

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them... He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life ... All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2005], 15-16).

Finally, Luther found this grace great enough to forgive even evils against life. Jesus Christ died and rose to save sinners from just such guilt. "That is why all those should be absolved whose sins are hidden, whether they are sins of the flesh, or of every kind of lust, abortion, and the like" (LW 39:42).

When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: "I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also" (Tappert, Theodore G, trans. and ed. *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* [Vancouver: Regent College, 2003], 86-87).

*LW refers to Luther's Works, 55 vols., Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, et al., eds. (St. Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986).*



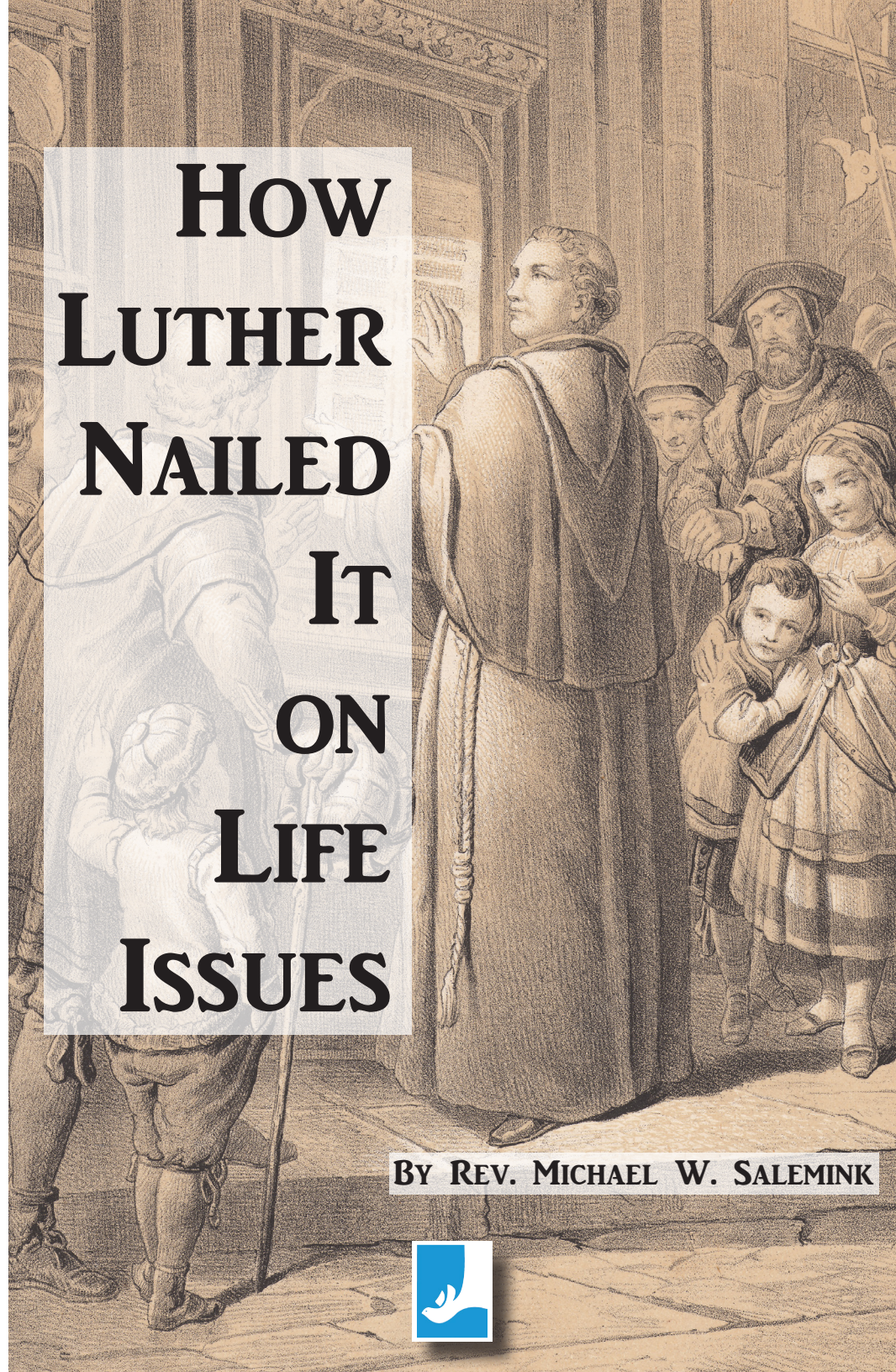
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Item LFL207T

# HOW LUTHER NAILED IT ON LIFE ISSUES

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Life issues didn't arise overnight. Their frequent connection to medical technology can make them seem like recent developments, and advances in understanding physiology and pharmaceuticals have made abortion and euthanasia more efficient and available of late. But these circumstances have been causing society's difficulties—and providing opportunities to proclaim the Gospel—since ancient times.

The Hippocratic Oath explicitly forbids both aborting and assisting suicide. This famous physician's pledge stated, centuries before Jesus, "Neither will I administer a poison to anybody when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course. Similarly I will not give to a woman a pessary to cause abortion." *The Didache*, a Christian text attributed to the apostles and as old as the New Testament, likewise declares, "Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten."

Martin Luther also applied his voice to life issues. As we celebrate the Reformation's quincentennial, listening to him can still enlighten us. His view of family matters proved revolutionary in its time. Luther promoted marriage, encouraged childbearing, and praised parenting. He concluded even unborn babies qualified as full-fledged human beings.

**Look at your infancy, and give thought to whether you remember that you were in your mother's womb, that you lay in a cradle, that you sucked your mother's breasts, cried, ate pap, grew, etc. Yet we are certainly alive even during the first year, when the fetus is carried in the mother's womb. (LW 5:75)**

**For no one of those who are alive today knows where he was during the first two years, when he lived either in the womb ... Yet he lived at that time, and he was a body joined to a soul—a body adapted to all natural functions. (LW 8:316)**

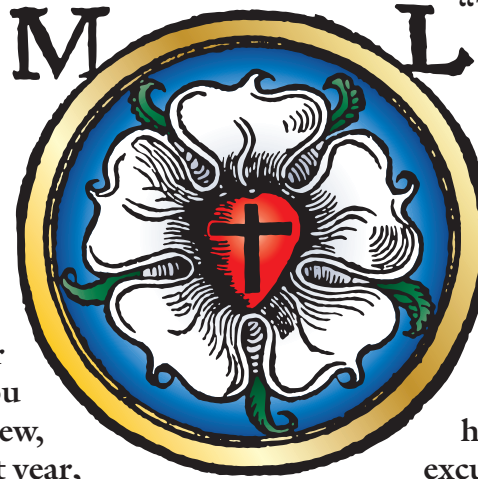
Luther derived this truth directly from God's Word. He observed how Holy Scripture testified about the prenatal humanity of Jesus and John the Baptist. **"Moreover, when Christ, the Son of God, was to be conceived in his mother's womb and become incarnate, he certainly had to be already present in essence and in person in the Virgin's womb, and had to assume humanity there" (LW 37:62).**

**"And St. John was a child in his mother's womb [Luke 1:41] but, as I believe, could have faith" (LW 40:242).**

So Luther called abortion a sinful offense against the tiniest neighbors. **"For those who pay no attention to pregnant women and do not spare the tender fetus become murderers" (LW 5:382). "How great, therefore, the wickedness of human nature is! How many girls there are who prevent conception and kill and expel tender fetuses, although procreation is the work of God!" (LW 4:304).** In fact, he labels such acts the devil's works: **"Hourly the devil seeks to destroy us all. No sooner are you baptized than the devil lies in wait for you. If possible, he would kill you in your mother's womb" (LW 23:256).**

In the same way, Luther saw suicide and its assistance as wrong.

**"Therefore those hotheaded spirits do wrong by scourging and beating themselves or by killing themselves and trying in this way to take heaven by storm" (LW 30:109).**



Christ Himself explains and sums it up. He says that we must not kill, neither with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help, nor counsel ... So also, if you see anyone innocently sentenced to death or in similar distress, and do not save him, although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. It will not work for you to make the excuse that you did not provide any help, counsel, or aid to harm him. For you have withheld your love from him and deprived him of the benefit by which his life would have been saved (McCain, Paul Timothy, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. [St. Louis: Concordia, 2006], 379-80).

God's limitless grace convinced Luther to regard life with such respect. Both Bible and experience led him to behold human beings and their bodies as gifts and privileges of infinite preciousness imparted by the Lord Himself. Neither ability nor disobedience, whether one's own or a neighbor's, could improve upon or invalidate the worth the Almighty instilled.