everyone who had eyes to see.

The Barmen Declaration set forth in six clearly written articles the meaning of Christian faith and life based on the Holy Scriptures and the great confessions of the sixteenth-century Reformation. It rejected the totalitarian claims of the state and called the German church back to the central truths of the Gospel. It did so by announcing in its first article that “Jesus Christ, as he has attested for us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.”

During the spring semester of 2011, the community of Beeson Divinity School is studying the Barmen Declaration and asking what it can mean for us today. “To the Winds Thy Fears,” from a hymn text by Paul Gerhardt (translated by John Wesley), is the theme of our community worship services this spring. Each week in Hodges Chapel, we will listen to sermons on the significance of the Barmen Declaration today. We shall also sing some of the great hymns of Luther and Gerhardt and listen to the music of the Reformation that so inspired Bonhoeffer and other believers in the Confessing Church.

One of the speakers in our series will be Eric Metaxas, a biographer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He, among others, has compared the Barmen Declaration to the Manhattan Declaration (MD), a recent statement of Christian conscience affirming the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, the dignity of marriage as a lifelong covenant union between one man and one woman, and religious freedom for all persons. The MD was drafted by Chuck Colson, Robert George, and me and released in November, 2009. Within one year of its release, the MD had garnered the signatures of some half-million Christian believers. You can find out more about the Manhattan Declaration on its website: www.manhattandeclaration.org.

It needs to be said that these three issues are not the only matters of pressing moral concern in our culture today. Many issues call for Christian engagement. Care of creation, racial injustice, the proliferation of violence, the spread of HIV-AIDS, the blight of poverty and hunger around the world, and many others are all areas of concern. But life, marriage and freedom are threshold issues on which so much else depends. If Christians cannot stand together on the sanctity of life, the dignity of marriage, and religious freedom for all, then how can we act with any moral earnestness on a host of other concerns that press upon us?

The Manhattan Declaration was written on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Barmen Declaration. The early drafts of the MD did cite the Barmen statement as a precedent that inspired our concern. But the reference to of Jesus in John 14:6, an assertion that demands a decision: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Second, neither Barmen nor Manhattan are “political” statements in the sense of being tied to a particular political party or ideology. The MD has been signed by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike. Some say today that the church should take a sabbatical from speaking to the culture at large. Hitler himself was happy (at least for a while) to leave the Christians alone so long as they stayed within the four walls of their church buildings and refrained from “meddling” in matters related to public policy and the common life of the German people. But both Barmen and Manhattan refuse to say that there are areas of life which do not belong to Jesus Christ. Both affirm the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Finally, both Barmen and Manhattan are more than mere statements of academic discourse. They are not mere declarations