

## Why Are You A Lutheran?

*This We Believe (Questions and Answers)*, by Richard L. Gurgel  
(Northwestern Publishing House, 280 pp., \$15.99)

More specifically, why are you a member of Our Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church (ORELC) that in turn is a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)? I hope you became a member because first and foremost you believe that we are committed (we believe, teach, and confess) to the full truth of Scripture as explained in the Lutheran Confessions.

If your baby pictures are in black and white (and maybe even if they aren't), it has been a long time since your confirmation. Are you still able to explain what you believe and why you believe it? Are you "...always prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you..." (1Peter 3:15)? When Pastor Proeber states that the WELS is Christ-centered, confessional, and consistent, do you really understand what that means?

Most of us need to be instructed and reminded frequently about the answers to these and other important questions. The WELS recognized this and published a 24 page booklet *This We Believe*, in 1967. Since then, the WELS has revised the booklet twice (1980 and 1999). Both revisions attempted to make the document more readable. Neither revision was undertaken as a result of any doctrinal changes. That said, the booklet *This We Believe* was primarily written as a basis for doctrinal discussions with other church bodies, not for the general reader.

In *This We Believe (Questions and Answers)*, Professor Gurgel has provided concrete explanations, geared toward the layperson and for use in every day life, of the WELS doctrines contained in the booklet *This We Believe*. Written in a Question and Answer format, he does an excellent job of explaining in practical terms what each of the doctrinal statements mean. Professor Gurgel uses the *This We Believe* booklet as an outline and the doctrinal statements contained therein as section headings with questions and answers following each doctrinal statement. So, the book contains all of the original *This We Believe* booklet sections (Section I: God and His Revelation; Section II: Creation, Mankind, and Sin; Section III: Christ and Redemption; Section IV: Justification By Grace Through Faith; Section V: Good Works and Prayer; Section VI: The Means of Grace; Section VII: Church and Ministry; Section VIII: Church and State, and Section IX: Jesus' Return and the Judgment) and the doctrinal statements contained in each of those sections. The book also includes a subject index.

Let's look at a couple of examples (from the over 300 questions and answers) in Professor Gurgel's insightful book.

The first example is from Section III: Christ and Redemption. Doctrinal statement 6 reads as follows: "6. We reject the views that consider the Gospel accounts to be pious fiction developed by early Christians to express their ideas about Jesus Christ rather than a true account of what actually happened in history. We reject all attempts to make the historical accuracy of events in Christ's life – such as his virgin birth, his miracles, or his bodily resurrection – appear unimportant or even doubtful. We reject the attempts to stress a "present encounter with the living Christ" in such a way that Jesus' redemptive work recorded in Scripture loses its importance".

Professor Gurgel follows that doctrinal statement with two (2) key questions: 1) How do we know that the Scriptures are more than pious fiction developed by the early church? 2) What does a "present encounter with the living Christ" mean, and what is the danger of such an emphasis? (Note: you can get the answers on pages 80 and 81 of the book).

A second example is from Section IX: Jesus' Return and the Judgment. Doctrinal statement 4 reads as follows: "4. We believe that when Jesus returns and his voice is heard throughout the

earth, all the dead will rise, that is, their souls will be reunited with their bodies (John 5:28,29). Together with those still living, the resurrected will appear before his throne of judgment. The unbelievers will be condemned to an eternity in hell. Those who by faith have been cleansed in the blood of Christ will be glorified and will live with Jesus forever in the blessed presence of God in heaven (Philippians 3:21).

Professor Gurgel follows that doctrinal statement with several key questions. Here are a couple: 1) How will God raise all the dead when many who died long ago have returned to dust? 2) Since the souls of those who died before the Last Day have already gone to heaven or hell, what is the purpose of having all stand before God on judgment day? (Note: you can get the answers on pages 255 and 256 of the book).

I hope that gives you a flavor for the book. As I mentioned earlier, there are over 300 questions and answers. Many, if not most of those questions and accompanying answers undoubtedly came from readers of *Forward in Christ* (the official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod). As many of you probably know, Professor Gurgel is a contributing editor to *Forward In Christ* and writes a popular monthly article entitled "Q&A at the foot of the cross" where readers are able to submit questions about the Bible and WELS doctrine and receive answers and commentary based on God's Word. Professor Gurgel currently serves as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Mequon, WI) where he teaches Systematic Theology, Education, and Homiletics (the art of preaching). He also serves as the Worship department chairman. Professor Gurgel is a member at Calvary, Thiensville, WI.

For those of us who were raised in another Lutheran Synod and witnessed what happens when the full truth of the scripture is no longer preached and taught, this book reminds us again of how blessed we are to be members of the WELS where the full truth of Scripture as explained in the Lutheran Confessions is believed, taught, and confessed. More importantly, this book will help you "...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...(2 Peter 3:18).

To God alone belongs all the glory!