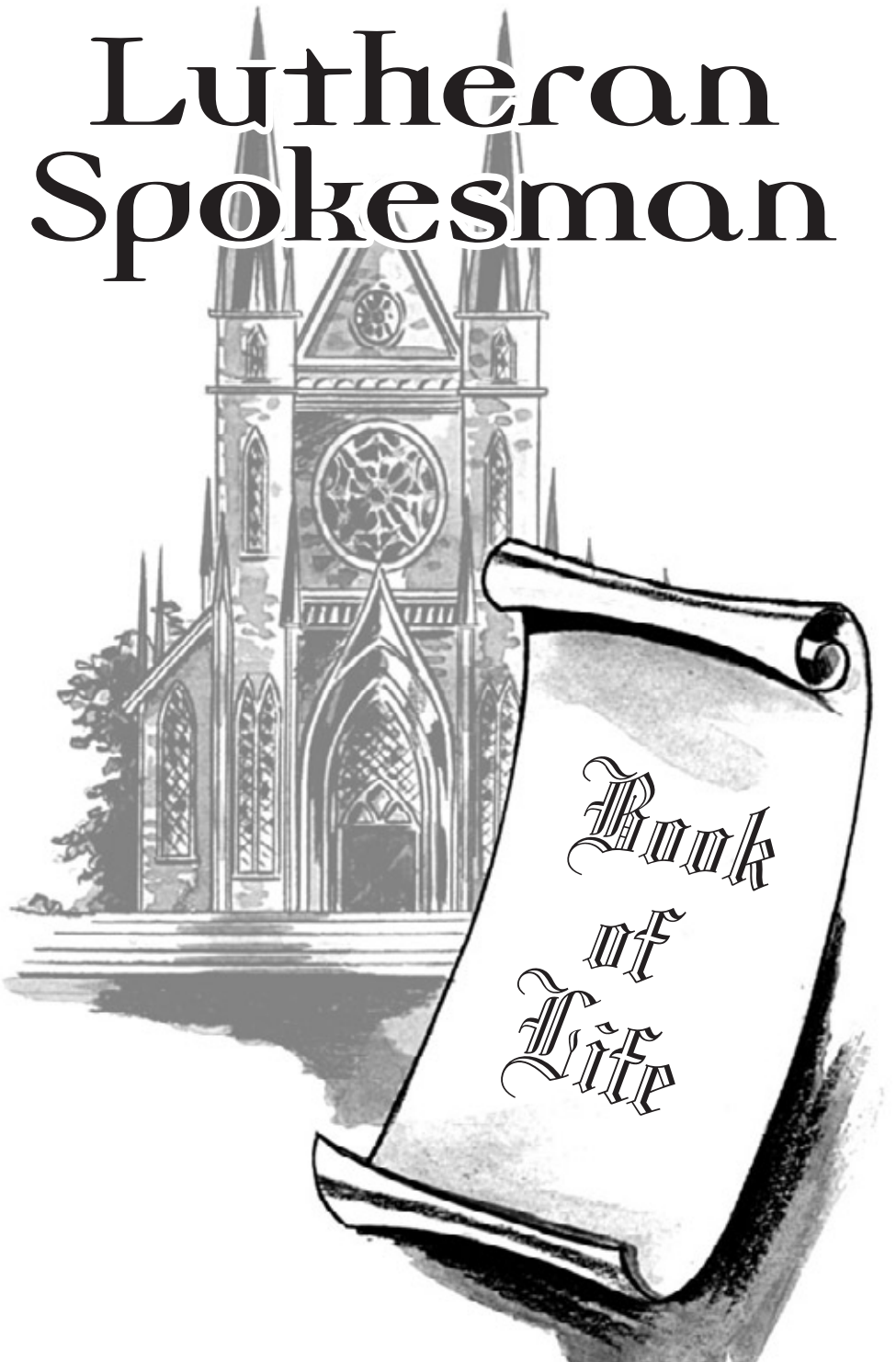


Lutheran Spokesman



The Holy Christian Church

It Does Exist

Travelers on Interstate 90 through the great state of South Dakota will note few signs of civilization. There are, however, a multitude of other signs on the side of the road, many of which direct the traveler's attention to a place called Wall Drug.

Where is Wall Drug? It's a drug store in South Dakota, of course! If you haven't had the privilege of visiting this landmark, I won't spoil it for you.

My point is this: it is rather easy to find Wall Drug, because there are so many signs pointing to it, including one sign on the continent of Africa, believe it or not.

"The Holy Christian Church is the communion of saints; that is, the group of all who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins" (*Small Catechism, Sydow Edition, 1988*). Where is this group to be found? Is it as easy to find as Wall Drug?

This group of all who believe in Christ is not as easy to find, since it is an invisible group. Since faith is something of the heart, and we humans do not possess the power to look into each others' hearts, we cannot see true faith in Christ with our own two eyes.

We do know that this Holy Christian Church does exist, however, since God tells us it exists. True believers are created wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are used, because in these things the Holy Spirit does His work. It is this gospel in Word and Sacrament (the Means of Grace) that makes believers.

Strength in Numbers

There are groups, clubs, and organizations of every size and variety in our country today. For example, if hot air ballooning really gives you a lift, then the 3,500 member Balloon Federation

Postmaster: Periodicals postage paid at Roseville, MN 55113 and at additional offices. Send address corrections (Form 3579) to Lutheran Spokesman, 2750 Oxford Street North, Roseville, MN 55113.

The Lutheran Spokesman is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC).

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Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Fleischer six weeks before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Fleischer.

Business Manager: Benno Sydow, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113. E-Mail to benno.sydow@isd623.org. Individual subscriptions {foreign—U.S. currency only}: \$11.00 {\$15.00} for one year; \$19.00 {\$27.00} for two years; \$27.00 {\$39.00} for three years. Subscriptions sent in bulk to congregations: \$9.00.

Spokesman Internet access: <http://www.lutheranspokesman.org>

Printed in U.S.A.

of America might be right for you. The list of groups of this kind is endless, for they are formed to find strength in numbers. People who share an interest get together to have a place to discuss their problems, a forum to have their ideals represented to the community, or just for the camaraderie of knowing that you are not the only one who enjoys doing what you do.

What are the benefits of believing in the Holy Christian Church and knowing you belong to it? Although God's Church is strong because of God's strength, God's Word gives us encouragement that no Christian stands alone. In fact, there are multitudes of believers, some of which are living here on Earth, others who are with the Lord.

In Acts chapter 5, we're told that "... believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." We are not alone in our faith. At one point Elijah thought that he was the only believer in the true

God left, but as God pointed out to him, there were still 7,000 believers left in Israel (see 1 Kings 19).

A Very Happy Ending

We cannot see this Holy Christian Church, but we know it exists as God says it does; and so we confess, "I believe in the Holy Christian Church . . ." As a believer in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, you have the comfort of knowing that you are not alone in your faith and the encouragement to carry on, knowing that you will one day join that innumerable company of angels and saints who shout out the praises of our God in heaven.

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" (Heb. 12:22,23).

—Pastor Mark Gurath



Citizens of Heaven Living on Earth

July 1, October 1, August 15, July 4—What do these dates have in common? They are all patriotic days for members of the CLC and our sister synods in the countries where they live.

July 1, 1867, the Dominion of Canada was established. October 1, 1960, Nigeria became an independent country. August 15, 1947, India gained its independence. And July 4, 1776, the United States of America was established.

We live in different countries; we enjoy varying degrees of freedom and prosperity; we all have different prob-

lems and concerns with the governments that are over us; but we all have one important thing in common—the Lord God is our King supreme to whom we joyfully bow in adoration and service. No matter where we live, no matter what race or nationality we are, every believer in Christ Jesus is a citizen of God's Kingdom.

As citizens of heaven, God has

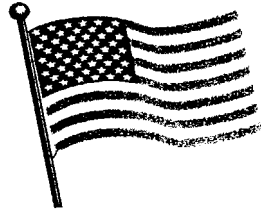
instructed us how to respond to the earthly nations in which we live.

Honor and Submission

Every government is ordained by God (see Romans 13:1). Therefore God tells us to submit to our government and to give it honor, not necessarily because it is deserving, but for His sake. The apostle Peter says, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. . . . Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

This honor and submission is not given only when we agree with the things our government is doing. We are to honor and submit to the authorities in all things unless that would involve disobeying God.

The believers Peter addressed were under the authority of a government that was persecuting Christians, yet Peter told them to be submissive and obedient. The government of India is controlled by Hindus who make things difficult for Christians. Yet God's people in that country are to honor and submit to their government. In the United States and Canada there is a growing antichristian segment in government and society. That does not give us the right to dishonor or disobey our government. Whether we agree with everything our government is doing or not, we can still honor our leaders as God-ordained leaders.



In countries of greater freedom, it is common to hear words spoken against rulers. We are thankful that we have proper channels through which we can voice our opinion about different issues, but that does not give us an excuse to speak evil of the rulers themselves.

The apostle Paul writes to Titus in chapter 3:1-2, "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of NO ONE, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men" (emphasis added).

We may or may not agree with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example. Nonetheless, the government has the responsibility for those decisions. Our responsibility is to support the government and to support our troops in those conflicts.

Pray

Rather than speak evil of our governments, we can also pray for them. It is God who controls the nations. Psalm 22:28 says, "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations." The best thing we can do for our country is to pray for it. God urges us, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Next time we are tempted to speak evil of our government or our individual leaders, let us stop and remember that they have been put in power by God and He maintains ultimate rule over them. Therefore let us honor them for God's sake, praying for them

and our country that the gospel may be freely spread in our own nations and around the world.

What great comfort, joy, and power we have by God's grace that we are citizens of heaven living on Earth!

—Pastor David Reim



Is this not the season for fruit?

"Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, 'Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.' And His disciples heard it" (Mk. 11:12-14). This scripture sure got me to thinking, as it did the disciples who saw it happen.

Jesus cursed the barren fig tree, and by the next day it had withered up—not only barren, but dead, says Matthew (21:19-20). That's scary, because we deduce that in some way that poor fig tree represents people, perhaps even me. Is this event not important for my life?

The event itself is not complicated. Coming from Bethany after a five-mile early morning walk, Jesus was hungry. At a distance He saw a fig tree that was getting an unusually early start at the spring growing season. Apparently so favored by sunlight, warmth of soil, moisture and nutrients, it was weeks ahead of schedule, "for it was not yet the season for figs."

In Palestine with its moderate winter climate, a fig tree could hang fruit

all year long. Over winter some of last fall's fruit might still be up there, and then the blossoms preceding the leaves could have already set some green nubbins. Since this was an unusually precocious tree, glossy with new leaves—it certainly ought to have some fruit somewhere among the foliage. What else is a fruit tree good for but its primary function of reproducing? This one, however, was deceptive; its superior appearance—a sham in its flashy vigor. Jesus found it to be a palpable fraud, a wayward tree gone wild, an extravagant weed!

So Jesus cursed it. It withered in a day.

And we look for a meaning to apply to ourselves.

Strong Messages

We are given at least two strong messages here—in addition to the main truth our Savior made to His disciples the next day, that their ministry needed to be totally dependent upon God. First, a powerful sidelight is cast on the Scriptural truth about human nature: the barren fig tree is a picture of the human soul as it is in its inborn genetic qualities—unfruitful toward God and a life of no earthly good for other humans, either. There it stood, as

wayward and independent as any glossy sinner, succulent from foot to crown, flashy, precociously attractive, good-looking and well-built.

Let us beware of admiring human idols for their exterior attractiveness; many entertainment stars and spectacular sports heroes are all too much like that worthless fig tree—a lot of impressive glitter is displayed with an exorbitant lifestyle—but what comes from them that can be called God-pleasing? A life or a creature that gains fame merely by reason of beautiful cellular growth—seldom bears fruit for godliness. Too often the flashiness disguises an inner deadness of soul and it even poisons adoring fans. We see such spiritually barren frauds everywhere.

There is a second point. That fig tree looks as familiar as if we had seen it in our own back yards. You and I have some barrenness to repent of, too. Though our gracious and saving God has salvaged us from the fate of being entirely deadwood, each of us has a withered branch or two that needs to be pruned away. Unfruitful days and unfruitful pursuits are still problems for us in our daily living. And let's not say as an excuse, "But it's not the sea-

son for figs." God knows when to look for fruit in our lives!

When God enables, then His creation can produce for Him. There is no such thing as a season when a Christian is unable to serve God fruit, fully ripe or not. None of God's children will be content to stand idly in the warmth of God's love, comfortably rooted in the deep soil of Biblical heritage, but then let the Savior pass by, hungry for our support in His saving work. No Christian—child, teenager, or adult—is too immature to produce what Jesus is looking for, and we know it.

The Christian takes this to heart and turns to Jesus with the confession: "Lord, forgive me for not responding to You as I could have when You came to me, looking for the fruits of righteousness. Bless me today again, please, with Your favor, so that I bear fruit for You—for You, my Lord Jesus.

Accept the gift which Thou requirest,
My heart and soul, O gracious God,
The first fruits Thou so much desirest,
For which Thy Son paid with His blood.
To Thee I willingly assign
My heart, dear Lord, for it is Thine. Amen."
(TLH 404:3)

—Paul R. Koch



**Women's Group,
Gethsemane
Lutheran Church,
Spokane Valley,
Washington**

Studies In Colossians

“In (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3)

Chapter 1:24-29

Suffering For Christ —A Badge of Honor

Everybody loves a good mystery. God loves to reveal the greatest mystery. He reveals His mystery to sinners through the preaching of His Word.

St. Paul counted it his highest privilege to reveal to one and all "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations." This mystery is no puzzling enigma, for it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Paul was entrusted by God to tell "the big secret": eternal glory in heaven for all who believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior of all.

Yet the commission to unfold "the glorious riches of this mystery" involves our sacrificial service. Hardship and trial will invariably accompany our work of spreading the gospel. Satan, world, and flesh do not want "the mystery" revealed, and will do everything in their power to make life difficult for those who serve Christ. As a prisoner under house arrest in Rome, Paul knew this firsthand.

Paul speaks of this suffering, when in verse 24 he says: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." Christ's afflictions are "lacking" only in the sense that the Savior was not the only one who must endure the world's hatred and scorn.

All the saints, to greater or lesser degree, suffer for the sake of the gospel. "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (Jn. 15:18). Paul is certainly not claiming that Christ's redemptive work lacks completeness, for he and the other inspired apostles testify again and again to the full atonement Jesus made for the sins of the entire world. Jesus declared from His cross, "It is finished," and so it is!

Growing Weary?

Moreover, the apostle does not lament his suffering for Christ and for the benefit of the Church. Like the apostles before him, Paul was happy to be counted worthy to suffer for the name that is above every name. There is no greater badge of honor you and I can wear than that of enduring hardship for Christ. Let us gladly wear that badge!

But perhaps the Colossians were growing tired of wearing their badge. Since false teachers were attempting to lure them away from God's revealed Truth, Paul seeks to bolster their faith. His stated purpose is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Since our perfection in sanctification will not be reached on this side of eternity, we will wage bat-

tle against our sinful flesh right up to the time we leave this world. And so Paul considers it his God-given duty to lead those he serves toward perfection. Motivated by Christ's love for us, we strive for spiritual maturity, which includes a willingness to suffer for Christ's sake. Paul calls upon all the saints to join the battle and experience the joy of sacrificial service.

Finally, Paul makes it clear that the

very strength and energy to labor for Christ comes from Christ. "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Truly Jesus is our all-sufficient God and Savior. He not only paid the full price for all sin but also provides all needed power to serve Him faithfully and joyfully.

—*Pastor Michael Wilke*



The Discourses of Christ

Christ, the Bread of Life —John 6:30-40
Part Two

Jesus: the True Bread from Heaven

It is simply human nature to question and doubt and seek confirmation. Amazing as it might seem, we call our Savior into question in the same way.

Jesus had just fed thousands of people a miraculous meal the day before this discourse, and yet they asked for a sign! It was as if the people were saying, "Yes, that was great, but what have you done for me lately? What will you do for me tomorrow? What's in it for me to believe in you?"

The Jews referenced the giving of manna for forty years in the wilderness—a bread which the children of Israel grew to loathe. They wanted to know whether Jesus could do something equally wonderful for them. His reply made it clear that what He offered them was infinitely superior to miraculous manna in the wilderness.

Jesus made it clear that He was the bread of heaven: "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (Jn. 6:32-33).

To be given bread from heaven that "gives life"—now that catches the interest! The immediate reply from Jesus' audience was "Lord, give us this bread always" (v. 34). But they still did not understand!

How well do we understand the wonder which Jesus brings into our lives? As we face the struggles of daily life with all its demands and pressures, don't we also find ourselves thinking a lot more about what Jesus could do to fix things for us, if only He would work some sign, some miracle in our life? We know He cares. We know He

can! But is that the most we want from Jesus? May that not be the case!

What Jesus offers us in essential spiritual nutrition is something so much more wonderful. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst." There is no need for any other spiritual nourishment! When the Lord provides for our souls, He provides all that we need! May we never lose sight of the greater good which Jesus supplies.

Fulfilling the Father's Will

The Lord came down from heaven not to fulfill our earthly whims, or even to fulfill a personal agenda or ambition of His own. He came down to Earth to fulfill the will of His heavenly Father. "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (v. 40). This is the greatest wonder, the greater good which Jesus provides. It is found in Him, the Son of God. We see Him by faith, a faith that comes to us by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

That is how we take this spiritual food and consume it; it nourishes our soul and

brings us life. The life which the Bread of Life brings us is eternal life. Having received this Bread of Life in the hearing of the gospel, we are assured that we shall live forever. This Bread contains the promise of resurrection!

To make sure that we comprehend this wonderful promise, Jesus states this "will of the Father" twice in these two verses. In verse 39 we read that it is the Father's will that nothing be lost but rather be raised on the last day. God would not have us die because of sin. So He sent Jesus that the truth of resurrection be established. Jesus came down to Earth to bleed and die for us on account of our sin. And the third day He rose again!

This is the Bread of LIFE! In Him we have a sure and certain hope of resurrection. Those who believe in Jesus receive the Bread of Life and possess everlasting life, and Jesus WILL raise them up on the Last Day. He will not lose one whom the Father has given Him. This is an absolute assurance for us of life and salvation.

In joyous faith and true understanding we echo the words spoken that day: "LORD, GIVE US THIS BREAD ALWAYS!"

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels*



SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

Fifth in a series

**"God has heard you;
Now come hear God."**

When we consider that human language is a wonderful gift from God, it

grieves us to hear it used in so many ungodly ways.

James puts it this way: "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity ... it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessings and cursing ... " (Jms. 3:6-10). Also, of the many evils that proceed out of the human heart, Jesus includes "false witness (and) blasphemy," which are part of mankind's evil communication (Mt. 15:19).

The first part of the church sign certainly includes everything evil that comes out of man's mouth. "God has heard you." God is omniscient (all-knowing) and there is nowhere a person can hide to escape God's all-discerning eyes and ears. In fact, God knows our thoughts even before they spill out of our mouths. These truths should cause us to think twice about what we say, whether in public or in private, whether women and children are present or not, and no matter how angry or frustrated we may be.

The statement, "God has heard you," also includes the good words that proceed out of our mouths. But here we must make a distinction between believers and unbelievers.

Some years ago a Baptist preacher in Dallas stated that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. This caused quite an uproar in the religious community. If we're talking about God's omniscience, He of course hears everything. But in the sense of having a prayer received or accepted by God, we have to agree with the Baptist preacher that an unbeliever—anyone who does not accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior—cannot properly pray to the true and only God. For "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb.

11:6). And Jesus said, "Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (Jn. 16:23).

Faith Comes By Hearing ...

Of course, "in My name" means more than simply tacking the words "in Jesus' name" at the end of a prayer. It means that we pray in connection with Jesus' name, that is, in accord with who He is and what He has done, and in keeping with everything He has taught us and everything He stands for. Thus, only a true Christian can pray in Jesus' name.

Even Christians sometimes err and do not pray in Jesus' name, for they ask for things they know they shouldn't have. All the more reason for us to continue to study God's Word—as the church sign says, "Now come hear God"—so that our prayers and all our words will be pleasing to Him. Then we don't have to worry about using flowery language or even correct grammar, for the Holy Spirit "also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26).

But the main reason to hear God is this: "Faith comes by hearing, and



hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 8:17). Throughout history there have been those who insisted that the Holy Spirit comes upon people without means (immediately). While we do not claim that God cannot or has never come upon a person in this way, we are directed to look "to the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). Peter, after he related the wonderful experience of seeing Jesus' transfiguration, nevertheless pointed his readers and hearers to the Word. "We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19).

So we can never stress too much—to those already in the church and to

those we are trying to reach—the necessity of the faithful use of the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacraments!

Many a one-time Christian has convinced himself that he can continue in the faith without hearing or studying the Word, only to realize one day that he no longer believes what he was once taught; or worse, only to wake up one day in hell.

May we continue, with the Lord's help, to stress the Word as the only source and norm of Christian doctrine and life.

—Gene Rutz

(Editor's note: *Due to space limitations, this fine series has been on hold for a few months. We resume it now. The articles are revised versions of articles that previously appeared in another periodical.*)



CROSS PURPOSES



The Conflict of a Christian Citizen

Independence day evokes a great deal of patriotism in our nation. As Christians we also appreciate the freedoms and other blessings that the gracious God in heaven has showered upon this nation. Yet we cannot help but be in conflict with our celebration as we see how the freedoms that are celebrated have also become a cover for every sort of evil and perversion. While we cannot impose our theology, much less Biblical morality, on the world or our nation any more than we would want any other religious group to impose theirs on us, the reality is

that in the name of freedom and legal sanction we are witnesses to the kind of carryings on that are described in Scripture in Genesis 6: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Disrespect for marriage (both by living in as well as by divorce), the killing of the unborn (abortion), homosexuality (same sex 'marriage?') are all things as old as sin, but today they even enjoy legal sanction as well as blessing from some within the church. As



Christians we dare make no claim to perfection, but acknowledge that we are sinners before God. But God forbid that we should pursue legal sanction for that which we do that is evil and an affront to the holy God! God forbid that we should use freedom as an excuse to do publicly or privately what offends our neighbor and blasphemes the Lord, our Creator and Redeemer.

So what shall we as Christians living in this evil world do about the deterioration of our society? Being a blessing to this society—and caring about this nation in which we live until the Lord calls us—begins with personal self-examination. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8ff). We begin first by going to the foot of the cross as penitents to make confession of our sins. There we will plead for the Father's forgiveness for the sake of Jesus whose merit and blood has atoned for sin.

Standards—And the Gospel

The standard of sin, of right and wrong, in our own life or in the world, is not a personal idea of morality. The standard is God's Word. In terms of right and wrong, the Lord speaks in absolutes. It is called the Ten Commandments. There is nothing gray about the Decalogue.

But neither can we impose our standards on society. Our weapons are not carnal. Our weapon against evil is the Word. Therefore, on the basis of the Word of God we must be ready to call sin sin! Certain evils may be widely practiced, vigorously defended, and even receive legal sanction. But we will not approve them, much less practice that which is contrary to the express will of God. We can exercise our rights as citizens, within the law, to seek to change those things which are offensive to what is good and right. The witness of our life will be a reflection of whose we are—either the Lord's or the devil's. We can pray the Lord to change hearts and minds.

But beyond that, there is much we can do to fulfill the mission our Lord has given us—and that is to preach the Word! We must be unequivocal in our condemnation of sin. The Church cannot cease to preach the law for fear of offending those who hate the law. But even the law will not change hearts. Only the gospel can do that. We will preach the gospel so that those who are troubled by their sin can find peace of heart in Christ Jesus the Savior. We will preach the gospel with the prayer that the Lord will touch hearts to turn from sin to Him. We will proclaim Christ with the attitude that none is so comfortable that he does not need the gospel, and that none is so evil that he cannot be won by the gospel. We will reflect the heart of Jesus who rejoices over one sinner that repents. We will preach the gospel!

As we live our life in conflict with the world, we will keep our eye firmly focused on heaven. The tribulations and conflicts of this present existence do not begin to compare with the glory

and peace of heaven. "Heaven is my home" is more than a song we sing. It is the desire of the heart, and the ultimate promised relief that comes to all the weary and heavy-laden who in faith

confess Christ Jesus as Savior. Heaven is where we shall be with God in eternal cessation of all conflict!

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



FROM A PASTOR'S DESK—

WE NEED TO TEACH MUCH MORE THAN MORALITY

Gang violence in Los Angeles, drug deals in South Florida, reckless endangerment of high school students through hazing in Chicago—these problems seem so distant from southern Minnesota. However, when we read headlines about school shootings in northern Minnesota and homecoming riots right here in Mankato, we can begin to understand why people all over our country are calling upon schools to emphasize the teachings of morality once again. It is important, after all, for children growing up in America to know the difference between right and wrong! We must have law-abiding citizens!

While every child should be instructed regarding the difference between right and wrong, we Christians realize that our goal must include more than mere instruction in morality. Young men and young women may well be moral and still lack saving faith. Children may grow up to become good and useful citizens and still lose their immortal souls. Since Jesus shed His blood for every human being (cf. 1 John 2:2), and God wants all people to know that truth and gain eternal salvation (cf. 1 Timothy

2:3-4), let us all bear in mind that we need to teach much more than morality! We need to teach our children the gospel of Jesus Christ, from which will flow a truly God-pleasing morality.

Let us remember the words of the apostle, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). Let us also remember the words of Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6). Our goal must not be to only teach our children the difference between right and wrong but to lead them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

We need, first of all, to teach our children about God's law. They need to know what is right and wrong in God's eyes. This, of course, involves teaching our children the Ten Commandments. Children must know that it is wrong to misuse God's name, to disobey their parents, to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, or to lie. Our children need to know that when they break one of God's laws they have sinned and need to confess their sins to God. This means taking the time to sit down with them when they break God's law and to explain why their words or actions

were wrong. It means helping them recognize that by saying or doing these wrong things, they have not only offended another human being, but they have sinned against their God. Such sins deserve God's punishment and, therefore, children need to confess their sins before God.

After leading our children to understand the content and purpose of God's law, it is absolutely essential, secondly, that we help them understand that their heavenly Father loves them in spite of their sins and has forgiven them their sins through the work of Jesus Christ. When children are led to understand their sin and see their need for God's forgiveness, Jesus' work becomes very personal. Jesus lived His life perfectly, because they did not. They receive His perfection by faith. Jesus died on the cross to remove their sins. When they confess their sins, God removes them completely because of Jesus. What joy there is for our children and for us as we humbly kneel before our Savior God, confess our sins, and rejoice in His forgiving love! By faith we become His children and are given the certain gift of eternal life.

The fact that we are God's dear children and heirs of eternal life becomes the motivation for our children to live an outwardly moral life before God. Through such a life we thank, praise, and please our God, who loved us so much that He gave up His Son for us. When our children honor their parents and superiors, are helpful and friendly to others, honor God's gift of sexuality, respect the property of others, and are honest and upright—all out of love for their Savior God—we can rejoice that the Holy Spirit has achieved something truly right and good in God's eyes! Our children will then also be honest and good citizens, thus bringing blessing to our society in this world. At the same time, our children can look forward with confidence to a secure future in heaven.

Here then is the goal of all Christian parents, whether in their home or with the help of the Christian Day School—to teach a morality that flows from hearts rejoicing in the gospel of Jesus Christ!

—Pastor Paul D. Nolting

(Taken from the Immanuel Home Messenger, Newsletter of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota)



**Women's Group,
Grace Lutheran Church,
Live Oak, Florida**

A Response to the WELS Position on Church Fellowship

From the Editor:

On these pages in recent months have appeared some comments on goings on in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) prior to its synod Convention this summer. The remarks gave a perspective on the "Benke matter"—the participation of Dr. David Benke, an LCMS District President, in the unionistic, syncretistic Yankee Stadium prayer service following 9/11—as well as on that synod's election of a new synod President.

We opine that readers of the Lutheran Spokesman will find both interesting and instructive the doctrinal perspective offered below.

We trust that this writing—first written by the author for his own congregation—is self-explanatory. It offers what might be called "the CLC position" over against comments by a representative of WELS on that synod's views of the Benke case within the LCMS.

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) continues to publicly declare that there is no difference between itself and the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) on the doctrine of fellowship, especially the termination of fellowship with false teachers or heterodox church bodies. We disagree, on the following basis.

One of the key words in the WELS discussion of termination of fellowship with false teachers or heterodox church bodies is the word "persistence." It is a word that also appears in the oft-referenced but unadopted "Joint Statement" prepared by delegations of the CLC, the WELS, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) in 1990. With hindsight the CLC should have followed its first instinct and rejected the use of the word "persistent," given its history and use in the synodical controversy. The use of the word should have been rejected because it introduced an element of confusion.

The word was used to validate the WELS failure to act in the period up to 1961. When the WELS finally applied Romans 16:17-18 to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), it

did so for the wrong reason that an "impasse" had been reached due to the LCMS's persistence in its errors. To demonstrate that determining "persistence" in error did indeed play a decisive part in the WELS inaction over against the LCMS, we offer the following evidence by the manner in which the word is still being used. The evidence clearly delineates the difference that still exists between the CLC and the WELS. It also documents the fact that lack of a clear statement rejecting false statements of the past leaves it an open question as to what the position of the WELS is on the matter of termination of fellowship with heterodox church bodies.

In the Fall 2003 issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly (WLQ)*, (pp. 308-310) one finds an LCMS press release announcing the reinstatement of LCMS district president David Benke. LC-MS vice-president Wallace Schulz had suspended Benke for his unionistic participation in the Yankee Stadium prayer service after September 11. An appeal panel subsequently reinstated Benke.

In light of the reinstatement, John

Brug of the WELS comments, "What remains to be seen is what Schulz and confessional Lutherans in the LCMS who have supported his action [i.e. of suspending Benke —DF] will do if the LCMS persists in defending a position on church fellowship which Schulz has correctly declared to be unscriptural."

Schulz recognizes that Benke's participation in the unionistic prayer service was contrary to Scripture. It is not like unionism has just recently reared its head in the LCMS. Why would the WELS suggest that "persistence" has any place in determining the action that should follow upon ascertaining of false doctrine and practice? Brug does not suggest that the LCMS has erred in weakness or ignorantly, or that it is even concerned about the unionism and syncretism in its midst. The LCMS has in fact most crassly validated its descent into unionism. How long must a church body "persist" in its error before the WELS will suggest that the time has come to avoid? When will

confessional Lutherans refrain from puzzling over what God wants them to do with errorists?

The LCMS will do what it chooses to do. The WELS continues to evaluate errorists by the persistence factor. The WELS is waiting to see what the "confessional Lutherans" in the LCMS will do "if the LCMS persists in defending a position on church fellowship" that is recognized as unscriptural. The CLC, on the other hand, concludes that the conservatives have a responsibility to do without further delay what Scripture directs, namely, avoid the church body that harbors men whom they acknowledge to be false teachers.

The WELS should desist from the false assertion that there is no difference between the CLC and themselves on this point. The difference between the CLC and the WELS could hardly be any clearer!

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



Luther on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism—

“It is God Who Acts...”

The Bible records how Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, was afflicted with leprosy and came to Elisha the prophet to be healed. Naaman was angry at the prophet's instructions for healing—to go and wash in the Jordan seven times. What could washing with water possibly do toward curing leprosy?

Yet at the urging of his servants, Naaman did as the prophet had directed, and he was cleansed. Naaman

praised the God of Israel, for he understood that it was not the water of the Jordan nor the act of washing but the power of God that had healed him.

Christian Baptism is likewise the simplest of acts. Whenever we see it done we cannot but marvel that a thing that has such power and meaning should be so humble in appearance.

Baptism employs the most common of substances: water—not some rare or expensive substance, such as fine wine

475th Anniversary of Luther's Small
and Large Catechisms
(1529-2004)

What Luther said:

"The deplorable destitution which I recently observed, during a visitation of the churches has impelled and constrained me to prepare this Catechism or Christian Doctrine in such a small and simple form...I entreat you all, for God's sake, my dear brethren who are pastors and preachers, to devote yourselves heartily to your office and have pity upon the people who are committed to your charge. Help us to inculcate the Catechism upon them, especially upon the young..."

or expensive perfume; not water from some exotic source like the Jordan River.

The baptismal formula is short, consisting of only a few words—not some long speech that could be learned and mastered only by those with talent and skill for such things.

The baptismal rite is simple, consisting of the application of water—not some elaborate or difficult ritual.

Because of these things, Baptism is often despised. The unbelieving, of course, reject it entirely as powerless and of no importance. But even many of those who make use of Baptism teach it as only an ordinance of God, denying its power. Many who bring their children to be baptized look upon the rite as only a nice traditional ceremony and do not see its significance for the child.

"Not just plain water"

Luther's simple explanation of Baptism in the *Small Catechism* dispels these objections and misconceptions with a few words: "Baptism is

Baptism

not just plain water. It is water used by God's command and connected with God's word."

Baptism is important because Christ Himself commanded it. It has power because His Word is connected to it.

The Catechism teaches that the very simplicity of baptism shows that it is a means that God has given by which He acts and bestows gifts of His grace. The person who receives baptism does nothing, only believes. The one who performs the baptism does something so simple and easy that a child could do it.

It is God who acts, as Luther explains in the *Large Catechism*, "To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by man but by God Himself. Although Baptism is indeed performed by human hands, yet it is truly God's own action. From this everyone can himself easily draw the obvious conclusion that it is a much greater work than that of any human being."

What are the gifts of grace that God gives through Baptism? "Baptism works the forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe." Christ our Lord promises this when He says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Paul teaches this when he calls Baptism "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

Baptism is humble in appearance, but its humble appearance leads us to look away from what we do, so that we may see what God does in Baptism.

—Pastor John Klatt

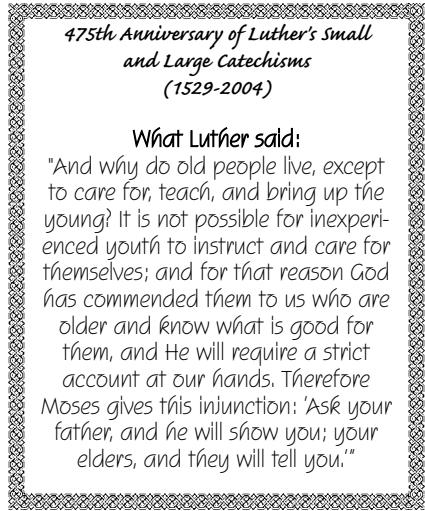
Satisfaction

"Had I been the partner of Eve, we'd be in Eden still!" are lyrics in the song "C'est moi!" from the musical Camelot. Setting aside the obvious arrogance of the words, they do bring up an interesting proposition. Had you or I been placed in God's garden, would we have found satisfaction there?

God had provided for each and every possible need that Adam and Eve could have encountered. Their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs were all thoroughly prepared for by the Creator.

So what happened? Adam and Eve desired more. They wished to "elevate" themselves above the position that God had provided for them to "become like God." This caused them to take or steal that which had been forbidden them.

This sin of our first parents is in us and with us all today. God calls each and every one of us to our various stations in life. Some are called to the public ministry, others to a variety of secular callings. Each of us finds our niche based on the talents and abilities



our gracious God has given us.

The trouble is that along with our calling, we take our sinful nature. Often this brings discontent or dissatisfaction with the position we find ourselves in. More often than not we find ourselves comparing not only our work load but benefits, rewards, remunerations, and so forth. When we make these comparisons we are sure to find differences, often not in our favor. This

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, nor get them in a dishonest way; but we should help him to improve and protect his property and way of making a living.

+++++++

Large Catechism Comment:

"A person who willfully ignores this commandment may indeed get by with it and evade the hangman, but God's wrath and punishment he will not escape. Though he may long carry on in his insolent, arrogant course, yet he will remain the tramp and bum that he is, and to top it off he will suffer all kinds of trouble and misfortune."

can bring discontent and will usually lead to an attempt to solve the inequity (as we see it), and sometimes in ways that are definitely not God-pleasing.

Have you ever shirked your duty because others weren't doing their "fair share"? That was stealing from the Lord as well as from your employer. This "goldbricking" is a serious problem with the young and old alike. When we start to feel that the portion of work we have to do may not be fair, we have started to lose sight of the purpose of our work. We work for the Lord, not as man-pleasers. The Lord commands us, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccl. 9:10); and also "When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you" (Ps. 128:2).

Robbing God?

Or do we find that we sometimes shut up our compassion for others by not finding opportunities to share? "I worked hard to get mine, let them work to get theirs." That's stealing! First of all, "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth . . ." (Deut. 8:18). Secondly, and equally important, the Lord has instructed us to work with our hands that which is good "that (we) may have something to give to him who has need" (Eph. 4:28). Even our enemies should have the privilege of sharing what we have. "Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink" (Rom. 12:20). We can't be satisfied with just leaving our neighbor be when we could be actively seeking ways to help him improve his station in life.

As Dr. Martin Luther sums up this commandment in his *Large Catechism*:

"Enough has been said on the definition of 'stealing.' The definition must not be too narrow. It must be applied to all our dealings with our neighbors . . . It forbids any conceivable wrong to our neighbor in depriving him of any part of his possessions or interfering with his enjoyment of them . . . it commands that we add to his possessions and advance his interests; and we are to relieve him in want by help and advice, whether he be friend or foe."

The Lord gives us our possessions to care for our family and neighbors. We should be taking care of our debts and using our time and talents wisely. But what does the Lord himself expect back from us? First and foremost, He would have us give Him our hearts and lives. Then we have the proper perspective on what really belongs to whom. All of our good and perfect gifts come down from Him. When our offerings of time and talent flow from a cheerful and thankful heart, they can't be anything but generous!

It's when we think of things as our own that our giving becomes niggardly. And that is nothing short of robbing our God! "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings" (Mal. 3:8).

Could you have been satisfied in the Garden of Eden? I know here in this life the Lord has thoroughly prepared for my physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs, and yet I still seem to long for more. Thank God He has given us more—all this life has to offer and heaven too! No wonder all eyes look expectantly to our God! He is able to satisfy the desire of every living thing!

—Teacher David W. Bernthal

Announcements

REQUEST FOR NOMINATIONS

The Board of Regents for Immanuel Lutheran College invites voting members of CLC congregations to nominate an individual or individuals to fill the vacancy on the ILC Faculty created by the retirement of Professor David Lau at the end of the 2004-2005 school year.

This position will involve teaching responsibilities primarily in the following areas: Systematic Theology (Dogmatics; Comparative Theology) and Practical Theology (Pastoral Theology, Missiology, Homiletics) in the Seminary; and a religion course in both the High School and College departments.

Those placing nominations are encouraged to include information regarding their nominee's educational background and teaching and/or professional experience. They should also indicate how their nominee(s) might help our school in the area of administration, or/and supervising extracurricular activities, such as sports, music, theater, etc.

The deadline for E-mail nominations is midnight, July 18, 2004; nominations by letter must also be postmarked by July 18th. All nominations must be sent to

Tom Beekman
3087 Skyhawk Dr.
Eau Claire, WI 54703
E-Mail: thomas.beekman@dot.state.wi.us

Anniversary

Redemption Lutheran Church in Lynnwood, Washington, will be celebrating 20 years of God's grace in sustaining its Christian Day

School. On Sunday, August 8, 2004, there will be a special celebration service followed by a fellowship picnic at Lynndale Park. We would like to invite our fellow Christians to share in our grateful praises to our gracious God. For more information please call Pastor John Hein at 425-775-2145 or email him at redemption@clclutheran.com.

—Pastor John Hein



Missionary Koenig writes: "This is the group in worship in Lome, Togo under Pastor Kossi. We have now provided roofing of zinc metal sheetings. They call themselves Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne de Confession."