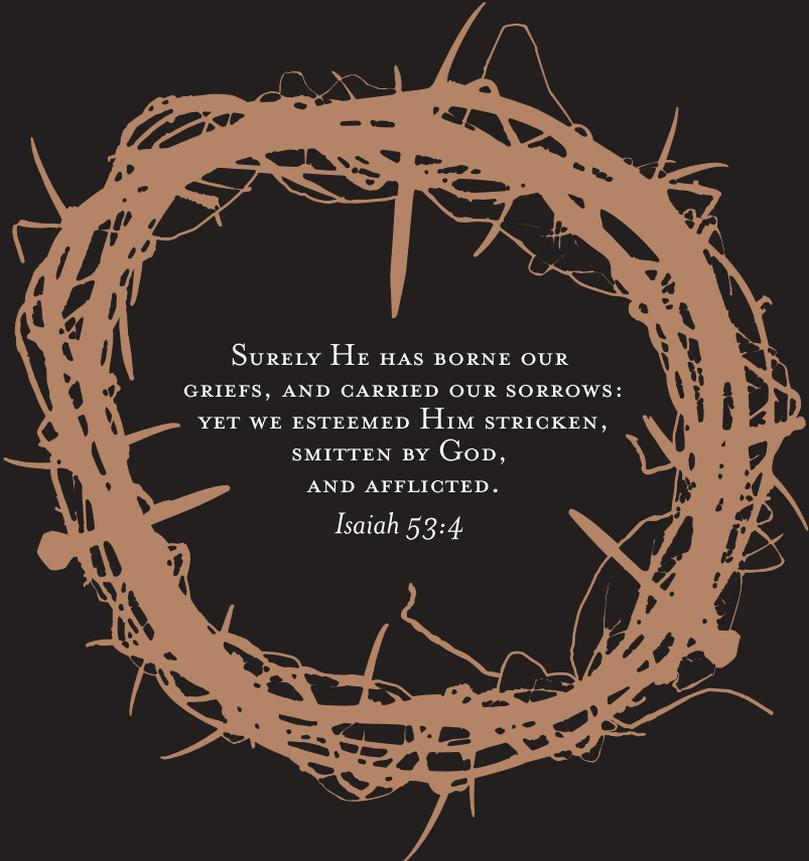


Lutheran spokesman



SURELY HE HAS BORNE OUR
GRIEFS, AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS:
YET WE ESTEEMED HIM STRICKEN,
SMITTEN BY GOD,
AND AFFLICTED.

Isaiah 53:4

march 2003 vol. 45 no. 9

The BEST to the WORST

The Worst

Imagine for yourself the worst smell that has ever entered your nose. Was it rotting, decaying flesh? Perhaps it was the rancid odor from a garbage bin that had been baking in the sun for days. Now imagine for yourself the worst sight that has been imprinted on your mind. I would imagine not too many of us have witnessed the carnage left behind on the battlefields of war. Could that be the worst sight imaginable? Perhaps the worst sight and smell combined is that of a human body left to rot and decay.

As graphic as the pictures are which you have formed in your mind, and as horrid as the smells are that you have been recalling for yourself, they simply don't compare to the ugly, rotting stench that escapes from the sinful, human heart. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to the condition of man's heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things,

and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

Just how bad are we human beings in our natural, sinful condition? We are so bad that even we Christians can't fully fathom how horrible we really are. If our natural, sinful heart were exposed for our eyes to see in all its horror, even the strongest among us would cringe and run for cover. At no time can we fully understand just how bad we sinners are. We surely wouldn't want to look into the bottomless pit of evil which is our desperately wicked heart. We just can't know how horrible we are.

During this Lenten season we come face to face with our sins as we hear the passion history of Jesus of Nazareth, and how the stinking, rotting mass of the sin of the world was placed on His shoulders as He endured the cross. As we go back to the cross in spirit, we see that our sins are what

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LENT

nailed Him there. So often we hear Isaiah remind us, "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (Is. 53:4).

Our hearts produce grief and shame: He bore it. Our hearts produce sorrow and pain: He carried it. We deserved to be stricken, smitten by God and afflicted: He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted.

Did we deserve to have our place on the cross taken for us? Absolutely not. In fact, we are not just undeserving of God's gracious treatment, but we deserve to be punished for our sins. We deserve to fear the day of our death with terrible dread, knowing that on the other side of death waits the eternal darkness of hell—the place where God is not.

The Best

But to the Worst, God gives the

Best! God's sending His own Son to endure the punishment meant for us was the height of all grace. He didn't hold anything back, because He doesn't have anyone or anything that is better. There is no person or thing on Earth or in heaven that is better than the gift which God gave us in His Son. He gave the Best to the Worst.

And His motivation? It is all about grace. Through Christ God gives peace to the heart which should be left racked with guilt. He gives hope to the heart which should look forward only to see the black hole of eternal torture pulling it in.

He laid down His Son for us all—simply because He wanted to! He sent the Best for the Worst because He loves mankind, even though our evil hearts are the Worst. God loves the sinner so dearly that He had to shower His grace upon us. His love moved Him to hold nothing back, giving the Best. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

Thank God that He gave the Best to the Worst.

—Pastor Mark Gurath

Where Sin Abounds, Grace Abounds More

In the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, we confess what we as Christians wish we did not have to confess. Even in spite of our best intentions—as Paul recognized in Romans 7—we sin. Thus in the petition we confess, "For we (I) daily sin much and

indeed deserve nothing but punishment." On one hand, faith moves us to see ourselves as recipients of the abundant grace and love that the Lord God had shown to Israel. On the other hand, honesty compels us to see our oftentimes thankless reaction to His love as excru-

ciatingly similar to that of Israel.

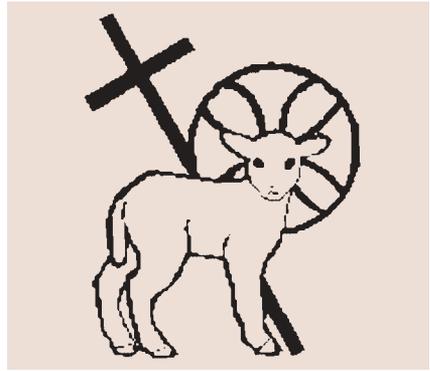
In the beautiful 43rd chapter of Isaiah, we find these expressions of the Lord directed toward Israel: "I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name: Thou art mine" (v. 1). "I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior" (v. 3). "Fear not, for I am with thee" (v. 5). "Thus saith the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (v. 14). "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King" (v. 15). "This people I have formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise" (v. 21).

Surely Israel had good reason to worship the Lord, to trust in Him alone, and to walk in His ways. But what do we read? "But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel" (v. 22). Israel's sacrifices were not sincere. They went through the motions without the involvement of the heart. The sacrifices the Lord required were not burdensome, in that such offerings were attended by divine blessing. Yet Israel saw its worship activity as a burden. It had sinned against the Lord!

It is against this backdrop that the Lord says, "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities" (v. 24). Sin deserves retribution. Already in the Garden of Eden the Father alerted Adam and Eve to the reality that sin brings with it consequence.

God Worked Deliverance!

So what is our Lenten meditation all about? It is about our sin and God's grace! Both the integrity and the justice of the Father—Who pronounced judgment upon sin and the sinner—demanded that He exercise punishment



against the same. Yet purely out of grace and mercy, without merit or worthiness in the sinner, the Father developed in eternity and carried out in time a plan that confirmed His own faithfulness and integrity.

As well, it worked the deliverance of the sinner. God sent His Servant Jesus Christ. He laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. Surely we cannot be of such hard heart that we are not overwhelmed by what our sins cost the Servant of God—especially when we hear Him say, "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities" (v. 22). It was not Israel, it is not we, who are burdened with the ultimate consequence of our sin, but the God of Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ!

For the penitent sinner there is comfort—comfort with double emphasis, "I, even I (the Lord says), am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (25). All our sins are recorded in the mind of the omniscient God Who knows, sees, and hears all. But all our sins recorded in the mind of God are as certainly blotted out, erased, removed as though they never were. God—"for mine own sake," that is, out of mercy and grace—blots out our sin.

How powerful is the work of Christ and how thoroughly cleansing the blood of the Lord Jesus that the Father does not remember our sins! Ours is not a forgetful God, but a merciful God! Christ being risen, His blood daily speaks in our behalf!

Luther caught the flavor of God's love when he wrote in hymn 387 [*The Lutheran Hymnal*]:

(God) spoke to His beloved Son:
'Tis time to have compassion.
Then go, bright Jewel of My crown,
And bring to man salvation . . .

And Jesus responds:

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*

From the Chapel Talks file of Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch—

"What if we had no word from God?"

This past Sunday was rather typical of most Sundays around here: we prepared ourselves for attending church, and we got to church.

Have you noticed that the whole hour is organized around the Bible? Hymns that reflect and respond to Bible truths; prayers and Scripture readings; and what seems to be the highlight of the service—our pastor presenting some of the main thoughts of a chosen section of Scripture.

You know what impresses newcomers to our church? That we depend a lot on the Bible for the way we worship! We stress the Bible from one end to the other of the service, as also in our bulletin and in our Bible Class.

Why do we devote our attention to God's Word as the dominant format and content of our Sunday worship? Because we want to demonstrate that our lives should (and do!) revolve

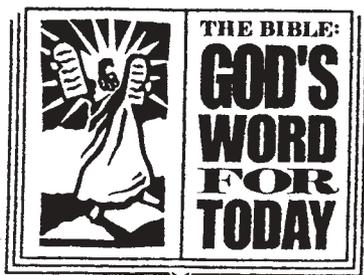
The Foe shall shed My precious blood,
Me of My life bereaving.
All this I suffer for thy good;
Be steadfast and believing.
Life shall from death the victory win,
My innocence shall bear thy sin;
So thou art blest forever.

From this we draw our comfort and our will to continue the daily battle against sin. Let us pray that our worship and our service to our Father this Lenten season—and until we enjoy the perfection of heaven—be genuine and sincere, with thanksgiving!

around God's things; so we start out our week by attending to what God has to say to us. That is remarkable in our day and age—not because we are any holier or more godly than others, for we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything (even as important and precious as the style of our church services) is merited by ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us capable servants of the New Testament—of His love in Christ Jesus.

To illustrate how nuclear the Bible is to God and to us, let us imagine for a few silly moments that there was no Bible—that it did not exist, that God never took it upon Himself to communicate Himself to earthlings but had decided to keep His counsels entirely to Himself.

Under such conditions, God had nothing to say to Adam and Eve after



Satan had done his dirty work in their hearts; for if God had a plan of saving their lost souls, they never heard of it. When Cain murdered Abel, God had nothing to say to him to point out his problem. And when the world got so morally rotten that God decided to cancel the project and send the Flood, there was no Noah preaching God's Word; and there were not eight souls saved in an ark to repopulate the face of the earth; and if a human race was somehow replanted, there was no Abraham, no divine assurances of reconciliation, no Moses, no prophets, no hope of a Messiah, no Mary and Joseph, and no Christmas!

If God had a Son, He would not be the fulfillment of any prior promise to anyone, for there had been no such sharing of God's purposes with mortals!

No message from God? Nothing to let mortals know what was on His mind? That's not God's way; that's the way of idiot idols such as the heathen have.

In contrast, God took great care to inform humanity of His thoughts, to share His feelings, His plans, and His procedures with the human race. In addition, He did not lay the responsibility on sinners to try to figure Him out as best they could from the stars, from astral spirits, or by crystal-gazing. God comes right out with it, sharing both His existence and His insides in a way that possesses clarity, accessibility, and is definitive about Himself. Here is the key whereby anyone can unlock the mysteries of God's heart and can get to know God's personality and can learn God's plans for all generations since Adam and Eve. *This is it* (the Bible!), relatively inexpensive, easily acquired, handy, durable, accessible as any magazine—in your mother tongue—so that no soul need be ignorant of God or His doings on planet Earth.

You have come to treasure it because Mom and Dad treated it respectfully, and you have been brought to love it also for the blessings it has brought to your heart and life.

Who is sufficient, capable, adequate for such things? Who among mortals could have contrived this revelation and have given it the place it deserved in your heart? We are not sufficient to have devised it ourselves; it is of God, who has shouldered the responsibility of creating and preserving His Word—



CLC Teachers Conference, Markesan, Wis. See p. 18

and has made it the center of our worship, for it is the center of our lives.

Thank God for the Bible; it is His irreplaceable gift to us.

Studies In Philippians

**"Rejoice in the Lord always.
Again I will say, rejoice!" (4:4)**

Chapter 3:12-16

Pressing Toward the Goal

The apostle Paul was a driven man. Every Biblical record that testifies of him reveals a man who endured every hardship to carry out his mission, one who possessed a vision of preaching the gospel in this life and also the vision of achieving his goal of everlasting life with Christ. But why, if this salvation was a gift of grace, was he so driven? Why live as if his salvation were earned?

He discusses that in this short section. His drive had *everything* to do with his faith—faith, not in his own merits, strengths, or qualities (which he counts as "*refuse*", cf. 3:8), but in the gracious call of his Lord Jesus, who called him out of darkness into light; out of death into life; out of ignorance into truth. And the truth Paul holds dear is that in Christ we are spiritually, morally, ethically complete, accepted by God, righteous in His eyes, in spite of the sinful weakness and shortcomings we often see in ourselves: "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*"

"Christ Jesus has laid hold of

me"—Paul could remember his stony-hearted and hateful past; then the Lord's appearance, his call, the baptism he received. Jesus had laid hold of Him, by grace; drew him out of the mire; claimed him for His own; redeemed him with His own precious and innocent body and life. All this, so that Paul could belong to Jesus—could serve Him in life, confess Him in death, and could finally "*attain to the resurrection of life.*"

It was this heartfelt knowledge—created by the gospel message—that filled Paul's heart and put him on the path that led him where it did (even into prison). He had been, in many ways, an exemplary citizen before his conversion. He had had every spiritual and moral advantage and virtue. This only increased after his conversion, for then he understood what love was and for love's sake served the Lord and the Church with astonishing vigor. But he gave little thought to that: "*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind (Jewishness; Phariseeism, self-righteousness, personal achievements, peo-*

ple's admiration and loyalty), *reaching forward to those things which are ahead* (like what?), *I press toward the goal.*"

Much is made in our day of "the Christian life." But so much of what is said leads one to concentrate on personal accomplishment, "growth," and "victory" over sin. Among believers there *will* be "growth" in sanctification; there *will* be a desire to conquer every sin; there will be accomplishments which are revealed when our Lord comes. But we remain in the flesh, with its perverse desire to exalt oneself. The true Christian spirit is relatively un-self-conscious, glorying no more in the production of a good work than an apple tree brags about its production of an apple. The goal is not the Christian life; the goal is Christ Himself. *"I press toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

The "upward call"—those things Paul is reaching forward to—is to be found *"in Christ,"* namely, living by faith in Him, repenting of every evil, and rejoicing in what Christ has done to save Paul and all others. This is the truth that fills, governs, and enriches

his life. This is a new life; it is a rich life; it is a life worth living. It is a life that blossoms forth out of Christ's own resurrection, His victory over death and all that brought death on. Paul lives in constant danger and trial, unafraid of either, eagerly pursuing what is yet to come: his own resurrection.

It is this grace-inspired hope that he shares with the Church, teaching them that this hope and joy is true maturity. Among Christians, the nit-picking, jealousy, and division that arise from self-righteousness must give way to a true love and unity in that common faith; redeemed sinners focused on being found faithful in Christ, awaiting the resurrection, even before death! This is "maturity"—a maturity that God eventually reveals to even the weak and impatient, if they persevere in hope.

That common faith and enduring hope create the Christ-centered "same mind" quality that the apostle time and again exhorts among the Philippians. May we, who by grace are in fact the children of God, be single-minded in the hope that belongs to such children of God in Christ.

—Pastor Peter Reim

(From the Editor: This article first appeared in the "Home Messenger," the newsletter of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota; in Part One the writer, Pastor Paul D. Nolting, spoke of "vocation" as a "calling" from God the Creator, as well as of the fact that the Biblical teaching of vocation rests on the providential care of our God. This second part concludes the article.)

A Biblical Perspective

VIEWING VOCATION

Part 2

These truths (that God is our Creator and Provider—ed.) free us from the false notion that somehow everything in our lives is up to us and

dependent upon our own efforts and determination. Such thinking can so easily lead to a life of self-centered preoccupation. The knowledge of God's providential care in our lives frees us to rejoice and be thankful for the blessings which flow into our lives from God's hands.

While some might object and suggest that this teaching seems to imply that we can simply do nothing and leave everything in God's hands, nothing could be further from the truth. The Biblical teaching of vocation recognizes the truth that God has entrusted to each of us many different abilities and has given all of us many different opportunities. Just as the servants in the parable of the Talents were expected to use those talents faithfully during their lord's absence (cf. Matthew 25:14-30), so God would have us work hard to use the abilities He has entrusted to us and so fulfill His will for our lives.

It is through faithful use of our God-given abilities that God brings about blessing in our lives, but even more importantly, the lives of others. Because of this, Martin Luther often stated that vocation was not simply a matter of the law—what God calls upon us to do, but rather a matter of the gospel—a manifestation of God's action, not our own. For Luther, vocation was not a burden placed upon us and something else at which to fail. Rather, vocation was a way to experience God's love and grace as He intertwines our lives for blessing! (cf. Gene Veith's *God at Work*, Crossway Books, pp. 23-24).

The Biblical concept of vocation is tied directly to love—God's love for us and our love for both God and our

neighbor. God instructs us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Matthew 22:37,39). Our vocations are the means through which we express our love for each other and for God.

As workers we produce a variety of useful products and services which bring blessing to the lives of others around us. We are dependent upon each other fulfilling our respective callings, so that our society will function smoothly, and we will all experience the blessings of peace and prosperity. *As fathers and mothers* we provide for our children not just the material things needed for their physical needs but also the love they need to develop emotionally and the religious example and instruction they need to develop spiritually. *As members of a Christian congregation*, we fulfill our calling by joining together in worship and praise of our Savior God. We support the work of Christian education and evangelical outreach. We offer our services to maintain buildings, but most importantly we stand side by side and encourage one another in the faith. *As members of our communities*, we take time and use our talents to invest in the greater good of our society.

Our God calls each of us into a variety of vocations, having equipped us for such service and sustaining us, and enabling us to be blessings while we experience His blessing in return.

The Biblical teaching of vocation brings honor to the simplest of tasks, for Jesus says, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Mt. 25:40). This teaching brings meaning to life, for by fulfilling our various vocational callings with faith-

fulness we are a salt and a light in this world to the glory of our Savior God (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). May our Lord be

with us both to encourage us in our individual callings and to bless us all through the same.

LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

“That We Might Have Hope” (Rom. 15:4)

Daniel Chapters 1-2

“Food Fit for a King”

"To the victor belongs the spoils" is a very fitting saying for the opening chapter of the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was indeed the victor. His campaign against Judah had been a complete success and he did spoil the land of Israel.

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar take away the golden articles from the temple and the wealth of the land; he also took away its future. The king ordered his servant to bring home the king's descendants and some of the children of the nobles—the handsome and intelligent, the future leaders of the land of Judah. These young men, it was hoped, could be taught the ways of the Babylonians and be incorporated into the service of the king.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among those sons of Judah. They had been blessed by the Lord with wisdom, great knowledge and quick understanding, as well as good looks. But most importantly, the Lord had given them a great faith to trust in Him above all else. This was first made evident by the fact that these young men were willing to submit to

heathen authority without compromising any moral ground.

The four young men (with their new Babylonian names, Belteshazzar [Daniel], Shadrach [Hananiah], Meshach [Mishael], and Abed-Nego [Azariah]) were placed in a three-year time of training so they might be able to serve the king. They were even given a portion of the king's own food and wine.

These "delicacies" were indeed food fit for a king. It was at this time that the Christian consciences of the young men had to draw a line. They were willing to live in a foreign land and serve a heathen king; they were even willing to be subjected to being trained and taught by these unbelievers and to use this knowledge to the best of their abilities—but they would not compromise their faith! According to Jewish law it was forbidden for Jews to eat 1) unclean animals, 2) animals that were strangled or with the blood still in them, 3) food that was sacrificed to idols.

Daniel and his companions decided in their hearts that they would not defile themselves in this way by par-

taking of the king's table.

What About Us . . . ?

What about us who live here in our modern-day Babylon? There is no doubt we live in a great nation where we enjoy wonderful blessings and freedoms given by God; yet there is plenty of room for compromise. When does compromising become caving in? Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh dish up all kinds of "delicacies" carefully prepared to our own detriment.

How many times do Christians give the "unclear sound of the trumpet" because their witness has been compromised by being politically correct, by a fear of causing waves, or by not wanting to "judge"?

As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and adults, we have the responsibility to pass on to our children not only the earthly knowledge which will aid them in this world but, more importantly, the wisdom that God imparts for the world to come. The church's mission, duty, and privilege is to proclaim the wonderful gospel message of a

Savior sent for all mankind. It is the mission of the individual Christian to be the best possible witness placed at God's disposal.

To be a proper and complete witness for Christ, we have a dual purpose—to point out error and to proclaim the truth. To do one without the other does not fulfill our calling.

"I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me . . ." (Ezek. 3:17)

This passage goes on to tell us that if we fail to warn the wicked or the righteous about their wicked behavior, God will require their blood at our hands. (Thanks be to God that even the sin of compromise is washed away in the blood of the Lamb.)

Also, we must never forget that as our one hand points out the error of one's ways, the other hand should point to the cross. It is only at the cross of Jesus that a broken and contrite heart finds true healing and forgiveness; ". . . the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7).

The tempting tidbits of the world



An amphitheater in a local park in Lynnwood (Seattle area), Wash. served as site of Mission Festival services for Redemption Lutheran Church, August 25, '02.

will always be offered. And what can one little bite hurt? Even the youngest among us can point to the Garden of Eden to remind us how our actions betray the intent of the heart.

Daniel and his companions were indeed blessed by God with wonderful gifts and a powerful faith. And so have

we. May the Holy Spirit give us the strength and courage they had—to stand up for all that the Scriptures teach.

"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103).

Now that's good eating!

—Teacher David Bernthal

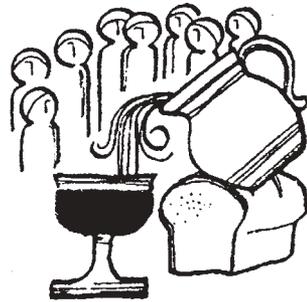
"CLOSE COMMUNION"

Or: "Who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper?"

First In A Series

This series is a revision of several bulletin inserts from 25 years ago. During the intervening years I have become convinced of at least six more things in connection with "Close Communion."

First—by the time it is a problem area in a congregation or denomination, it is usually too late to correct it without great upheaval. *Second*—it must be dealt with in instruction classes which prepare people to receive the Sacrament. *Third*—it is among the last things covered in detail and agreed to during instruction, and prior to acceptance into membership through Confirmation or Re-Affirmation—along with doctrines like Unionism, Election, Creation, etc.—because of the level of Biblical maturity required. *Fourth*—it is not a position that people can be "reasoned" into—unless the rationale is completely of the Holy Spirit, which means Bible passages, not "logic" but "theologic," if you will. *Fifth*—"Close Communion" is right there on the cutting edge of the Lutheran Church, right at that point



where she does her best mission work, operating on the principle of "attraction by repulsion." *Sixth*—it must be candidly and evangelically reported regularly in sermons, Bible classes, bulletin articles, etc., so that all the members can articulate it, use it, and apply it.

Now we shall look closely at the word "close." Most Lutherans at one time or another used it (or the word "closed") but have abandoned it and its practice, in keeping with the last century's developing phenomenon where virtually all religions, Christian or otherwise, were abandoning previously confessed positions. People often think there is something too negative about

the word(s). Our Lutheran forefathers realized this, because it is tied to the scandal of the gospel of which Jesus confesses in John 14:6: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me."

The word "close" is preferred over "closed"—the latter seems too final, as if there is no entrance permitted at all. There is certainly an exclusivity involved, but the door is not nailed tight shut. Other good words are *confined*, *enclosed* or *enclosing*, *carefully guarded*, *secluded*, *intimate*, *precise*, *familiar*, *limited*, *held in common*, *regulated*, *united*, *in agreement*, and so forth. Each implies, besides restriction, that there is "a way in."

No matter which word or phrase is used, there will always be someone who will take offense—hardly astonishing in a time of extreme permissiveness, unregulated rights, freedoms minus responsibilities, and self-assertiveness to the extreme. It has to be taught that the "no" and the "not" are also necessary for the retention and propagation of good order. 1 Corinthians chapter 14 passages come to mind, such as "Let all things be done decently and in order" (v. 40), and "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (v. 33, where "peace" means "order"). This applies to the liturgy of the Church and to our "liturgy of living."

This is true of life in general—with regard to various licenses (cars, planes, machinery, ships, law, education, medicine, etc.). And why? For the sake of order, care, responsibility, accountability, protection. The alternative is anarchy, chaos, destruction, eventual loss of rights and privileges. Would anyone actually prefer that?

But note that the way is "open" for people to become members of the "close" group of license-holders. It is done by way of instruction, training, discipline—followed by certification, regulation, control. Sometimes it takes years to comply. You would not let "just anyone" remove your appendix or replace your hip joint or re-wire your house! In our congregations there will be a door opened for instruction in the Word and doctrine of God, so that people may become "discipled" (instructed, disciplined, even "licensed," if you will) into the realm of "Close Communion" where each member becomes practitioner, priest, steward, and worker of the Christian profession. Members are no longer just bystanders. We are all drivers, pilots, operators. Membership licenses (aka Confirmation certificates) should probably be renewed and updated every five years—or less—by means of *classes for doctrine/practice review*.

The Church thus sets standards for the rest of the world by the way She does her business—and God knows the world needs the Church's witness, from the Cross outwards.

Chew on that till next time.
(to be continued)

—Pastor Em. Warren Fanning



Pastor David Reim (r), outdoor Mission Festival speaker in Lynnwood, with Pastor John Hein (see p.11)

A study of the Christian's relationship with his Savior and what He expects of the Christian in connection with being in the world but not of it—

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Part II. WHAT IT MEANS

As Jesus drew the illustration of the Vine and Branches, He brought out a beautiful goal of that relationship—the branches are to bear fruit: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me . . . by this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (v. 4,8).

Jesus' disciples are in this world as extensions of Himself. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). That means that we are not left in this world as an inert agent—filler with no real effect on our surroundings. We are a distinctive preservative—"the salt of the earth"; we are saints, set apart to be holy to the Father through faith in Jesus Christ—saints in an unsanctified world: "God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

The Holy Spirit who first worked faith in our hearts continues His work in us. He "enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps" us in this faith. Although we are yet in this world, we are most decidedly not 'of' the world. We are not minded like it but rather share the mind of

Christ. We no longer regard our origin as from the world, but from God. We no longer sow to the flesh, reaping the corrupt rewards of the flesh, but sow to the Spirit, reaping the eternal blessings of the Spirit (Gal. 6:8).

Implicit in all of this is the understanding that we are flesh and spirit; that while we have been perfected in the sight of God through the imputed righteousness of Christ, we still have the sinful flesh about us. While according to the Spirit our wants, desires, and impulses are all pure and holy, according to the flesh we are still corrupt, rebellious, and unresponsive. So it is to the believers that Paul writes "You should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk . . . but that you put off . . . the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:17-24).

An interesting remark by Paul along these lines is brought out in 2 Corinthians 6 where Paul erupted in a heartfelt appeal (not wishing that they should be lost to unbelief): "O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by

As we put off the lusts of the flesh and become more detached from the world—and more resistant to the Prince of this world (Jn. 14:30)—we come to enjoy the liberty and peace that belongs to those who are in this world, but are not harnessed to its corrupt, self-defeating goals.

your own affections" (2 Cor. 6:12-13).

Don't we often regard our Christian life as a restricted, confined, chained life? This is a deception, even though in our faithfulness to Christ we do forego many worldly pursuits. Did not Christ say "If you abide in My word, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31-32)? As we put off the lusts of the flesh and become more detached from the world—and more resistant to the Prince of this world (Jn. 14:30)—we come to enjoy the liberty and peace that belongs to those who are in this world but are not harnessed to its corrupt, self-defeating goals.

In this world there are many philosophies—many ideas of wise men who purport to show us the way to

enlightenment. But man's philosophy invariably leads away from Christ. Therefore, "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). Paul views such mundane 'gospels'—whether dressed up in carnal or esoteric terms—as nothing more than legalism, binding man to works-righteousness and the condemnation of the law: "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—do not touch, do not taste . . . ?" (2:20-21).

The cheating done, then, is done by any so-called wisdom which leads us away from the simplicity that is Christ—that is, to be justified in His name and to walk in willing obedience to His word, setting aside the wisdom of men.

(To be concluded)

—Pastor Peter Reim

(Editor's note: This is the second portion of a shortened version of an essay delivered to the June 2002 West Central Delegate Conference, Denver (Lakewood), Colo.; Part 1 was a treatment of WHAT IT IS that a Christian is "in the world but not of it.")

(Editor's Note: In our December 2002 issue we carried an article on this same subject by another CLC pastor. We feel there is sufficient interest and concern in the matter to print herewith a second evaluation of the new "Thrivent" by another of our pastors. While both pastors end up on the "same page," there is a slightly different approach and commentary. This particular assessment of the AAL/LB merger was prepared by Pastor Theodore Barthels, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Austin, Minn. for the October 8-9, 2002 Minnesota District Pastoral Conference.)

THRIVENT FINANCIAL FOR LUTHERANS

The Merger of AAL and Lutheran Brotherhood

A year ago a public announcement and the question arose, whether, by chance, this might offer AAL and LB

the opportunity to change their nature and therefore become simply an insurance company with which we could do business without entanglements in false fellowship. This question becomes more important since assertions have been made in recent weeks by individuals who have left our fellowship that there no longer exists any difference between the CLC and WELS. One clear example of a continuing difference between our church bodies is the involvement in fraternal benefit societies with the spiritual nature of AAL and LB. In my judgment this also demonstrates a very different understanding of the Scriptural principles of church fellowship which stand behind these different positions. So the question needs to be addressed: Is the new Thrivent Financial for Lutherans an organization of a different nature than its origins suggest, or is it a fraternal with a spiritual basis that involves its members in religious unionism?

In a recent mailing received from this new company, they say: *"We're excited about our proposed new name—Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. It's a new look, with a new sense of energy. It immediately tells people that we are about the growth and success that serves to fulfill a caring mission. While we have a new organization and a new look, our mission is unchanged."* (Promotional mailing dated March 8, 2002)

That they are excited about this merger of two fraternal organizations is obvious, but the question for us is, does this really change anything? Does this merger remove the objectionable features of being a fraternal benefit society that involves its members in the

promotion of false teaching and false cause, that involves its members in a unionistic relationship with other Lutherans?

While they are forming a new organization out of the two, the new organization will maintain its fraternal nature. Their March 2002 mailing announcing their new name and merger declares in bold print: *"A new name. A new fraternal. A new era."* Yet the basis of declaring fraternity or brotherhood has not changed. They are not now declaring that American citizenship is the basis of this fraternal relationship, or anything else other than a common spiritual bond. Again, that is made clear by their own promotional brochure mailing. *"But make no mistake about it, we are for Lutherans. We remain committed to serving the Lutheran Church, its members and its institutions."* That there is no real change in the nature of these organizations is an important and frequently repeated message of their promotional material:

"Over time, the name Thrivent Financial for Lutherans will be synonymous with the same qualities that Aid Association for Lutheran and Lutheran Brotherhood have been known for."

"Thrivent Financial for Lutherans will have the same Lutheran associations with such recognizable names as Concordia, Augsburg Fortress Publishers and Wheat Ridge Ministries—names that have, over time, become synonymous with serving the Lutheran community."

"As members, we all have the ability to help build that recognition of the new name and the new organization."

This quote also makes it clear that

members play a key and involved role in the promotion and fulfillment of the Thrivent for Lutherans mission, the promotion of a Lutheran mission. It must be extremely difficult for them to avoid saying "a Lutheran ministry." Surely by listing the above names, they desire a mental association with Lutheran institutions which are involved in ministry. When one is "committed to serving the Lutheran Church, its members and its institutions," how can one not conclude that this is at least the promotion of these ministries, even if not becoming a ministry in itself.

The true nature of this organization becomes clear when we read what they say of themselves:

Mission

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is a faith-based membership organization called to improve the quality of life of its members, their families, and their communities by providing unparalleled solutions that focus on financial security, wellness and caring for others.

Vision

Our vision is to be the organization that Lutherans, Lutheran congregations and Lutheran institutions seek first when pursuing their financial goals. More than creating financial solutions, we add the unique capability of enabling Lutherans to demonstrate their care and concern for others.

Our Core Values

Thrivent Financial was founded to help Lutherans care for and support one another in time of need, guided by the principles of the Christian faith. We remain committed to this rich fraternal heritage as we strive to achieve the highest possible good for members, staff and society. We hold these values

to be essential as we work to fulfill our mission, vision and strategies.

(www.thrivent.com.)

Please note that Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is very careful never to use the word company in any of its literature describing itself. Rather, quite clearly, we just read that they are a "faith-based membership organization." A faith-based fraternity is synonymous with a faith-based brotherhood or a faith-based fellowship. As they cross the denominational boundaries with their programs, they ignore the vast doctrinal differences that exist between Lutheran churches and still claim to strive to achieve the highest possible good for its members, staff, and society.

Their vision includes "*more than creating financial solutions*" (they are not just an insurance or investment company). "*We add the unique capability of enabling Lutherans to demonstrate their care and concern for others.*" This is done "*guided by the principles of the Christian faith.*" This again suggests, if not actually declaring, a unity of faith—a fellowship.

Also on their web page one is again encouraged to understand that "Thrivent" does more than offer financial services. "*We offer hope and help to Lutherans, their families, and their communities. Find information here about how you and your family can financially help Lutheran churches, schools and organizations.*"

We know the instruction of Scripture in this matter. We realize that Romans 16:17 applies, "Note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." Again, we remember the words of 2 John 10-11, "If anyone

comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."

Can we as confessional Lutherans now be involved with this organization as simply a matter of "doing insurance business"? I believe that the Thrivent mailing of March 8, 2002 answers that question. *"During this time of change, we hope you will embrace our new name—Thrivent Financial for*

Lutherans—A Century of Serving the Lutheran Community—and support all it stands for." Are we ready to support all that this organization and its new name stands for? As a fraternity whose clear intent has been the promotion of pan-Lutheranism, and a diversity of Lutheran institutions, there is so much that they support, and so much that they "stand for" that we simply cannot "stand for" and still truly stand for Christ and the truth of His gospel.

2002 CLC Teachers Conference

The 2002 CLC Teachers Conference met in Markesan, Wisconsin, on October 9-11.

Teachers from our CLC schools across the country meet annually to encourage one another, to share recent thoughts and trends in education, and to refresh ourselves with fellowship. We are then ready to return to our own classrooms with new zeal for serving the Lord as well as being equipped with new ideas.

Our Conference theme was "Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus." Chaplain Seth Schaller guided us on three journeys with devotions along this line. First, "A Miraculous Walk" showed us that our walk in faith is even more miraculous than Peter's walk on water. Next, "Run With Strength" reminded us that the Lord uses trials and discipline in our lives to make us stronger for work in His kingdom. Finally, "A Refreshing Stroll" encouraged us to remain immersed in the gospel, turning to our Savior and using the power of the Spirit to find strength, joy, and peace.

On Wednesday, the Markesan faculty of Barry Hay, Ann Sprengeler, and Candice Ohlmann presented a textbook review of the "Shurley Method" of language instruction. This lively technique uses "jingles" to teach and reinforce recognition of the parts of speech. There is much more to this instruction than "jingles," but that was the highlight of the presentation for many teachers, myself included. Many students of Faith School performed "jingles" for the teachers, making this spirited presentation very rewarding.

Professor Joseph Lau presented a paper on "Professionalism in Our Schools." There were many items of benefit both for experienced teachers and those who have not been teaching as long. The Mountain View, Calif. faculty (Sara Pfeiffer and Rachel Snell) presented "Teaching Patriotism Across the Curriculum." Using PowerPoint, many useful ideas were shared with the teachers in various subject areas. This is a good teacher resource for using patriotic ideas in the classroom.



Caught between numbers, Teachers Conference choir

Kurt Koenig presented "Ideas Related to Teaching the Catechism." This included examining the purpose of the Catechism—how we use the Catechism (whether in the classroom or out), as well as reminding us of some of the many benefits of using the Catechism.

During the course of the Conference, much business was discussed, including deciding where the next two conferences would be held, as well as an update on the CLC Sunday School series. Ross Roehl spoke on behalf of the CLC Board of Education. He conveyed thanks to those who have helped with the CLC Sunday School curriculum, but he also asked that anyone interested in helping to finish the project should contact him.

Three seniors from the ILC Education program were introduced. They prepared to work with their supervising teacher(s) for their student-teaching experience.

On Wednesday evening, vacancy Pastor Keith Olmanson preached a sermon entitled "Get Wisdom, Get

Understanding." This encouraging message based on Proverbs 4:7 was a reminder to us all that the wisdom and understanding we receive from the Lord through His Word is the most important thing in our lives.

On Thursday, Lane Fischer presented a book review on *Teaching with Love and Logic*. Beneficial discussion followed. Two break-out sessions were held, one for upper-grade and one for lower-grade. From the Minutes of Secretary Sara Pfeiffer:

In the upper grade break-out session, Neil Bernthal gave a Title Five presentation entitled "Express and Impress with Color: Five Art Lessons on Color Using the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Painters." Ross Roehl presented a Title Five on "Using the Internet without a Connection to the Internet." A "Literature List" was presented by J. D. Sydow. Leif Olmanson shared ideas on "Geography." "Five Science Experiments" was presented by Jay Sydow and Karl Olmanson.

In the lower grade break-out ses-

sion, Heather Carstensen presented "Rhythm and Music/Physical Education." Erin Manthe presented "Art Projects." Erin Libby shared "Ideas for Getting Children to Read." "Cooking in the Classroom" was presented by Rachel Pfeiffer. Nathan Wales presented "Five Science Experiments."

Doug Libby presented a paper entitled "Teacher Burnout." This included defining "burnout" and learning how to deal with it in the most effective way. Several factors can contribute both from without and from within a teacher, but the best treatment and prevention is the use of the gospel in Word and Sacrament, the Means of Grace.

In the Ideas Exchange, teachers brought an idea (or more) to share with the group. For many, this is one of the greatest highlights of their trip to any conference. Friday was a miscellaneous business day, including a field trip to a local Amish community—or golf for those interested.

The Lord has again blessed our meetings and renewed our hearts to serve Him in our classrooms and in our lives! Praise Him for this opportunity to gather together as we work in His kingdom. We look forward to gathering again in Jamestown, North Dakota for October 15-17, 2003; and Fond du Lac, Wisconsin for October 20-22, 2004.

—Submitted by Teacher Philip Strike,
St. John's Lutheran School
Okabena, Minnesota

Announcements

Available for Cost

In response to a request from Missionary Koenig for use in our overseas missions, we have put together ("clipped, pasted, and copied") a 36-page booklet called "Appreciating Our Lutheran Hymns." Included in the booklet are background histories of twenty-nine hymns from *The*

Lutheran Hymnal as these first appeared in issues of the *Lutheran Spokesman* between the months of November 1998 and June 2001. CLC Pastors John Klatt and Paul Krause were the writers.

Anyone desiring one of these booklets—good for devotional, instructional, and other purposes—need only contact the editor. At this time availability is by snail-mail only, \$2.00 each P & H.



Immanuel Lutheran College Eau Claire, Wisconsin Tour Choir Itinerary

March 9	Millston, Wis.	10:15 a.m.
March 15	Stambaugh, Mich.	1:00 p.m.
March 15	Marquette, Mich.	7:30 p.m.
March 16	Saginaw, Mich.	7:30 p.m.
March 17	Detroit, Mich.	7:30 p.m.
March 18	Dowagiac, Mich.	7:00 p.m.
March 19	Manchester, Mo.	7:30 p.m.
March 20	Middleton, Wis.	7:30 p.m.
March 21	Hales Corners, Wis.	7:30 p.m.
March 22	Fond du Lac, Wis.	7:00 p.m.
March 23	Markesan, Wis.	10:00 a.m.
March 30	Fridley, Minn.	10:00 a.m.
March 30	Eau Claire, Wis.	7:00 p.m.

Editor's note: Please check with the pastor of your local CLC church to verify site and time of these sacred concerts.

COVER: Matt Schaser