

Lutheran Spokesman



BAPTISM

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Baptism-God's Gift for Everyone

A man who belonged to an ecumenical congregation promoted the fact that they tolerated all Christian teachings in his group. He was then asked, "Since you are so accepting, if I brought an infant to be baptized, would you do it?" The answer was a flat-out "no."

Confessional Lutherans will find themselves clearly distinguished from many other denominations when it comes to the sacraments. Such a distinction goes back to the root of how a person is saved. If one believes that God is completely responsible for his salvation (as we learn in Scripture), then the Biblical view of the sacraments is also clear—God is doing something for us. He creates faith through Baptism and strengthens faith through Holy Communion. On the other hand, if one believes that he is responsible for his own salvation in some way, then he likely will also readily believe that Baptism and the Lord's

Supper are deeds that a person does for God. What is a beautiful act of God's grace quickly becomes the drudgery of human obedience.

Infant Baptism is particularly cast aside because, after all, "what can a baby do for God?" In reality, an unbeliever, no matter what the age, is dead in trespasses and sin and can do nothing for God. But that is the point. Everybody enters this world spiritually dead and—without the life-renewing power of the Holy Spirit—would remain that way.

The wonderful news of Baptism is that God is at work. In Baptism a rebirth occurs. "According to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). We are born again of water and the Spirit, and thus made spiritually alive, members of God's Kingdom and even of God's family. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as

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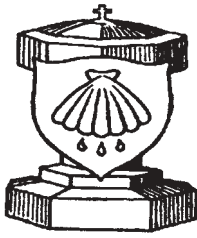
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many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). We are baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3) and thereby receive the benefits of His death.

What a blessing that sin is washed away! This is truly the work of God and not of man.

There are no prohibitions in the Bible when it comes to infant Baptism. Infants are indeed in need of forgiveness and part of "all nations" (for whose sake Jesus authorized Baptism). It is no less miraculous when a baby is brought to faith than when an adult is converted. In

each case it is solely the work of God. In each case God brings to life one who was spiritually dead. We dare not put a limit on the power of God.

We confess with Martin Luther: "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord nor come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel . . ." That gospel of Jesus is what gives the power to Baptism—not the water, not the person administering or receiving it.

In the Epiphany season we are reminded that Jesus is revealed as the Savior for all nations—Jew and Gentile alike. He kept the law for all sinners. He shed His blood on the cross to atone for the sin of all people. To all nations—and not excluding any group from any nation—we are then to bring that precious news of Christ crucified. And also the precious gift of Baptism!

—Pastor Michael Schierenbeck



Big Miracle! Big Talker! Big Fisherman!

Arthur Rubinstein, the famous pianist, was also fluent in eight languages. He was once stricken with severe hoarseness. After trying the usual remedies to no avail, he consulted a throat specialist. The doctor examined him without comment, and told him to come back the next day for further tests. This examination was also accompanied by an ominous silence. The famous patient could finally stand it no longer and exclaimed: "Tell me, what's the matter? I can take the truth; I've lived a full, rich life. What's wrong with me?" The doctor replied,

"You talk too much!"

One imagines that Simon Peter was a big talker—even before he met the Lord Jesus. Fishermen do have a reputation. But one day the Lord really gave Peter something to talk about—a big miracle, the great catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11). Peter had seen and would see other miracles. Most all were occasioned by desperate situations or by the desperately afflicted, and all proved Jesus to be who He claimed to be: the very Son of God.

The miracle of the great catch of fish, however, was big for Peter and his

companions because it touched on their very livelihood—on who they were and on who they would become. It was a miracle which experienced fishermen especially could appreciate and talk about.

If Simon Peter were with us today, he might tell the story in this way:

“My brother Andrew and I were pretty good fishermen, I dare say, but we had been working all night and had caught absolutely nothing. We had tried everywhere and used every trick I knew. It seemed as if the fish were purposefully hiding. We were frustrated and tired, washing our nets and breaming the boat.

“Then Jesus of Nazareth came by and asked for—and used—our boat as a perch from which to speak to the crowd which had been following Him. When He had finished, He told me to let down the nets yet again. (I should have just kept my mouth shut, but it all seemed so ridiculous; we had tried all night . . . the best time for fishing . . . lower visibility; so I objected, forgetting for a moment that I was addressing the Messiah.)

“After consenting and letting down the nets in deep water, I couldn’t believe my wall-eyed eyes (as in “an unbelieving stare”—ed). Fish were jumping everywhere, acting as if they wanted to be caught. Not just minnows! When our boat began to sink, I yelled to the Zebedee brothers for help. Their boat also began to founder under the load of all those fish.

“For once in my life I was speechless; well, not really. I fell to my knees and blurted out something rather foolish: ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ Thank God He did not. Thank God Jesus saw my recognition

of my own unworthiness, for as the Savior He did not come to depart from sinners like me, but to receive them and forgive them.

“And then Jesus told us we would become fishers of men. What a turn-about! Previously we had been catching live fish solely to kill them; now we would catch spiritually dead souls that they might become alive in Christ Jesus!”

Peter remained the big talker. When not controlled by his faith in the Savior, he got into trouble—once Peter was soundly rebuked by Jesus and another time he cowered before a servant girl of the high priest. But on another occasion when he spoke out of faith, it was wondrous: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

When Peter spoke in the power of his Lord, nothing could again shut him up: “We cannot but speak of the things we have heard and seen” (Acts 4:20). A big miracle—and now a big talker and fisherman for Christ.

No doubt Peter saw the symbolism of the miracle on Pentecost when — following his sermon—3,000 men were “caught” for the Lord. That was something to talk about! A tremendous miracle of grace surpassing even the miracle of two boats of fish!

May we ever see in Jesus’ miracles His divine nature, and in His work the miracle of our salvation. May we faithfully become big talkers for Christ and big fishermen for lost souls to the glory of our Savior’s name. Of that kind of talking and fishing there can never be too much!

—Pastor David Fuerstenau



The Discourses of Christ

Jesus And Nicodemus—John 3:16-21
Part Two

John 3:16 Revisited

John 3:16 is probably the most well-known and universally treasured verse in the Bible. Children memorize it readily; adults refer to it lovingly as God’s clearest message of His love and grace to a sinful world. But after years of reciting it, we will need to beware of the malaise of over-familiarity due to repeated handling. The jeweler no longer sees his diamond rings as does the love-struck fiancé.

Let us call to mind the setting of this particular gem. Jesus had Nicodemus in a corner, where he was learning to be humble as Jesus brought to light marvelous “heavenly things” from God’s pockets. Here Jesus dug deep and brought forth the coronation jewel, which God has never commercialized.

In such few and well-chosen words Jesus tells us that God loves humanity—the whole race. With all His heart, soul, strength, and mind God enfolds humankind; God loves the unlovable and seeks to salvage lost sinners from hellfire.

Consider the carat weight of such love. *God SO loved the world* (in such a manner, to such a degree, and with such fervor) *that He gave* (sacrificed away) *His only-begotten Son* (His one-and-only most precious child, the irreplaceably unique Son) to get sinners

saved. We pause to catch our breath—that God’s mind and heart are built in such a way that He was willing and ready to trade off His own personal entity . . . in exchange for what? For something more valuable, more desirable, more divine? Hardly! He traded His dear Son for human trash. How wonderful that God’s ways are not our ways! God’s way outclasses Satan’s fools-gold of self-justification! Other problems come from the world, too, with its diversions of the after-Thanksgiving bargains and “one-day only” specials. God’s child knows in his heart that feel-good holiday sentimentality does not usher him into God’s corner at the side of Nicodemus, for neither Satan nor the world is hustling God’s Christmas Special.

Let us not skip too quickly over the word “gave.” We understand 25% off, and half-price, too. But 100% OFF the purchase-price of such a gem is unbelievable. Our human nature suspects that somewhere there is a catch; our flesh looks for small print concealing a hidden contract agreement. But God has no truck with such chicanery; God’s gift is a *gift* is a GIFT; it’s not wages, earnings, or contract for deed.

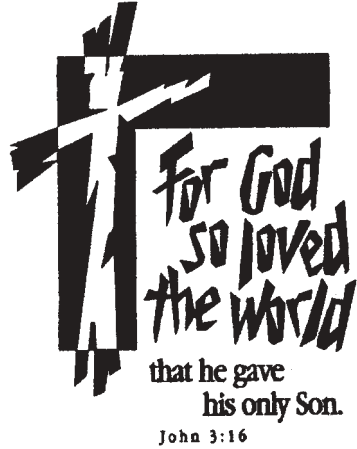
Not that salvation came cheap to God; redemption of sinful humanity

was not a knocked-down celestial special. The simple truth is that since salvation came at a price too steep for poor sinners, God decided (entirely out of His good nature) to bear the expense Himself—then turn right around and make salvation free to one and all. Making a free gift of everlasting life was God’s original intent when He sent Jesus to our planet, and it (rather than eternal punishment) remains God’s commitment to this day.

Read verses 17 and 18 over a few times for reassurance against Satan’s slur, “Do you mean to tell me that God really gives heaven away freely?! Bah, humbug!” We answer, “Yes, that *is* what God says, and that *is* what God has done for us sinners!”

Disdaining Satan’s slander, the world’s distractions, and fleshly leaven, we treasure God’s Christmas gift, take it home with us, and live with it.

By the way, there remains an awful alternative, still available and waiting. If in a moment of weakness you are tempted to think your eternal salvation (since it is a freely given gift) is a toss-away for whatever fun can be squeezed from evil living, read verses 19 and 20 and 21 again—carefully and thoughtfully. Loving the darkness of Satan and practicing evil in Satan’s exercise parlor will most certainly bring you condemnation and perishing. Lord, have mercy!



Every lost sinner could benefit from joining Nicodemus in such a quiet one-on-one visit with Jesus, to discover that He speaks Truth (the awful truth about human sin and the saving truth about God’s grace) for sinners who certainly deserve the whole truth—minus philosophic rationalizing and/or the staged camaraderie of TV specials. We find Jesus’ words more authoritative than Satan, world, and flesh—and Jesus more attractive than all holiday diversions.

Through John 3:16-21 God has convinced many a mortal that His love-gift outweighs (in sheer carat value) everything this world has for sale. God grant that we truly value God’s gems, and that Jesus our Savior remain our heart’s greatest treasure!

—Paul R. Koch



Spokesman cover artist John Fox, wife Sandra, children Elizabeth and Hannah

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 I. WHAT IT IS

We've heard the phrase often enough: "we're in the world, but not of the world." We may suspect that it's merely a home-grown truism, like "home is where the heart is." We suppose it has something to do with why Christians shouldn't do some things that non-Christians do. We assume it means something, but seldom really stop to examine its content. When we do, we're mildly surprised to find that it's actually a solid Biblical concept with rich implications for the believer. It is, in fact, nearly word for word a phrase from Scripture: "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world . . . they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:11, 14).

May the Holy Spirit bless us with a clear vision of our Savior as we explore the spiritual implications of this concept.

The concept of the 'world' as used in the Bible is interesting. The term in question is the Greek word *cosmos*. The root idea of *cosmos* is something that is beautiful in its orderliness. It is where we get the English word "cosmetic." In New Testament usage it means "the ordered world."

Its usage narrows and refines, though. It is frequently used to refer to "the inhabited earth"—the world of men. Think of John 3:16: "God so

loved the world . . . " Jesus is not really thinking of Pluto, Alpha Centari, and the Marianas Trench. He's thinking of the millions and billions of souls searching for something they lost in the Garden.

It is because of sin that what God created perfect and orderly became corrupt. Someone has pointed out that through sin, the *cosmos* became a "disordered world in the grip of the Evil one." In this context there is a sinister dimension to the world: 'this world set over against God.'

This God-opposed view of the world—"a system of organized society hostile to God"—especially predominates in John's writings, both the Gospel and first Epistle. Not surprisingly, from John we also find the most instructive information concerning the Christian's relationship with His Savior while he or she is in this world. For Christ first of all saw Himself *in* the world, but not *of* this world.

John begins by setting forth "the Word" who became incarnate, the Son of God who was with God at the beginning, "without Whom nothing was made that was made" (Jn. 1:1,3). This Word "was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (v. 10). It is this world's ignorance of the Word, its defi-

ant non-recognition of the Deity, that is its chief and all-pervading flaw.

Yet in love God came into the world: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Even the best of this world—those most favored by God, the descendants of Abraham—rejected Jesus: “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (Jn. 1:11). Trusted disciple and bitter adversary, righteous Jew and pagan Gentile—the whole world conspired to destroy Jesus, God’s Son.

In the face of such organized hostility, “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure . . . ‘yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion’” (Ps. 2:4-6). God raised Jesus from the grave and set Him up as the Man by whom the Lord will “judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31).

Yet His coming was not, in the first case, to condemn the world, but that the world might through Him be saved. “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” ‘In the world but not of the world’ is the status of those people who—through God’s grace, Jesus’ redemption, and Spirit-created faith—have escaped the pollution of this world, have been delivered from its condemnation, have been converted from antagonists to Christ to His loving disciples.

Our ties to this world are severed by our union with Christ: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (Jn. 15:19).

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As Jesus spoke with His disciples during and after the Passover supper, He had much to say about their future without Him. His earthly ministry was coming to a close, the consummation of His redemptive work was near, and His exaltation was within view. But all that pointed to His going away: “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you” (Jn. 13:33).

The disciples found this most distressing. How could they survive without Jesus around them? What was to come of the promised kingdom if Jesus wasn’t here to rule over it? How could they live in this world—understanding, as they did, that through Jesus they were separated from the world? They felt like orphans—abandoned, vulnerable, hopeless.

The bulk of Jesus’ discourse that night (as recorded by John) was words of comfort and assurance: “I will not leave you orphans” (14:18). He would send them “another Comforter,” the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit working faith in the believer, Jesus and the Father will dwell with him while in this world (14:23). Through the Holy Spirit’s bringing to mind the word of

Christ and leading the faithful to cling to that word, Christ will be manifested to them, but not to the world (14:23-24).

Replacing an earth-bound and unregenerate world-view, Jesus' disciples have, through Him, obtained a knowledge of and organic relationship with God: "I have manifested Your [the Father's] name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word . . . For I have given to them the words which you have given Me . . . and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (Jn. 17:6-9).

To be in the world but not of the world is to enjoy the special, Spirit-created relationship bestowed through

God in Jesus Christ. It is a living, organic relationship—as a branch (the believer) is nourished by the vine (Christ). The pollution, guilt, and offense that exist because of sin are removed through faith in Jesus' heaven-sent testimony: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (Jn. 15:1-3).

(to be continued)

—Pastor Peter Reim

(Editor's note: This is the first of three installments of a shortened version of an essay delivered to the June 2002 West Central Delegate Conference, Lakewood, Colo. Future installments will treat WHAT IT MEANS that a Christian is 'in the world but not of it.')



Understanding Our Faith

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
(From a series of bulletin articles)

The joy of worship is not in what we are doing for God, but in what He has done and is doing for us. The message of the loving gospel energizes the chords of the heart in thanksgiving for the grace of God, which has appeared to all men, bringing salvation.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

As churches come to the beginning of a new year, they compile their statistics for the year past. We know that statistics are subject to abuse and that they can be "cooked" to satisfy whatever it is that one desires to prove.

Statistics are neither here nor there. To the effective work of the church

they could be forgotten. In fact, many may best be forgotten, if "head-counting" leads to pride. That was a problem in 1 Samuel 21:1. On the other hand, the Lord commanded Gideon to make a count in order to guard against pride (Judges 7).

One of the statistics churches keep

is that of attendance. For the most part compiling church attendance data is more humbling than it is a temptation to pride.

With regard to attendance at worship services, the most meaningful is the record that the individual keeps for himself. For those who attend regularly, it is a good practice to question oneself occasionally as to why one attends. Is church attendance habit or pride? If that is the case, repentance is in order. Or is attendance at worship born of a heartfelt need to hear the Word of God for one's instruction and one's comfort? Might one's desire for fellowship with Christian brethren be a contributing reason as to why one delights to attend worship?

Our Lord Jesus Christ desires that we come together to worship Him. Worshiping the Lord together serves to mutual encouragement. Besides the personal blessing that comes to the Christian through the gospel, the blessings of fellowship with brethren are special, as like-minded Christians gather around the Word and Sacrament.

But what about those who seldom or never worship? We expect this of heathen, but not of such that profess to be Christian. What do they do on Sunday morning? Let us grant the benefit of the doubt that they faithfully carry on an active confessional life, confessing their sins unto the Lord, an active prayer life, an active study life, as well as an active worship life in the home with themselves and family. Let us grant that they do this each day of the week as well as on Sunday.

Yet corporate worship is God's will. "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of



some is" (Heb. 10:25). There is a certain catharsis in joining with the brethren in confession of sins. Mutual confession of sins equalizes all—children and adults, rich and poor, men and women—before the cross. Together we rejoice for ourselves and each other as we hear the words of absolution: "Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, hath had mercy upon us and hath given His only Son to die for us and for His sake hath forgiven us all our sins."

The joy of worship is not what we are doing for God, but what He has done and is doing for us. The message of the living gospel energizes the chords of the heart in thanksgiving for the grace of God, which has appeared to all men, bringing salvation. This joy is ours personally, in church or at home, but it is a precious privilege to raise heart and voice in united voice within the assembly of God's people and declare: "For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised" (Ps. 96:4).

Fellowship is a wonderful blessing. A Christian has fellowship with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is the Author and

Creator of such fellowship through the Word of the gospel. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The response of the Christian to this relationship into which he has been brought is a fruit of faith; the fellowship which God has created with Himself elicits from the Christian a “Yea and Amen” to the will of God, as well as to the blessings of God.

One of those blessings is the fellowship with fellow believers. It is manifest through mutual support and encouragement of one another. Not the least of this encouragement is when Christians worship together. In this context, worshiping together says, “I need you, and your presence assures me that you need me,” as we walk in common faith through a hostile world to the mutual goal in heaven.

This is true regardless of the size of the congregation, but it is especially meaningful in small congregations where the very existence of the congregation may depend on the activity and participation of all the members.

Fellowship is a blessing, but fellowship implies joining with others. One cannot fellowship with self!

Finally, attendance at worship is a witness to the world. What does it mean to the neighbor who hears one claim to be a member of a church yet hears the same member make a sterling defense of the truth of God’s Word, and then observes that same member seldom attend worship in the church where he claims to be a member?

Yes, we can and sometimes must worship in our home as a witness. But when we have opportunity and privilege to worship in a congregation where God’s Word is taught and the gospel proclaimed in all its splendor—

and we do not do so—our witness is muted, if not dead.

Statistics are in themselves quite meaningless. But numbers do tell some things. They tell us that some within a congregation have deprived themselves of the blessings of the public preaching of the Word and the comfort of the sacrament. They tell us that some have deprived the congregation of the pleasure of their company and of the joy of sharing the gospel message. They tell us that the mutual support system is not as strong as it could be because a link in that system is missing.

The psalmist said: “I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” (122:1). With good reason! “I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation” (111:1). Surely we are among those for whom he prays: “Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; and let those who love your salvation say continually, ‘Let God be magnified’” (70:4)—until finally those who have rejoiced in the message of salvation are numbered among all those to whom the Lord says: “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34).

LET US WORSHIP THE LORD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE SAINTS.



(From the Editor: This article first appeared in the "Home Messenger," the newsletter of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota; we are reprinting it in two parts. The writer is Pastor Paul D. Nolting.)

A Biblical Perspective

VIEWING VOCATION Part 1

The Biblical teaching on vocations is very important yet often overlooked in our day. When many hear the word "vocation," they do not even think of a Biblical teaching, but rather of technical colleges which teach vocational skills; or they view it as a synonym for "career." The Biblical concept of vocation, however, implies something much broader. A "vocation" is a "calling" from God. It involves God's intentions for many different aspects of our lives. It is through these various vocations that God seeks to guide and bless us in life.

God calls the average person to numerous vocations within the workplace, the home, the church, and society in general. Each of these vocations, or callings, is unique to the individual. Each of them is important, because they all help to define our relationship, establish our responsibilities, and bring meaning to our lives. Through our various vocations we are able to use our distinct gifts and discover God's design and intentions for our individual lives. At the same time, it can be said that through each of these callings God Himself enters the world He created and through our actions provides blessings to our families, our fellow citizens, fellow believers, and us.

The Biblical teaching of "vocations" stands in direct opposition to modern, secular individualism, which suggests that all people should be

"A 'vocation' is a 'calling' from God. It involves God's intentions for many different aspects of our lives. . . ."

absolutely free to do whatever they want to do. Such complete freedom and independence, however, is a mere illusion, and pursuing that illusion courts disaster. None of us lives in isolation. We are not free to do whatever we wish, nor are we ever truly independent of others! The attempt of many within our society to exercise such complete freedom has led to an abandonment of responsibility, the destruction of individual lives, and damage to virtually every type of relationship. The result of this modern cult of individualism has been nothing short of disaster.

What can be done to help the situation? There are no easy solutions, but any God-pleasing solution will involve humble repentance and a renewed appreciation for the Biblical teaching of vocation. Interestingly, when individuals understand and embrace the Biblical teaching of God-given vocations, they will experience genuine freedom and fulfillment. This in turn will build relationships and create blessings in accordance with God's will and plan. Let us, therefore, consider briefly this Biblical teaching.

The Biblical teaching of vocation rests upon the fact that God is our Creator. The psalmist writes, “The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts, individually; He considers all their works” (Ps. 33:13-15). He continues elsewhere, “Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Ps. 100:3). In addition, he observes, “Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Ps. 139:16). Man, the Scriptures inform us, is not a free and independent agent, isolated, and uninvolved. Rather, he is a being created by God—gifted and incorporated into

God’s divine plan for His universe. We can recognize this truth, rejoice in it, and experience the blessings to be derived from it, or we can rebel against it and suffer the inevitable consequences.

The Biblical teaching of vocation also rests on the providential care of our God. God can and does care for us, bestowing and withholding blessing as He sees fit in view of His overall plan for our lives and the lives of others. Hannah recognized this truth in her prayer of thanksgiving after God had given her the gift of a son, Samuel. She prayed, “The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory” (1 Sam. 2:7-8).

(To be continued)



Installation of Pastor Theodore Barthels at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Austin, Minn. on November 10, 2002. (l-r): M. Gullerud, J. Albrecht, J. Pfeiffer, B. Naumann, T. Barthels, D. Schierenbeck, P. Nolting, W. Eichstadt, L.W. Schierenbeck.

Pastor & Mrs. (Denise) Barthels, with children Katie, Valerie, Samantha, Erica



QUESTIONS GOD ASKS

Years ago this was a title to an article in a theological magazine. It was an intriguing title: “Look Though your Bible and See All the Questions that God Asks.” The questions that God asks were not asked for His own sake. He knows the answers before He asks the question. Whatever questions the Father asks are asked for our sake.

After Adam and Eve fell into sin, the Lord asks: “Where art thou?” Adam did not answer the question directly but gave some lame excuse for hiding, something about being naked, to which the Lord asked, “Who told thee thou wast naked?” This was immediately followed by another question, “Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?” Adam did not answer any of these questions directly or honestly.

We read in Genesis that God who knows all put Adam and Eve out of the Garden. But then—marvelous grace—the offended Father gave promise of a Savior who would right what Adam and Eve had done.

For all the boldness of Peter, the Lord still had to confront him with a question. “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” As He asked the question, Jesus snatched Peter from a watery grave. No report is given as to Peter's reply. What is your personal answer to the question? Will you admit with me that we are not as spiritually strong as we like to think that we are?

Jesus asked His disciples, “For what

is man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Honesty can only answer, “Nothing.” The pursuit of the things of the world has wreaked havoc among those who are focused on the wrong things—lost faith, broken homes and families, unbearable pressure, compromise of morals, etc. It is a question about which we should think in the race that is our life.

In another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked the disciples, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” No answer was given. What is your answer to the question? Are we so occupied and so busy that we cannot give Jesus an hour of our week, a few minutes of our day?

What went through the mind of Judas when the Lord asked, “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?” Most certainly it was a question through which the Savior was reaching out to Judas to rescue him. He gave no answer, but went on doing what he was bent on doing, after which he went out and hanged himself.

To all the questions that God asks, Satan is sure to suggest a wrong answer—an answer that leads to ruin. God asks them of us to call us to repentance. He asks them of us to lead us to introspection. He asks them of us to inspire us to get back into Scripture. The Father's questions always have a purpose. Sometimes He asks them to draw out our faith.

Jesus asked the disciples, “Will you also go away?” Blessed are we, if we respond with another question as did Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” That is a question—and corresponding answer—inspired of faith.

Peter did respond to another question of Jesus. “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered clearly, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter gave the correct answer. Our own

salvation depends on the answer that we give to that question.

When God asks questions, listen carefully. They are always asked for our benefit.

—*From the bulletin of Resurrection Lutheran Church, Corpus Christi, Texas; Daniel Fleischer is pastor*

**Editor’s note: Scriptures cited include Gen. 3:1, Gen. 3:9, Gen. 3:11, Mt. 14:31, Mk. 8:36, Mt. 26:40, Lk. 22:48, Jn. 6:67f, Mt. 16:15f.*



SMORGASBORD

• REPORT FROM CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION OF INDIA (CLCI)

We were favored with a report from Pastor Jyothi Benjamin as submitted to the Joint English India Conference, held at Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, South India; dated September 2002. Generally such a report would be for the prayerful consideration of the Board of Missions alone. As interesting as much of Pastor Benjamin’s

lengthy report is, we thought we would share with our readers what is said specifically under the subject of “outreach” and “VBS.” These words might help CLC stateside members know better how to direct their prayers in behalf of foreign missions. Here, then, a word we have selected from Pastor Benjamin (printed without editing):

. . . *OUTREACH: With our Almighty God’s grace, the outreach programs throughout the year were*



Seminary Graduation in CLCI, September 2002 (see following pages as well)



cordial. I gratefully acknowledge our CLCI pastors, evangelists, workers, youth seminary students for their good work in doing this outreach. As you know in India, people of various castes and races live in separate areas. We invite all the people to the public Gospel meetings for a time in search of real truth. We never criticize their religion or their cults. Through public Gospel meetings, we give advice to the people to recognize the difference between the religions. We encourage them to realize the religions which are created by man and that of the religion which is created by living God. We always try to explain the importance of the belief in Jesus Christ. The other religions only give another life even

lower than the present life. But the Christian religion gives eternal life. Like this we take very much care to explain the differences between these religions with very easy theological points in a very smooth way to give an opportunity and about our Savior. It may take tremendous time but we believe that this is most important and best way to do the outreach. We have also printed and have been distributing certain pamphlets, which contain the testimonies of our CLCI Hindu converts, which would provide more interest among the Hindu people. With testimonies people may recognize the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have spending more concentration on outreach program. Under this



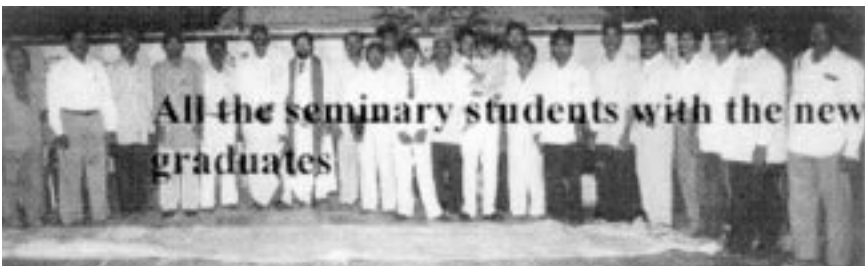


our CLCI youth have been presenting some Christian plays, dramas, and devotional singing programs in various villages. We have been using special troops for this. During day times, all the men and women go to work in the fields. During night times only they will be able to spend time to hear the Word of God. You know the situation about electric power in Andhra Pradesh state. We have been using a portable Generator to do this night programs in various villages. We are very glad to inform you that we have been achieving very good success in doing mission work in many rural areas of Andhra Pradesh State.

. . . VBS: Material like books, charts, coloring pencils like crayons, sketch pens, Sunday School material, children songs cassette tapes, picture books were supplied by the beloved members of the respected CLC. "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things

and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?" (2 Samuel 23:5) Yes! It is possible for every young child here in this darkened Hindu land to give a similar testimony like that king David! The Lord has made an everlasting covenant with them. He will preserve it till He comes back!

We are praying our Almighty living God Christ Jesus for His grace to grant us courage and strength to carry on His blessed work. It is our sincere hope and prayers that the CLCI will continue to grow in the future. It has always been a matter of great pleasure for all CLCI people to have you as our brothers in Christ. Thank you once again for your valuable service and thank you also for your continued trust in us. With the continued cooperation and good wishes and valuable prayers from the members of the CLC, and BELC through our Lord's blessings, we the Church of the Lutheran Confession of India hope to achieve greater success



in our attempt to bring about all round improvement to the Mission work as well as to the Orphanage. Once again we thank all the Brethren of CLC, BELC. Thank you very much.

* **THE SALVATION ARMY**

The December 2002 Newsletter of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota carried an assessment of The Salvation Army. What is reprinted here was part of a larger article which presented an evaluation of “thrift stores which receive donations of used items for resale to the public.”

The reasons for choosing to reprint a portion of the article will be obvious, inasmuch as The Salvation Army is a nationwide phenomenon particularly—but not alone—at Christmas time, when its bell ringers solicit donations at stores and malls.

What is written about the ministry of The Salvation Army will be carefully considered by Christians who, in their lending of financial support, are sensitive to Biblical fellowship principles (cf. Romans 16:17-18, 1 John 4:1, 2 John 10-11 etc.).

The Scripture passage at the head of the article—written by Pastor Wayne Eichstadt—was “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

THE SALVATION ARMY

The work of the Army is twofold. Its prime purpose is said to bring about the spiritual regeneration of fallen mankind by endeavoring to persuade fallen men and women to lead clean lives. The second purpose of the Army’s work is social welfare. The social efforts of the Salvation Army are

so prominent that many overlook the fact that in social service the Army aims to bring their teachings to the people they are serving.

The Salvation Army believes that God does not come to sinners through His revealed Word in Scripture, but that He speaks directly to them. The Salvation Army also rejects Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Salvation Army’s Handbook of Doctrine says: “As it is the Salvation Army’s firm conviction that these ceremonies are not necessary to salvation nor essential to spiritual progress, we do not observe them.”

Concerning the fall into sin, the Salvation Army declares that man’s spiritual powers were marred but not destroyed. The Handbook of Doctrine states, “Spiritual death, like bodily death, is not at once complete and does not imply the absence of will power,” and “Man is free to accept or reject the salvation which he in no way merits or deserves.” Therefore, man is able to work out his own salvation and choose the way of life. This contradicts God who tells us that we are by nature dead in sin and completely incapable of working out our own salvation. “You . . . were dead in trespasses and sins . . .” (Ephesians 2:1ff). “The natural mind does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Handbook of Doctrine also says, “The death of Jesus Christ should not be represented as the literal or actual payment of the sinner’s debt.” Thus, instead of paying the debt of sin, Christ’s suffering merely shows the fatal evil of sin and the importance of

CLC EXPLORATORY SERVICES

(Up-dated January 2003)

This is a list of "start-up" congregations who are being served by an off-site pastor. Some meet in homes, others in rented facilities. Also included is our CLC exploratory mission in Detroit, Michigan. Visitors are warmly welcomed. Those who are considering a move or are just traveling through the area are encouraged to contact these groups and worship with them.

LOCATION	PASTORAL CONTACT	LAY CONTACT
Alaska , Juneau	David Fuerstenau 907-225-2842	
Arizona , Gold Canyon	Delwyn Maas 602-866-2341	
British Columbia , Vancouver	John Hein 425-775-2145	Kimary Shahin 604-225-0713
California , Stockton	Nathan Pfeiffer 510-581-6637	Fran Niblett 209-951-9004
Florida , Orlando	John Schierenbeck 941-299-4084	Paul Kuehne 407-977-5949
Florida , Coral Springs (North Ft. Lauderdale)	Paul Larsen 941-423-1822	Bob Doriot 954-429-0063
Michigan , Cadillac	Tim Holland 616-532-0198	Bob Remus 231-832-2687
Michigan , Detroit	Walter Schaller 248-307-0461	
Minnesota , Kimball (St. Cloud area)	Lawrence Bade 651-310-0174	Reuben Streich 320-453-7562
Missouri , Liberty (Northeast Kansas City area)	Todd Ohlmann 616-225-3458	Jim Priebe 816-781-4702
New Mexico , Albuquerque	Robin Vogsland 505-892-6934	
North Dakota , Mapleton (Fargo area)	John M. Johannes 678-376-9948	Gary Pansch 701-277-1727
Ohio , Columbus/Cleveland	Michael Wilke 517-792-9390	
Tennessee , Monterey	Nathanael Mayhew 770-962-9034	Wayne Everhart 270-618-4387
Texas , Amarillo	Timothy Wheaton 719-336-5773	
Texas , Temple	Thomas Schuetze 972-267-0738	Eric Rachut 254-853-2867
Virgina , Fairfax (Washington D.C. area)	Glenn Oster 803-926-0603	David Loop 703-250-2020
Washington , Withrow	Terrel Kesterson 509-327-4203	Ray Lillquist 509-683-1192
Wisconsin , Appleton	David Naumann 920-922-3318	

the law. Christ's death only demonstrates the guilt of sin and the justice of God and makes it possible for God to forgive sin (in Salvation Army teaching). The truth is that Christ's suffering and death were the actual payment for sin as Scripture teaches us. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities . . ." (Isaiah 53:5f).

By comparing the teachings of the Salvation Army to the Scriptures, we are able to conclude that the Salvation Army preaches and teaches a gospel other than the gospel of Christ. Through the apostle Paul, God speaks very strongly against any perversion of His Word: "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).



Announcements

Corrections

In our January 2003 issue, p.20, the date for the "Entering In" service at St.Paul Lutheran Church, Lakewood, Colo. should have read February 4, 2001. The Dedication service date was correct as given.

COVER: Last month's fine Epiphany cover was the work of graphic artist Matthew Schaser. It was incorrectly attributed to Mr. John Fox.

We regret the errors.

CLC WOMEN'S RETREAT

The fourth annual "CLC WOMEN'S RETREAT" is set for three days (March 28, 29, and 30, 2003) at the Schwan Retreat and Conference Center outside of Trego, Wisconsin (about one and one-half hours north of Eau Claire). Bible sessions will revolve around 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, where St. Paul speaks of God's love. Saturday afternoon will feature various "mini-sessions" that treat topics of interest to women.

Registration is limited to the first 90 women; fee cost is \$105.00; deadline for registration is March 10. The Retreat is sponsored by Immanuel Church of Mankato. Questions?

Please call Laila Fleischer 307-635-1936 (pgflei@prairie.lakes.com) or

Pastor Paul D. Nolting 507-387-7035 (PNolting@hickorytech.net).

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.



COVER: John Fox

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 I. WHAT IT IS

We've heard the phrase often enough: "we're in the world, but not of the world." We may suspect that it's merely a home-grown truism, like 'home is where the heart is.' We suppose it has something to do with why Christians shouldn't do some things that non-Christians do. We assume it means something, but seldom really stop to examine its content. When we do, we're mildly surprised to find that it's actually a solid biblical concept with rich implications for the believer. It is, in fact, nearly word for word a phrase from Scripture: "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world . . . they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:11, 14).

May the Holy Spirit bless us with a clear vision of our Savior as we explore the spiritual implications of this concept.

The concept of the 'world' as used in the Bible is interesting. The term in question is the Greek word 'cosmos.' The root idea of 'cosmos' is something that is beautiful in its orderliness. It is where we get the English word 'cosmetic.' In New Testament usage it means 'the ordered world.'

Its usage narrows and refines, though. It is frequently used to refer to "the inhabited earth"--the world of men. Think of John 3:16: "God so loved the world . . ." Jesus is not really thinking of Pluto, Alpha Centari,

and the Marianas Trench. He's thinking of the millions and billions of souls searching for something they lost in the Garden.

It is because of sin that what God created perfect and orderly became corrupt. Someone has pointed out that through sin, the 'cosmos' became a "disordered world in the grip of the Evil one." In this context there is a sinister dimension to the world: 'this world set over against God.'

This God-opposed view of the world--"a system of organized society hostile to God"--especially predominates in John's writings, both the Gospel and first Epistle. Not surprisingly, from John we also find the most instructive information concerning the Christian's relationship with His Savior while he or she is in this world. For Christ first of all saw Himself in the world, but not of this world.

John begins by setting forth "the Word" who became incarnate, the Son of God who was with God at the beginning, "without Whom nothing was made that was made" (Jn. 1:1,3). This Word "was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (v. 10). It is this world's ignorance of the Word, its defiant non-recognition of the Deity, that is its chief and all-pervading flaw.

Yet in love God came into the world: "God was in Christ reconciling

the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Even the best of this world--those most favored by God, the descendants of Abraham--rejected Jesus: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (Jn. 1:11). Trusted disciple and bitter adversary, righteous Jew and pagan Gentile--the whole world conspired to destroy Jesus, God's Son.

In the face of such organized hostility, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then he shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure . . . 'yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion'" (Ps. 2:4-6). God raised Jesus from the grave, and set Him up as the Man by whom the Lord will "judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31).

Yet His coming was not, in the first case, to condemn the world, but that the world might through Him be saved. "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." 'In the world but not of the world' is the status of those people who--through God's grace, Jesus' redemption, and Spirit-created faith--have escaped the pollution of this world, have been delivered from its condemnation, have been converted from antagonists to Christ to His loving disciples.

Our ties to this world are severed by our union with Christ: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn. 15:19).

As Jesus spoke with His disciples during and after the Passover supper, He had much to say about their future without Him. His earthly ministry was

coming to a close, the consummation of His redemptive work was near, and His exaltation was within view. But all that pointed to His going away: "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you" (Jn. 13:33).

The disciples found this most distressing. How could they survive without Jesus around them? What was to come of the promised kingdom if Jesus wasn't here to rule over it? How could they live in this world--understanding, as they did, that through Jesus they were separated from the world? They felt like orphans--abandoned, vulnerable, hopeless.

The bulk of Jesus' discourse that night (as recorded by John) was words of comfort and assurance: "I will not leave you orphans" (14:18). He would send them "another Comforter," the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit working faith in the believer, Jesus and the Father will dwell with him while in this world (14:23). Through the Holy Spirit's bringing to mind the word of Christ and leading the faithful to cling to that word, Christ will be manifested to them, but not to the world (14:23-24).

Replacing an earth-bound and unregenerate world-view, Jesus' disciples have, through Him, obtained a knowledge and organic relationship with God: "I have manifested Your [the Father's] name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word . . . For I have given to them the words which you have given Me . . . and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but

for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (Jn. 17:6-9).

To be in the world but not of the world is to enjoy the special, Spirit-created relationship bestowed through God in Jesus Christ. It is a living, organic relationship--as a branch (the believer) is nourished by the vine (Christ). The pollution, guilt, and offense that exists because of sin is removed through faith in Jesus' heaven-sent testimony: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (Jn. 15:1-3).

(to be continued)

—*Pastor Peter Reim*

(Editor's note: This is the first of three installments of a shortened version of an essay delivered to the June 2002 West Central Delegate Conference, Lakewood, Colo. Future installments will treat WHAT IT MEANS that a Christian is 'in the world but not of it.')

FOR HIGHLIGHTING:

Our ties to this world are severed by our union with Christ:

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn. 15:19).