

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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The typical American citizen does not know the names of his two U.S. senators and one U.S. representative. Even those who can identify their elected officials by name, know little about the members themselves and still less about their positions on issues such as abortion or imposing sanctions on nations that systematically persecute Christians. In other words, just because someone knows the names of his members of Congress does not mean he knows anything about them or their views on public policies.

There is one name that is familiar to almost every American—the name “God.” Our money says, “In God We Trust.” We pledge allegiance to “one nation under God.” Our president and other public officials often end their speeches with the words “God bless you.” But as Lutheran Christians, we must never equate the words “In God We Trust” on our money or a politician’s words “God bless you” with a confession of the Christian faith (or an assurance that he is a true believer). The early church understood this point well—what one says about God matters.

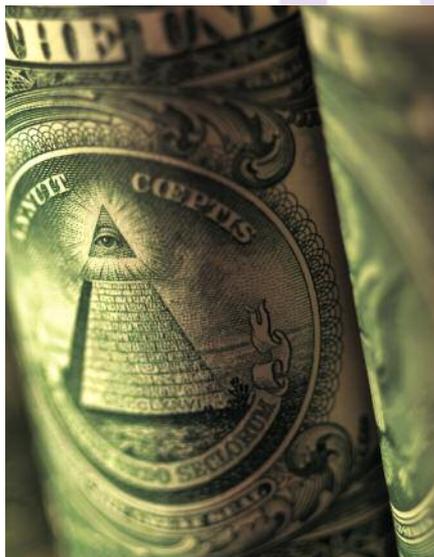
When compelled by their own rulers to confess a false creed about God, they refused. Some Christians paid with their lives for confessing the first creed of the church, “Jesus is Lord.”

The 1998 synodical convention adopted Resolution 2-05A, which encourages “the Synod and its members to work to promote and protect freedom of religion and religious expression both at home and abroad.” The members of Synod may have been justified in adopting this resolution in light of the dramatic increase in the occurrences of discrimination against—

not to be confused with the persecution of—Christian citizens and agencies (and those of other religions) in our society today. But here, too, Lutheran Christians must not confuse efforts to ensure the free practice of religion, of all religions, with the proclamation of the Gospel. Those who passed Resolution 2-05A clearly did not make that error.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn once wrote, “The meaning of existence was to preserve unspoiled, undisturbed and undistorted the image of eternity with which each person is born.” Those who wish to make America a Christian nation seem to think that the state has the duty to point man toward eternity. The Augsburg Confession disagrees: “Temporal authority is concerned with matters altogether different from the Gospel. Temporal power

does not protect the soul, but with the sword and physical penalties it protects body and goods from the power of others” (Tappert, p. 82).



Our money says, “In God We Trust.” We pledge allegiance to “one nation under God.” Our president and other public officials often end their speeches with the words “God bless you.” But as Lutheran Christians, we must never equate the words “In God We Trust” on our money or a politician’s words “God bless you” with a confession of the Christian faith.

Name of JUNE GOD

By Elizabeth A. Fluegel

The task of handling eternal things is that of the Christian pastor; and it would be better said that he is called to preserve (and preach) unspoiled, undisturbed and undistorted the image of the Eternal One: the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This, too, the Augsburg Confession speaks clearly about: "Our teachers hold that according to the Gospel the power of the keys or the power of bishops is a power or command of God to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. For it is not bodily things that are thus given, but rather such eternal things as eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These things cannot come about except through the ministry of Word and sacraments. Inasmuch as the power of the church bestows eternal things and is exercised only through the ministry of the Word, it interferes with civil government as little as the art of singing interferes with civil government. For civil government is concerned with other things than the Gospel. The state protects not souls but bodies and goods from manifest harm, and constrains men with the sword and physical penalties, while the Gospel protects souls from heresies, the devil, and eternal death" (Tappert, p. 81-82).

Synod has not spoken on the specific issue of prayer in the public schools for almost two decades, and did then only through its Board for Parish Services. That board opposed state-sponsored prayer in the public schools because "Christians cannot join with non-Christians in addressing God in circumstances that deny Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord." Notwithstanding Synod's 1998 resolution encouraging us to work for the protection of religious freedom, Lutheran Christians must remember that it is not the state's job to nurture or to "protect souls," which can be done only through the proclamation of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments, but never through generic religiosity.

The pastor most frequently carries out the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the Sunday morning worship service. He speaks the Word of God and the people of God respond in the liturgy. The introduction to Lutheran Worship states this truth beautifully: "Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise—Saying back to Him what He has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. What is most true and sure is His name, which He put upon us with the word of our baptism. We are His. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the divine service. Where His name is, there is He" (pp. 6-7). This is also where an important distinction between the pastor and the people of God immerses. For the pastor must see that the Gospel is spoken and that all that is said and sung about God here is true.

The last Missouri Synod pastor who began Congress' day with prayer did so in the name of Jesus Christ. Tragically, many Christian ministers do not. We live in a pluralistic society. That means that only in the gathered community of believers will the triune name of God be confessed and known and loved as that of the only true God. Yes, one day "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11), but not yet. Not until the return of the Eschaton Himself. "Come Lord Jesus!"

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