

# CONTENTS

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## For the Life of the World

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

## FEATURES

### 4 Christian Involvement in Public Ethical Issues

By Peter J. Scaer

Even now, Christians are suffering, losing their businesses, being subjected to fines and firing, simply for conducting their lives in accordance with the truth that every child deserves a mom and dad. While society moves towards injustice, we must speak for those who would rather not participate in that injustice.

### 8 Baptismal Ethics in Family and Society

By Lucas V. Woodford

This is a moment of opportunity for the Church boldly to address the challenges of our age. Many want to know how to confront the toxic moral and spiritual influences all around: how do we find hope and develop good habits of faith and life that can combat this evil and build biblical character and the family unit, not only amongst ourselves but for the next generation of Christians?

### 12 Standing Up for Life: The CTSFW Life Team

Jacob H. Benson and Hanna M. Hoffbeck, Contributors

Our Lutheran understanding of good works and morality frees us to love the neighbor in ways that most of Christendom lacks. To that end, to help form pastors and deaconesses who are doers and not hearers only, the Life Team at Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW), Fort Wayne, was formed.

### Also in this issue:

<b>What Does This Mean?</b> .....	<b>p. 11</b>
<b>Called to Serve</b> .....	<b>p. 16</b>
<b>Faculty Focus</b> .....	<b>p. 18</b>
<b>Faculty News</b> .....	<b>p. 21</b>
<b>CTSFW to Offer Ph.D. in Theological Studies Beginning Fall 2018</b> . . .	<b>p. 22</b>
<b>Alumni</b> .....	<b>p. 24</b>
<b>Seminary Guild</b> .....	<b>p. 27</b>
<b>Profiles in Giving</b> .....	<b>p. 28</b>
<b>Bible Study</b> .....	<b>p. 30</b>

# Baptismal in Family and



**This is a moment of opportunity for the Church boldly to address the challenges of our age. Many want to know how to confront the toxic moral and spiritual influences all around: how do we find hope and develop good habits of faith and life that can combat this evil and build biblical character and the family unit, not only amongst ourselves but for the next generation of Christians? Our Lutheran answer is the baptismal life, which brings the joyous reality of the redeemed, sanctified and moral life we are given to live here and now in Christ Jesus.**

People love stories. Stories have a way of helping us see ourselves in light of the meaning and purpose of life. One of the things I love to do with my five (soon to be six) kids is read stories to them. They love stories. Reading to them opens tremendous avenues for caring conversations about life and society, about family, about manhood and womanhood, about sex, about faith and about all their hopes and dreams. It is, quite frankly, a wonderful tool for teaching children and passing on the faith from one generation to the next.

In our house, we have a wide range of classic books of literature, mixed in with books on virtues and character and, of course, all the great stories, parables and wisdom literature of the Bible. Take *Alice in Wonderland* for example. In Chapter 6 there is a great exchange between Alice and the Caterpillar:

*“Who are YOU?” said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, “I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”*

Though written a long time ago, this conversation describes the condition of our times. We live in a world that has lost its story. People are emerging without an understanding of who they are or even where they come from. Increasingly they are making up their own story as they go along. The result is the spiritual mayhem and moral chaos we see reflected in current entertainment media.

But the same media helps distract people from the sheer emptiness of life

without a story. Remember *Seinfeld*? The most popular comedy of all time was self-admittedly a “show about nothing.”

Sadly, entertainment often simply reflects the prevailing thought of the day. And when “nothing” is the goal, the manner of getting there is simply to indulge and revel in whatever feels good along the way, ignoring any and all moral constraints.

When the world is stripped of meaning and purpose and the self is stripped of any and all moral character, we’re left with the cultural madness and social mayhem we see reflected in the digital media and entertainment of our day. Our digital age has created a world of spiritual and moral zombies, as increasingly we (kids, adults and whole families) stare into our smartphones and other digital devices that teach us to look *to* ourselves and *at* ourselves, as we obsessively project our segmented, fragmented and exaggerated lives on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.

This is a moment of opportunity for the Church boldly to address the challenges of our age. Many want to know how to confront the toxic moral

# Ethics

## Society

By Lucas V. Woodford



and spiritual influences all around: how do we find hope and develop good habits of faith and life that can combat this evil and build biblical character and the family unit, not only amongst ourselves but for the next generation of Christians?

Our Lutheran answer is the baptismal life, which brings the joyous reality of the redeemed, sanctified and moral life we are given to live here and now in Christ Jesus. Holy Baptism is not just an idea or abstract thought. It not only imparts spiritual reality that has practical application for the life of every Christian, but it gives holy character and a specific identity that wraps the baptized believer into the life and story of Jesus Christ.

Scripture clearly affirms this (see Rom. 6:4-5), and the Small Catechism succinctly confesses this reality about Baptism when it says, “It indicates that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

In repentance Christians not only confess sin but turn away from that sin and evil desire in sorrow and contrition. Thus, our sinful thoughts, behaviors and vices are drowned and die. We confess them as wrong. We plead for mercy and forgiveness. In so doing, we spiritually crucify the sinful self and bury it with Christ (Rom. 6:4), thereby mortifying the flesh. The habit of daily repentance therefore brings with it an ethic of faith lived in union with Christ. Paul put it like this: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). In a world that has lost its

story and aims to disorder everything that God intimately and intricately ordered, our baptismal identity and character beautifully equip us to live a new life. Each and every day we are newly created in Christ Jesus as sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father to live ordered lives in a chaotic world.

Our baptismal identity and character are especially helpful in our digital age. With the advent of Netflix and other digital streaming services, shows like *Big Mouth*, *I am Jazz*, and *Thirteen Reasons Why* can rapidly invade the hearts and minds of youth and family with the moral revolution of our time.

Each of these releases strives to mainstream a chaotic world and normalize the moral revolution of a world devoid of meaning. *Big Mouth* is a just released Netflix “adult” animated comedy series that explicitly, vulgarly and disgustingly explores the teenage challenges of puberty. *I am Jazz* is an American reality television series on TLC about a transgender “girl” named Jazz Jennings that features Jazz and family dealing with teen drama through the lens of a transgender youth. *Thirteen Reasons Why* is an explicit and vulgar Netflix drama about the challenges of high school that led one young girl to commit a brutal suicide and leave behind recordings of 13 reasons why she did it.

Disorder, decadence and despair have become the new normal of our society. In a world without a story, we Christians need to resist these lies, that’s for sure. We must be bold to stand *against* sin and cultural mayhem. But we must be bold about what we are *for*. We serve a living Lord who is the Light no darkness can overcome. Let’s band together to reclaim family virtue and live in the grand story of the new creations we are made to be through Christ in Holy Baptism.

Now, as ever, the Church needs to proclaim boldly the cleansing, purging and purifying work of Jesus Christ through His Word and Holy Baptism. Likewise, we need to teach boldly and preach the truth of God’s Law, while also declaring from where the power to live an ethical life comes. “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I

who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

The Church is a beacon of light and life on an ocean of darkness and death. We provide an oasis of hope for the defiled, truth for the confused and relief for the tortured souls of our day. They, along with every last sinner on the face of the planet, need the cleansing, purging, healing and sanctifying power of the Gospel—not just for the forgiveness of sins, but for the daily reception of a holy identity and a holy lifestyle that comes through Baptism into Jesus Christ.

While staying informed about the false narratives of our digital and media saturated society and the challenges of living in a world without a story, we must be bold to tell the biblical story. Let our children learn from us once more the true story—even as they see it modeled in our lives—that marriage is an earthly image of the true union of Christ Jesus and His Bride, the Church. Let them see in us what it means to be a godly woman, a godly wife and mother. Let them learn within the family of faith what it means to be a godly man, a godly husband and father. Let them honor their own bodies and revere sexuality as a profound gift of God’s creation as they see sexual chastity and faithfulness modeled among the communion of saints.

Rather than letting media and entertainment shape our kids and families, let’s be intentional about shaping them with the story of Christ and regularly weave them into that grand story of redemption, sanctification and salvation. Even better, let them see His love in action as we together live out the identity and character of Christ given to us in Holy Baptism right here and right now. 🏡

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