

PRAISE FOR *EMBRACING YOUR LUTHERAN IDENTITY*

If you've been looking for an accessible book on the Christian Church down through history, here's what you've been waiting for. Filled with thoughtful questions for reflection and discussion, this book covers everything from apostolic times to our own complex era. In robust colloquial language, Dr. Veith unravels the complex story of the Lutheran Church—warts and blemishes included. Woven throughout is the faith once delivered to the saints, rooted solidly in God's enduring Word.

Harold L. Senkbeil, author of *The Care of Souls*

What I've gathered is that most Christians know things about Christianity but are disconnected from the time line of the faith they've inherited, even among our confessional community, causing many to muddy the meaning of what it is to be a believer. This leaves numerous individuals devoid of knowledge and awareness of the care God has generously poured over His church throughout the ages. Gene Veith closes those gaps and fills the mind and heart with the Holy Spirit's highlight reel. By relaying some of the most special moments of church history, Veith's words will inspire the reader and ignite an imagination for good works in the world as unto our Lord Jesus Christ—works worth modeling from important times in the past.

FLAME, GRAMMY®-nominated and Stellar Award-winning hip hop artist;
author of *Extra Nos: Discovering Grace outside Myself*

Knowing what you would die for reveals what you are living for. Veith builds up our identity in Christ Jesus by exploring the common community, history, and beliefs of Lutherans. *Embracing Your Lutheran Identity* will bolster your identity in Jesus, a faith that is worth living for—and even dying for.

Rev. Dr. A. Trevor Sutton, senior pastor, St. Luke Lutheran Church,
Lansing, Michigan; coauthor of *Authentic Christianity: How Lutheran
Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World*

Gene Veith provides a lively overview of the legacy that Lutherans have, starting with the apostles and culminating in contemporary confessors. Veith reminds us that the Lutheran Church did not start with Martin Luther in the sixteenth century but embraces a heritage going back to the first century. Veith demonstrates how Luther and his coworkers were born into a church deformed by false teachings that deflected attention from Christ alone, directing sinners to their own works and piety. Luther sought to reform that which had become deformed. The result was a lively confession of the Gospel that would ring out around the globe and is still going on today. Whether through individual reading or group study, Lutherans will be enlightened regarding their heritage, and non-Lutherans will find this book is an accessible introduction to this church.

John T. Pless, assistant professor of pastoral ministry and mission,
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

As Dr. Veith's readers have come to expect, this book is both understandable and substantive. With clarity and context, the text leads the reader on a broad, historic journey to strengthen a highly personal appreciation of the Christian faith. Topical sections, questions to ponder, and recommendations for further reading make this book perfectly suited for both group discussions and individual study.

Cheryl Swope, MEd; author of *Simply Classical: A Beautiful Education for Any Child*; coauthor of *Eternal Treasures: Teaching Your Child at Home*; creator of the Simply Classical Curriculum for Special Needs

Gene Veith has done it again. He weaves theology, history, and sociology together in the compelling story of being a Lutheran Christian. By showing the roots of our identity and the history of where we have been, Veith prepares the modern Lutheran believer to face the challenges of the world of today. For those who know the power of Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, be blessed with how it has sustained a particular people for particular times all around the globe. Don't just read this book; identify with it, find your place in it, and you will be blessed.

Rev. Dr. Gregory P. Seltz, executive director, Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty; speaker emeritus of *The Lutheran Hour*



TO THE YOUTH OF TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, BLACKWELL, OKLAHOMA



Published by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

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Quotations from *Luther's Works* are from Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition; general editors: Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, Christopher Boyd Brown, and Benjamin T. G. Mayes; 82 vols., St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress, 1955–.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book had its origins in a postconfirmation course I taught for the youth of Trinity Lutheran Church in Blackwell. I wrote about it on my blog (patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/), and my readers said that they, too, would like to learn all this stuff and urged me to write it up.

So I did, and Concordia Publishing House was kind enough to publish it. But this is a different kind of book than I usually write, and there are several different ways it can be used.

This is me writing not as a scholar or a pundit or an apologist. This is me writing as a teacher. My primary vocation over many decades before I retired a few years ago was a college professor in Christian schools.

This book follows the pattern of having several paragraphs of my presentation, interrupted by questions. That's basically how I taught. According to the tenets of classical education, going back through Luther and Melancthon and beyond, it's important to have knowledge, but it's also important to understand that knowledge and be able to apply it personally.

Understanding comes from dialectic—that is, from discussion, as stimulated by questions. The personal application comes under the category of rhetoric, which involves expressing one's own thoughts by putting them into writing.

The questions in this book are not “test” questions to see if you have read the material, and they are not “right or wrong” questions to see if you have come to the right conclusions. Teachers do use those types of questions. But the questions in this book are designed to

cause you to think about the material and to provoke discussion with those who answer the questions differently.

So there are four basic ways you can use this book:

1. Reading it by yourself

- **The Easy Way:** You can just read this like any other book. But I hope that when you come to the questions, you will at least pause to think about them.
- **The Better Way:** Read the book like any other book. But when you come to the questions, write out your responses, at least to the ones that interest you the most. Going through the book in this way would turn it into a disciplined study, a good exercise for Lent or for your personal devotions.

2. Reading it with a group

- **The Easy Way:** As a group study, this one requires no preparation or special knowledge on the part of a leader. I supply that. Nor does it require anyone to do any reading ahead of time. When everyone gets together, as facilitated by a leader or not, participants simply take turns reading the paragraphs. Then, when the questions come up, everyone can say how they would answer them, leading to a discussion. Then go back to reading the paragraphs, with breaks for the questions. Go at your own pace.
- **The Better Way:** Everyone reads the chapter ahead of time and writes out their answers to the questions. Then, when you get together, everyone reads their answers out loud to one another, resulting in more extensive discussions. This would actually be the quickest way to go through the book, since you could do a chapter per session.

This is a teaching script, not a scholarly treatise. When I write works of scholarship, I am careful to write objectively and with precision, treating all sides and documenting my sources. When I lecture

in the classroom, though, I don't footnote everything I say. Rather, I draw on my academic knowledge of the field, gained both by my prior education and by my continued reading, as well as my own thoughts about the subject. I do prepare for each lecture by tracking down the names, dates, details, and other information that my presentation calls for, digging them out with the help of reference books and, these days, the internet.

That's basically what I do here. If you want to find out where I got my material or go deeper into it, consult the "For Further Reading" section at the end of each chapter. You can also look up the topics on your computer.

The purpose of this book is to help instill a Lutheran identity. This identity comes from believing in Lutheran doctrines and understanding Lutheran theology, especially as it differs from other perspectives. To understand those differences, I commend to you books like Alvin Schmidt's *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017). Though my book gets into that, it began as a postconfirmation study and assumes those who read and study it have "confirmed" their knowledge of the catechism and agree with what it teaches. That is to say, they are already Lutherans. They have that identity, and I simply want to flesh out what that means.

That identity is fostered by participating in the Divine Service—hearing the Word, singing the Word, receiving the sacraments, praying together with fellow believers—as well as participating in other aspects of the life of the church, from the rhythms of the Church Year to getting involved in the lives of other members of the congregation.

But another aspect of identity has to do with feeling a part of a community with a common history, culture, and collective experience. One of the legacies of progressivism is to cut people off from their history, their heritage, and thus their identity. Few Lutherans today know the stories of their long history—the persecutions, the martyrdoms, the villains, the battles, the heroes—or the lore, such as why we worship as we do, why the Saxon immigrants came to America, and why confessional Lutheranism stands out in contemporary Christianity.

I had in mind as I wrote this book an audience of high school

youth, college students, and young adults, but I think it will communicate to older adults as well. But younger people in particular would do well to learn more about this church that they *belong* to, that they are *part of*. Because your Lutheran identity strengthens you in the primary identity that you have in Jesus Christ.



INTRODUCTION

YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Who are you? What are you?

Those would seem to be easy questions. But they aren't. Especially today. These are questions about your identity. People today are obsessed with identity, and yet they often have a difficult time identifying themselves.

Part of the problem is that identity involves both your uniqueness and your belonging. Each of us is a unique individual, and yet each of us also yearns for connections with other people.

Many people are trying to find their identity in their sex, ethnicity, or social status. They try to define themselves—and others—in terms of race, wealth, politics, or sexual desires. This never works in the long run, since these and other external and superficial factors do not describe who you are deep down, in your inmost thoughts and feelings, in your personal uniqueness.

There is only one who knows you in that way, who knows you completely in the depths of your personal uniqueness. That would be God, who created you distinctly from everyone else and is in constant communion with your very soul. Furthermore, God designed you to be in relationship with others, with Him and with other people whom He brings into your life.

So to find our identity, we would do well to learn how God identifies us.

YOUR BAPTISMAL IDENTITY

It is astonishing how directly the Bible addresses the identity pre-occupations of our time—ethnicity, social status, and sex—and puts them in their place:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27–28)

Everyone who is baptized has “put on Christ.” So when God sees us, He sees us through the lens of Jesus. He sees not our sinfulness but Christ’s righteousness. Christ—by becoming one of us, bearing our sin, and taking our punishment—has our identity, so now we have Christ’s identity. Our identity is no longer based on the world’s categories.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek.” Our ethnic, national, cultural, or racial identity no longer applies—neither to our relationship to God nor, as Paul is exhorting, to Christians’ relationships with one another.

“There is neither slave nor free.” Our social status, our economic position, and our place in society no longer define our identity. And important to today’s issues, as to the slaves and other oppressed people who have always been drawn to Christianity, our identity is not to be found in our victimhood and our oppression. People in bondage could say, “My slavery doesn’t define me.” And a free citizen would have to say, “My privilege doesn’t define me.”

“There is no male and female.” We are not to find our identity in sex or gender—not in feminism or the men’s movement, nor in trying to change our gender or in fixating on our sexual proclivities.

It isn’t that these categories don’t exist or are not important. They are part of our physical creation and our social and cultural life. The Bible has much to say about them all. But they are not to define our identity.

1. Why is your baptismal identity so much more important than your ethnic, national, cultural, or racial identity?

2. Why is your baptismal identity so much more important than your status, the amount of money you have, your job, your victimhood, or your privilege?

3. Why is your baptismal identity so much more important than your sex, gender, or sexual desires?

4. What does this mean for how we identify others and how we treat them? Apply this both to fellow Christians and to non-Christians.

The ultimate signifier of identity is our name. Each of us has a distinct and individual name, according to which we are distinguished from everyone else. Our parents gave us our name, and in our culture,

our family name—either that of our parents and forebears or of the new family that began with marriage—is part of our individual name.

One of the things that happens in the rite of Baptism is that we are named. Thus, God names us. He gives us our identity. Yes, parents give the pastor the name that they have picked out for the child, or an adult being baptized formally tells the pastor what his or her name is, but the statement of the baptismal candidate's name is an important part of the rite. Historically, what a person is named at Baptism, as recorded on the baptismal certificate, became the official, legal name. This is why a person's first name has also been called the "Christian name," referring to the name given at the christening, when the person was baptized and became a Christian.

And then, most importantly, the name of God is attached to the person's name. In the rubrics of *Lutheran Service Book*, the pastor says this as he pours the water over the candidate:

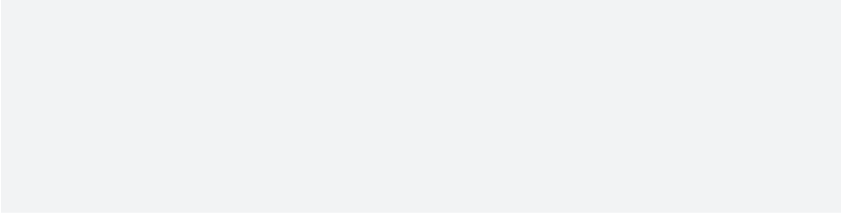
Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

What makes a Baptism is not just water but the water plus the *name* of the triune God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *in the name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, emphasis added).

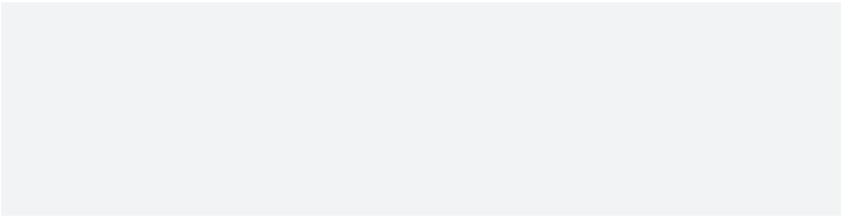
Yes, our nationality, social position, and sex—along with many other things, such as our family, the times we live in, our cultural heritage, and our personal interests—help make us who we are. Their effacement in Baptism does not take away the created order or the social estates (family, church, and state) that God established for human flourishing. Also shaping our personal identity are the multiple vocations that God calls us to in these estates (such as marriage and parenthood, worker and citizen, pastor and laity). This, however, is addressed in Baptism, which is where we receive our first and most foundational calling: the call of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel as given in Baptism.

Our ID cards might record our various secondary identities. But our primary identity, the deepest reaches of ourself, our individual essence that will live forever, is to be in Christ.

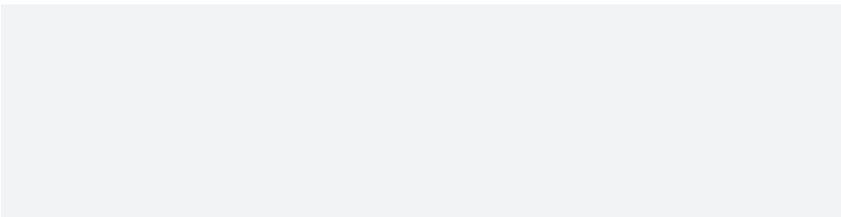
5. What is your name?



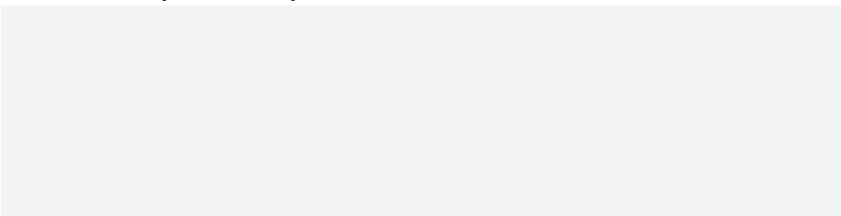
6. Why did your parents give you that name?



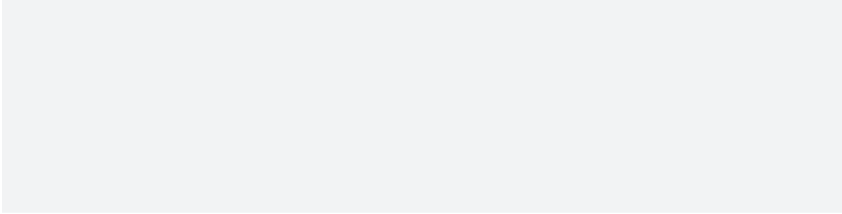
7. Do you know what your name means?



8. You have a “Christian name” given at your Baptism (your first name), and you also have a family name (your last name). Do you know where your family name derives from and what it means?

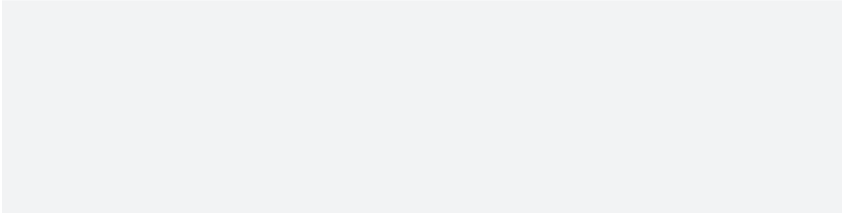


9. What do you know about your ancestors (what country they came from, why and how they came to this country, interesting facts about them, etc.)?



If you have an ID card (that is to say, an identity card, such as a driver's license or school ID), take it out. What are the different kinds of information it records? (My driver's license gives my first and last names, my address, my date of birth, my sex, my height, the color of my eyes, and, embarrassingly, my weight. It also assigns me a *number* so that I can have an existence in the government's computers.)

10. Which bits of information on your ID identify you by what groups you belong to?



11. Which bits of information on your ID identify you as a unique individual?

