Christianity*.
- 3 *What We Can't Not Know*. (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2003), 10.
- 4 For the Lutheran Confessions' acceptance of the validity of Natural Law see Ap. XXIII.60 and FC SD V.22.
- 5 See, for example, *Life at the Bottom* by Theodore Dalrymple.
- 6 This Lutheran approach is more circumspect than the modern Roman Catholic approach as exemplified by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' statements on government policies like welfare and immigration. The Lutheran is reluctant to advocate specific policies except in those cases (like abortion and euthanasia) where the Natural Law is speaking directly and clearly to a state's duty. There are literally thousands of policies regarding welfare or immigration that could well fit into the Natural Law's demands; the Church should not involve itself in the State's business of choosing between these godly options. It should be enough for the Church that the state is avoiding ungodly options.
- 7 "Army Casters Heraldic Lion." *The Local: Swedish News in English*. Online publication: (<http://www.thelocal.se/9398/>) 13 Dec 07 12:34 CET.
- 8 I borrow these well-known examples from C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*.
- 9 See the Epilogue above (Epilogue: Homer and the Amazons) for a fuller treatment of the Amazons in Homer's poetry.
- 10 The Deborah episode is especially well-treated in *Report of the Committee on Women in the Military and in Combat*, Orthodox Presbyterian Church in America. Online publication: <http://www.opc.org/GA/WomenInMilitary.html>.
- 11 LW 9.219. Here Luther correctly interprets the military overtones of the Hebrew *kelib-gaylik*. *keli-geber*. Most modern English translations give something like "wear the clothes of a man" - as does the Vulgate (non induetur mulier veste virili). However, *keli* is more general than "clothing" and *geber* is best translated as warrior. "Weapons of a man," as Luther has here, captures the meaning quite well, though I would propose "kit of a man at war" as even closer to the ring of the Hebrew. In his translation of the Bible for the German people, Luther gives *Mannsgeräthe*, something closer to the Vulgate; however, his extended comments on the verse here make clear his intention in using that translation.

Jesus' beginning

On December 24th, 2016, a group of clergy persons had an opinion article in *The Virginian-Pilot* which is based out of Norfolk, VA. It is the largest newspaper in Virginia. The article was entitled "Jesus' beginning." This article was co-signed by eight clergy persons in the Virginia Beach-Chesapeake area. One of the co-signers is an LCMS pastor, Rev. Jeff Wuertz, pastor of Chesapeake Commu-

nity of Hope. I have tried to reach him prior to writing, asking him what was his intention in co-signing the opinion article. As of this date he has not responded to my request.

At this point, you might be asking yourself, "why is a pastor in Wisconsin addressing an issue in a Virginia newspaper?" The short answer is that a Norfolk area LCMS lay person asked me to because the letter to the editor seemed misleading at best as to what the Holy Scripture clearly states.

At first glance it might seem like a very loving and caring attempt to reach out to those communities that might feel excluded by the Christian Church during the time of Christmas. Who could possibly be opposed to that? Well I guess that would be me.

The article begins, "As pastors of Christian churches who are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ this Christmas season, we want to publicly honor the people of other faiths whose ancestors honored Jesus at his birth more than 2,000 years ago. First, we want to honor all Jews. Jesus was born a Jew in the Israeli city of Bethlehem. Jewish shepherds were the first people to honor Jesus at his birth. The first 50,000 followers of Jesus were probably all Jewish. The writers of our Bible were all Jewish."

"...not only is this article factually inaccurate but it's not loving either. It doesn't call for anyone to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. ... It simply leaves the unbeliever in their unbelief, and that is the most unloving thing anyone could do."

It is true that Jesus was born more than two thousand years ago, and that He was born a Jew in Bethlehem as the Scriptures tell us. But to honor the Jews today for Jesus' birth seems to reject what St. John writes, John 1:10-13(ESV):

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Nowhere in the birth account of Jesus are we told that the shepherds were Jewish as Judaism is a religion not a nationality (this is a common issue throughout the opinion article). I understand the assumption, but this has not been revealed, just as the statement that the first fifty thousand followers were probably all Jewish. If they became followers of Jesus, they were no longer Jews but Israelite Christians, again Judaism is a religion that still awaits their coming messiah. This also rejects the Biblical

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fact that Jesus did much of His ministry in Gentile country because His own did not receive Him. The statement that the writers of our Bible were all Jewish is again a false statement. Luke was a Gentile convert and the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

The article continues, *“Next, we want to honor what we will call ‘The People of the Magi.’ We do not know much about these wise men except that they were not Jews and that they came from lands east of Israel. These Magi could have come from all parts of Asia — China, India, the Arabian Peninsula and the like. So we wish to honor all Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and people of all faiths from the east of Jerusalem. Finally, we think this is a good time to remember that despite the obvious differences between our faiths today, there was a time when our ancestors honored Jesus at his birth. Why not? Jesus came for all of us. He came to show the world the love of God for all men everywhere.”*

Again, we can't say that the “wise men” were not Jewish as they very well could have been Gentile converts brought to faith in the coming Messiah through the Word of God taught in Synagogues that would have been established during and after the Babylonian Captivity. What we know is that the wise men or magi (which is a term associated with practitioners of Zoroastrianism) came from the East, seeking Him who was born King of the Jews. What we know is that Muslims were not included in the wise men because the Muslim faith didn't exist until six hundred years later. Again, this seems to be an attempt to confuse nationality with religion. Had the ancestors of these pagan religions worshiped Jesus, how horribly sad it is that their children's children have forsaken the worship of the One true triune God for idols.

This opinion articles concludes, *“May all of our neighbors, of all faiths in Hampton Roads, experience deep peace and joy in their hearts and homes this Christmas 2016.”*

This seems like a very loving way to conclude their article, however apart from Jesus there is no true peace. So, not only is this article factually inaccurate but it's not loving either. It doesn't call for anyone to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't even invite anyone to the services of God's house. It simply leaves the unbeliever in their unbelief, and that is the most unloving thing anyone could do.

Jesus is very clear in His exclusivity of the Christian faith, John 14:6-7(ESV):

⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

“Jesus' beginning” are much earlier than His birthday that we celebrate on December 25th, as the Christian Church has faithfully confessed since 325 AD,

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

Rev. Joseph M. Fisher

Senior Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, West Bend, WI

**Please Support LCMS Missionaries
Rev. Dr. Daniel Jastram (Northern Asia) and
Rev. Charles E. Froh (Kenya)**

Rev. Daniel Jastram, who was Secretary-Treasurer for the Lutheran Concerns Association for many years, is serving the church as a missionary to northern Asia. He is the son of the Rev. Robert Jastram and Phyllis (nee Matthies), who accepted a call to serve in Japan as a missionary in 1953, and remained there for 23 years.



Rev. Daniel Jastram, and his wife, Dr. Joan Jastram, are stationed in Tokyo where Rev. Jastram serves as strategic mission planner for Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. He coordinates theological education opportunities and supervises and evaluates theological educators throughout northern Asia. When needed, Rev. Jastram teaches courses at Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary, Tokyo.

Rev. Charles Froh and his wife, Janet, are serving in Kenya, where Rev. Froh teaches theology courses to male seminary students preparing for pastoral ministry and to female students preparing to serve as deaconesses. He teaches at Neema Lutheran Theological College in Kenya. Rev. Froh, a graduate of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, MO, previously served as pastor at Epiphany Lutheran Church, Penn Hills, PA, and Grace Lutheran Church, San Mateo, CA. Through the relationships that he is forming in Kenya, Rev. Froh has the opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people of Kenya.

The LCA encourages you to support both of these servants in their work for the Lord; write a check payable to LCMS and mail to:

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Some of the information for this article was extracted from <http://www.lcms.org>.

The Lutheran Clarion

The official publication of the Lutheran Concerns Association, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.
Circulation: 6,000



Published regularly to support issues and causes in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod which build faithfulness to true Confessional Lutheranism and to be a clear voice of Christian concern against actions and causes which conflict with faithfulness to the One True Faith. LCA consents to readers reproducing articles provided the entire article, plus footnotes, is included in the reproduction and full attribution given.

The address for all matters pertaining to the LCA is:
149 Glenview Drive
New Kensington, PA 15068-4921

Editorial Board: Mr. Walter Dissen (Chairman)
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Mrs. Ginny Valleau: Layout, Printing & Mailing

Faithful Lutherans who are members of LCMS congregations are invited to submit articles of approximately 500 words for consideration. Inquiries are welcome. Manuscripts will be edited. Views and judgments expressed in articles are the author's own and do not necessarily represent those of LCA. Please email articles to Mr. Walter Dissen (wdissen@aol.com; 757-436-2049).

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Lutheran Concerns Association
March 2017



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New Kensington, PA 15068-4921