

Lutheran Spokesman



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God's Gracious Preservation

I love to garden—getting outside, working the soil, planting the seeds, starting the seedlings, watching the plants grow. Somehow what had been hard work as a youngster has become an enjoyable hobby as an adult.

Gardening is not without its challenges, however. Here in the 2000 foot deep Lewis-Clark Valley of eastern Washington and north-central Idaho, there are unique challenges to successful gardening.

Because we are in such a deep valley (700 feet above sea level), winters are rather mild. As a result, many garden pests are able to survive through the cooler months. This makes the use of some kind of pesticide almost a necessity. Weather systems can wreak havoc too, as they sweep down the canyons, bringing unseasonably cold rains or even snow in the higher elevations in the middle of July.

Once the garden has been planted, we face the constant battle of dry heat.

Lewiston, Idaho and Clarkston, Washington are classified as "semi-arid," with the average annual rainfall of about twelve inches.

To keep a garden alive requires constant monitoring of the soil's moisture content. I have seen my share of failures—from wireworms eating their way around the stems of bean plants right at ground level to seeds rotting in the ground because of lengthy and late, cold rains.

The never-ending work involved in keeping just a few plants alive gives this writer a tremendous appreciation for the work of preservation done by our heavenly Father. With the psalmist we readily confess, and rightly so, that "it is [God] who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Ps. 100:3).

A Lengthy List!

But as marvelous as our Lord's creative work is, it doesn't even come close to stopping there. He did not sim-

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ply get everything started and then turn away. Every second of every day the Lord preserves us and all creatures alive in countless ways.

In other words, how many things could be added to that already lengthy list in which Luther says: "He still preserves me, daily and richly providing clothing and shoes, food and drink ... money and possessions ... good weather ... and things like that"??

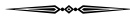
Think for a minute of just a few of the laws of nature (as they are often called). All are set up by God for our preservation! He holds the Earth at a certain distance from the sun so that we neither fry nor freeze. He keeps the Earth on its revolving route around the sun, rotating on its axis once every twenty-four hours—all of this is so that His promise made to Noah so long ago is kept: "While the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, winter

and summer, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22).

With God's constant preservation, what is there to worry about? As the Lord Jesus so kindly reminds us: "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life. ... And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind; ... your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you" (Luke 12:22, 29-31).

For the divine preservation our Lord gives us, may our hearts be moved to echo Nehemiah's words: "You alone are the LORD; You have made the heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You!" (Nehemiah 9:6)

—*Pastor Paul Krause*



Editor's note: *From the Ministry by Mail files — Text: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path ... Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart ... I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways" — Psalm 119:105,111,15*

BE SELFISH

For centuries men scorned the barren sands of Arabia as some of the most worthless and inhospitable real estate on the planet. What they could not see were the vast oceans of black gold that lay beneath the barren dunes.

When Secretary of State William H. Seward championed the purchase of millions of acres of frozen wasteland from Russia in 1867 (at a total cost of \$7.2 million or 2 cents per acre) many

derisively referred to it as "Seward's Folly." What they could not see were the vast natural resources that lay beneath the surface of the Alaskan wilderness.

When non-farming pioneers first encountered the vast plains of the Midwest, they referred to them as "grass covered deserts." Again, what they could not see were the billions of tons of coal that lay in great black lakes

below the surface.

So it ought not surprise us that when sinful human beings encounter the vast panorama of God's Word, they have similar reactions. Even those who trip lightly across the surface routinely come to imagine that what they have witnessed is really of very little practical value. Oh, the writing is pretty good in their estimation, and it contains some solid little bits of moralizing, but all-in-all the Bible is to them an over-hyped piece of real estate.

The real problem is that man has no idea what untold wealth lies just below the surface of God's Holy Word. What is more, all men from birth lack both the vision to recognize the potential and the tools to extract all of those divine riches. The result is a catastrophic waste on a scale unimagined by humankind. The unparalleled wealth given to us by our gracious and merciful God will forever remain hidden from the unbelieving world unless and until they are given faith to extract it.

We share much with the unbelieving world, don't we? We too miss out on so much of what our Lord would lavish upon us simply because we fail to mine the wealth offered to us in our Bibles. We often skim over, flip through, and pass over great riches that are just lying there, waiting for us to pick them up....

Dear fellow servants of the Lord Jesus, is it wrong to be selfish? We are taught from little on that it is, so it can be difficult at times to recognize that the right answer is, "Not always"! It is not wrong, for example, to be selfish about reading our Bibles. There we are



to be selfish both with our time and in our thoughts.

We are to be selfish with our time because so many things in this world struggle to draw our attention away from things spiritual and toward things material. So many other obligations and expectations are forced on each of us that we find ourselves giving up first the things that matter the most—the times of spiritual strengthening and growth.

Be selfish about those times.

We are also to be selfish in our thoughts during our personal prayer and study time. That means that we are supposed to close the world out from our thoughts and our attention, and it means that we are to apply what we read first and foremost to ourselves.

God never intended for us to read His Word without applying to ourselves what we find there. Bible reading becomes little more than a High School Literature 101 assignment—if we fail to be very selfish with our thoughts when reading and meditating!

—Pastor Michael Roehl

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." --Jesus (in John 5:39)

"And who is sufficient for these things? . . . Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant . . . "
(2 Cor. 2:16, 3:5f.)

"Who is sufficient for these things?"

A chance visitor to our Sunday church service will think we are mentally weird to say so affirmatively: "We are by nature sinful and unclean, and we have sinned against God by thought, word, and deed." That is as much as saying, "I am an awful person morally; I'm so bad, I was born bad; and even now I still am a loser."

Now how can you say things like that about yourself and mean it—unless something really mind-and-heart bog-gling has happened to you on the inside and has rearranged the way you think of yourself? It's pretty awesome!

Reminds me of the time I was hitchhiking home for a Christmas vacation and got a ride outside Milwaukee with an ex-serviceman in a Jeepster convertible. He soon learned I was a Lutheran theology student, and somewhere near Chicago, as we were sharing thoughts about God and the world, I needed to make the point that no human is sufficient by self to fix up his soul; so I asserted that by God's standards of morality, I was a lost cause, not anywhere good enough to escape hell.

That caused such a knee-jerk reaction on the driver that he just about lost it at 70 mph! Evidently I had touched a raw nerve; he could see no sense in such an attitude of self-worthlessness! He sputtered, "If you keep centering on that idea about yourself, you're going

to go crazy!" Wanting to avoid any more tire-screaming, I backed off.

But it was a point worth making, wasn't it? We are not sufficient of ourselves to be suitable to God, and we are brought to know that and to say so!

We call it the Confession of Sins. What power on Earth can get people to think of themselves as poor, undeserving, wretched sinners? No human is able by and of himself to administer His Word to our proud hearts and bring us to such self-exposure that we can admit it to ourselves before God! But God does it.

Further, what power on Earth enables anyone to get such words to cross his lips in a public place? It goes so contrary to human nature; it is so opposed to the love of self—that only the drawing of His love can make us willing, ready, and able to say so to Him and to one another in the Christian assembly! That's truly marvelous—it's a genuine miracle!

But what's the need of it? What's the good of it?

I once read of a medieval city that had locked its gates against strangers during a plague, lest an infected foreigner bring the plague into their town. They did not realize, of course, that the plague was already inside the citadel, and the locked city gate was only obstructing rescuers. In just the same



way a soul locked tight against God falls victim of its own disease already contracted and incubating. Once that awful and saving truth is realized, the bars can be let down in order to give access to the Rescuer. That's why God works to bring us sinners to recognize our problem; our hearts already diseased need Jesus to apply His Red Cross healing. We are not sufficient of ourselves to do our own cleansing; our

souls need a total transfusion; we need the saving blood of Jesus to cure our fatal plague.

Confession of sins is absolutely wonderful; God brings us to it out of His great love for us; He opens the doors of our hearts to admit to Him that we need Him desperately. And thus we are brought to turn our faces to Him with our confession of need: "Therefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And we have not yet become jaded to the response of the servant of the Word, "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given His only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgives us all our sins!"

Maybe someone else got that far with another soldier (or civilian) on a long car trip! Maybe you did?



FROM A PASTOR'S DESK—

GRACE Means 'Free and Clear'

Mike and Jessie sat nervously in the lobby of their small-town bank. About ten years before, they had taken a leap of faith by buying their first home. It took some adjustments to get used to paying the mortgage each month, but with hard work they were able to stay on top of it—that is, until Mike lost his job. When the unemployment checks ran out, they got behind on their credit cards and finally on their mortgage. Now they were expecting the bank officer to call them in to say, "I'm sorry, but we're going to have to foreclose on you." Instead, much to their surprise

and relief, the banker called them in to give them a different message: "We hate to lose a customer, and we have faith that things will turn around for you. What we'd like to do is to refinance your mortgage and extend it out to thirty years again. We think the lower monthly payment will be one that you can handle." Mike could hardly stop shaking the man's hand; he and Jessie were so grateful!

If God treated us all that way, we would have to give Him our thanks for His generosity, wouldn't we? If God wanted to, He could tell us, "You've

done many things I've told you not to do, and neglected to do the things you should have. You're way over your head in debt to Me, but I'll give you a way to pay Me back. Dedicate your life to My service, and with My help you'll find the way to finally reach your heavenly home." Yes, you'd have to call that a generous offer. ... But that's NOT God's message in the gospel at all!

For a picture of how God actually operates in the heavenly real estate market, imagine this unlikely scene: Mike and Jessie sit down in the bank President's office. He says to them, "I see that you're so far behind in your debts that there's no hope of ever digging out. By all rights, I could put you out on the street. Instead, what I'm going to do is tear up this mortgage." (Riiiiip!) "The home is yours, free and clear!"

Their jaws drop. In shock and joy, Mike and Jessie can only stammer their thank-you's, and resolve to recommend this banker to all their friends!

Of course, this sounds impossible. A bank can't stay in business by giving away homes, can it? Yet a heavenly

home is far more valuable, isn't it? Would God really offer these homes for FREE? Amazingly, yes, He does. Not that the price of full forgiveness was cheap—the heavenly mansion that God offers came at a very steep cost. The key is that it was a cost that was fully and finally paid by someone else. God's own Son took your mortgage of sin and paid it in full with His very life in obedience to the Law and His death on Calvary's cross. Our sins sent Jesus to the grave, and His resurrection is the ultimate proof that God has now made you free from your staggering debt!

So if your conscience has ever weighed on you like a past-due mortgage—and it should, because everybody sins—just remember that, because of Jesus' payment for you, your title to heaven is free and clear! "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

—This article was written for the clergy column of a local newspaper; the pastor is Bruce Naumann, Grace Lutheran Church, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota



THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

The next national political campaign is already heating up. Politics is in the air. We are already being subjected to hype, personal attack, mud slinging, deceit, character assassination, lies, boasting, misrepresentation and confusion. If our system of elections is the best example of the democratic process in action, it also reveals the consequences of Satan's

deceit in the Garden of Eden.

As citizens of heaven living on this Earth, we look with longing eyes for the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. While we wait, we are concerned about the nation in which we live. It is our home away from Home. Therefore, we want to let our light shine as our Father exhorts us, and thus be an instrument for blessing

in our nation. The light of the Christian shines as a reflection of our gracious God when we believe in Him, trust in Him, and live according to His will.

Our Lord did not institute a particular form of government. Nonetheless, He did institute civil authority (Romans 13) for our benefit, and has told us to be subject to it. Jesus Himself lived on Earth during the time of the corrupt Roman government. When the Pharisees sought to discredit Him, they asked Him about paying taxes. Jesus said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:21). The apostles also lived under the burden of a corrupt civil government. Neither Jesus nor the apostles counseled overthrow of the government (see 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

In our country we speak of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Who then is the government? We are. We elect from among our own those who represent us. Luther said that nations sometimes get the kind of government they deserve. If those in authority are less than we expect or desire, we should first of all

look at ourselves. We should examine the demands we place on our representatives. It is not an easy task to serve in authority when people with different moral, social, and political agendas are pressuring an elected or appointed official. We expect disagreement over programs.

Our nation shall likely endure through different tax reforms, recession, unemployment and whatever comes out of the White House or Congress. Yet it cannot endure but will reap divine judgment when callousness toward the Lord, immorality, indecency, lying, cheating, and lovelessness become a way of life! We have the right to expect decency, morality, and truth from our representatives. But ask again: Do we as citizens measure up to the decency, morality, and truth we expect of those whom we elect? How do we act when we are in a place of authority?

Repent and pray. Pray for forgiveness and wisdom for yourself and your family. Remember to pray for our nation and for those elected to serve. And remember, the Lord makes all things work out to the benefit of His children on Earth.

Remember further, that above all else it is righteousness which reaps blessing for this nation; therefore live righteously before God. Live your faith here while you wait the end of faith in heaven.

Above all, pray for God's grace that you be kept strong in faith in Christ Jesus, that when life in this vale of tears is ended you may enter into the eternal Home.

Yes, pray, and continue in the Word!

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

“That We Might Have Hope” (Rom. 15:4)

Daniel Chapter 5

BELSHAZZAR’S FEAST

One thing that becomes evident when studying history is how often rulers fail to learn from the mistakes of their ancestors. How often don't children repeat the same sins of their parents, even after seeing the devastating effects that sin can have on their lives! Such is the insidious nature of sin.

In today's lesson from the Old Testament, we will hear how Belshazzar, king of Babylon, failed to learn from the mistakes of his ancestor, King Nebuchadnezzar.

In Nebuchadnezzar's day, no one rivaled his earthly power. But power and pride often walk together. In spite of having seen God's power revealed in the sparing of the three men from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar boasted in vanity: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30).

In response to this attitude, God saw fit to humble the king by causing him to go insane and to live as a "beast of the field." After learning his lesson, Nebuchadnezzar was restored to power and uttered these repentant words: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan. 4:37).

A Message On the Wall

Fast-forward thirty years. Belshazzar, a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar, was now on the throne of Babylon. He surely was aware of the pride of his ancestor and the judgment received because of it.

Did Belshazzar learn from the mistake of his forefather? No! In fact, in Daniel chapter 5 Belshazzar is holding "a great feast for a thousand of his lords." As was customary, wine was drunk on such occasions. In his arrogance Belshazzar commanded that the gold and silver vessels taken from the temple at Jerusalem be used in his celebration—using this opportunity to praise the gods of Babylon, those made of "gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone." Not even Nebuchadnezzar had desecrated those items intended for worship-use of the true God.

It was now time for Belshazzar to be humbled. Suddenly "the fingers of a man's hand" appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the banquet hall. Belshazzar became so frightened his knees knocked and his face grew pale. He was so desperate to have the message interpreted that he offered a purple garment, a gold necklace, and the third highest position in the government to anyone who could tell him

the meaning of the message. But none of the king's wise men could help him.

Finally, the queen suggested that Daniel be called, since he had been able to help Nebuchadnezzar with the interpretation of his dreams.

In spite of being surrounded by a hostile audience, Daniel interpreted the dooming message for the king. Daniel told Belshazzar that he should have known better than to blaspheme the God who had humbled his father Nebuchadnezzar: "... the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified" (Dan. 5:23). The four-word message, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN," meant that Belshazzar's kingdom had been numbered, and it was finished; that Belshazzar had been weighed in the balances and found wanting; that his kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

The Lord's judgment was swift, for that very night Belshazzar was slain, and the Babylonian empire fell.

Beware Of Pride!

What can we learn from this account in Daniel? Obviously, the first lesson is directed towards the sin of pride. The "gods" may be different, but how often do we attempt to place ourselves above God, to glory in our accomplishments and in our "kingdoms"? Whenever we use our gifts, financial or other, in glorifying the created rather than the Creator, we too are guilty of pride. Thank God for the humbling that He provides us when we are tempted by the sin of pride.

Let this also serve as a lesson to those in a position of authority, including our country's highest political lead

. . . What can we learn from this account in Daniel? Obviously, the first lesson is directed towards the sin of pride. The "gods" may be different, but how often do we attempt to place ourselves above God . . . ?

ers. Because of the unparalleled strength of our country, we particularly need to guard against the sin of pride. The Lord's will is mightier than money, land, or weapons. May the Lord grant us humble leaders who acknowledge the true source of all power.

Finally, let us seek wisdom from above to recognize and avoid the mistakes of our ancestors. The power of the Holy Spirit in God's Word is greater than the power of sin. Although we are conceived and born in sin and thus in need of a Savior, we are not doomed to repeat the sins of those who came before us. Whether the sin be divorce, alcoholism, addiction, laziness, bigotry, and so on, God provides us the power to break the cycle of sin in our lives.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). To this end, help us, dear Savior.

—Prof. Joseph Lau



Nathan Libby, Jon Kelly, Dale Thom on graduation day at ILHS, Eau Claire.

"CLOSE COMMUNION"

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

Fifth In A Series

The practice of Close Communion can be quite a burden for pastors, and rightly so. Anxiety and concern can occur, especially in view of Ezekiel chapter 3:17-21, where, as the watchman of the congregation, the pastor is to speak warnings to the wicked and the righteous when they commit sins, with dire consequences to himself if it is not done.

The Lord's Supper is a corporate meal. But it is at the same time a private absolution or remission of sins, administered by the pastor for each individual communicant. The Sacrament is to be received with joy and thanksgiving, but not without true penitence. Our theology is the "theology of the cross," not a "theology of glory" in the sense of just feelin' good.

Dr. Martin Luther's strong words to communicants still ring in our ears: "Repent, and that honestly! If not, you can just as well go to the devil by yourself, without my absolution, and besides, by your guilt drag me along without my guilt. Nay, man; I say: You go to the devil, I shall stay here; I am not pastor to go to the devil with everybody, but to bring everybody with me to God."

The temptation is to control the situation 100%. And now comes the other concern—that of legalism. And so, today's pastor must always be on guard against laxity on the one hand and unnecessary rigor on the other. And he must be aware of his own lim-



itations in dealing with such spiritual things and also take the cup and bread with great relief and joy.

And a pastor will endeavor to retain a friendliness of spirit. The members will do likewise—towards their pastor and their fellow members. With true Christian tenderness and affection, many problems that arise may be dealt with by good and honest (penitent) people, under God. Admonition and consolation and encouragement remain on-going requirements/privileged responsibilities until the very day that God calls us out of this life.

Law and Gospel preaching and teaching at the church help to retain a buoyant and lively Christian spirit among members. But instruction and review should also take place in the home. The *Small Catechism* should be reviewed regularly, at least on a monthly basis (even just the "enchiridion," the bare Six Chief Parts apart from the explanations—although those pages should be covered frequently also).

—From MARTIN LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM (Sydow edition)

CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS

For those who are about to partake of the Lord's Supper:

1. *Do you believe that you are a sinner?*
Yes, I believe that I am a sinner.
2. *How do you know this?*
I know this from the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.
3. *Are you sorry for your sins?*
Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.
4. *What have you deserved to receive from God because of your sins?*
I have deserved His anger and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation.
5. *Do you also hope to be saved?*
Yes, this is my hope.
6. *Whom do you then trust?*
I trust in my dear Lord, Jesus Christ.
7. *Who is Christ?*
Christ is God's Son, true God and man.
8. *How many gods are there?*
There is only one God, but three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
9. *What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?*
He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins.
10. *Did the Father also die for you?*
No, the Father is God only, as is the Holy Spirit; but the Son is true God and true man; He shed His blood and died for me.
11. *How do you know this?*
I know this from the holy Gospel and from the words of the sacrament and by His body and blood which are given me as a pledge in the sacrament.
12. *What are those words?*
Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread. And when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
In the same way He took the cup, after supper, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

(There is a total of 23 "CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS." The remainder will appear with the next installment in the "Close Communion" series. — Editor)

The *Small Catechism* is the handbook of the Lutheran Church—good preparation for Communion, especially when the CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS (For those who are about to

partake of the Lord's Supper) are used also.*

—Pastor Em. Warren Fanning

* See Questions 1-12 of the "Christian Questions" in this issue. — Editor

Understanding Our Faith

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

But this country will eventually fade away. When the Lord God comes in judgment, this nation, with all others on the Earth, will disappear. That is why the Christian looks for a better land. . . .



FLAG or CROSS?



"CHURCHES TURN TO FLAG FOR COMFORT" was the headline of a recent article in the newspaper. This of course is the assessment of the writer of the article. She wrote that "The American flag has replaced the cross as the most visible symbol in many churches across the country since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Even the pledge of allegiance has replaced the Nicene or Apostles' Creeds at some worship services. The emphasis on the flag instead of the cross is not appreciated by all, however."

We would agree.

In the weeks since September 11th including the war in Iraq, there has been a surge of patriotism. People all across our land have been flying the flag. The flag is flying at the parsonage. Christians are also patriots. It is surely

appropriate to have a heart for the country in which we live, and according to the will of God to pray for it and its leaders. Moreover, yes, Christians who have a heart for this land and nation will pray that righteousness may prevail in it, even as they pray that the Lord will turn the hearts of the people to Him.

But this country will eventually fade away. When the Lord God comes in judgment, this nation, with all others on the Earth, will disappear. That is why the Christian looks for a better land and an enduring city, the heavenly Jerusalem, to which all believers in the Savior Jesus Christ will go.

It is a better land and an enduring city because in the midst of it is the throne of God. In it there will be no more sorrow, tears, sin, or death, only

joy forevermore at the right hand of God. The residents of that country eternal in the heavens shall have peace far greater than that for which we earnestly pray for our nation in its present crisis.

Therefore, they who desire that country will keep the cross of the Lord Jesus as their focus.

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

When the woes of life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me;
Lo, it glows with peace and joy.
(TLH #354)

The beauty of the cross lies in the fact that it was the altar upon which our Lord Jesus was sacrificed for our sins.

It was the instrument by which He removed our sins from us, having taken them upon Himself. It is the true source of comfort for the Christian because it speaks to us of the righteousness of Christ, which has been credited to our account. It is the righteousness that is acceptable to the Father and the basis upon which the Father shall welcome believers in Christ into the home in heaven.

Comfort in the flag? No! Comfort is in the CROSS!

Thy cross I'll place before me,
Its saving power be o'er me,
Wherever I may be;
Thine innocence revealing,
Thy love and mercy sealing,
The pledge of truth and constancy.
(TLH #171)



Editorial Comment --

UNIVERSALISM — AND POLITICS — MARCHES ON IN THE LCMS

This writer has subscribed to *Christian News* (CN) magazine for many years, doing so mainly to keep informed on what is going on in the religious and church world—and particularly in the Lutheran Church outside our own synodical borders.

Seldom do we take the time to read the 28-page weekly, which is as lengthy as many secular newspapers. What we do is "read" CN the way we do the newspaper—scan the headlines, check the editorial page, and note the names of those who write letters to the editor. On occasion, we pause to read more thoughtfully.

For the last year and a half or so we have saved ourselves considerable amounts of time by noting—and skipping—CN articles having to do with

the "Benke Case" in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). Lately, however, certain headlines have caught our attention—headlines which suggest that a synodical rift might be in the offing in the second largest Lutheran synod in America. The major problem has to do with LCMS Atlantic District President David Benke's participation in a post 9/11 ecumenical prayer service in Yankee Stadium (see box). [The January and February '02 *Lutheran Spokesman* had articles, with comment, regarding Benke's role in that service.]

Contrary to the conflicting opinions/positions on the matter within the LCMS (of which CN is chock-full week after week), with us there is no question—repeat, praise God, no ques-

tion!—that Benke's participation in this unionistic (worship with other professed Christians with whom one is not in doctrinal agreement), syncretistic (worship even with those who profess non-Christian religions) Yankee Stadium prayer service was and is contrary to the divinely-inspired and clearly expressed will of God in the Bible. There is also no question, as far as we are concerned, that Benke was rightly dismissed (at first) when proper channels were followed (after reviewing the case, LCMS second vice president, also Lutheran Hour speaker, Dr. Wallace Schulz, had suspended Benke).

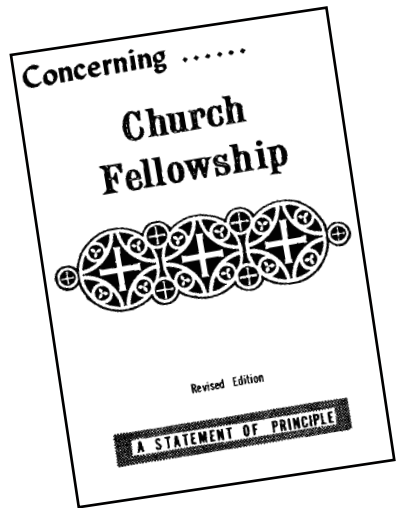
To the considerable dismay of synod conservatives, Schulz's action was subsequently overruled by a Dispute Resolution Panel (topping it off, not only has Schulz been suspended from his synodical position, but he also has been "booted out of his radio job").

Referring to Our CCF

When we say there is "no question" on our part, what do we mean? One of our CLC doctrinal confessions, Concerning Church Fellowship (CCF), has a number of paragraphs which have something to say in answer to arguments (rationalizations?!) being advanced by the LCMS pro-Benke faction.

For example:

"A distinction has been made between prayer fellowship and joint prayer. While it is granted that the general fellowship of prayer with heterodox bodies is out of the question, it is argued that under proper safe-guards a joint prayer on certain occasions would not be objectionable. This dis-



tion is certainly not justified by any difference in the inherent quality or nature of the prayer that would be offered on such a special occasion ... " (CCF, para. 78)

"We must reject and condemn this distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer as a device for allowing fellowship where fellowship has been forbidden. The proponents of this distinction have found it necessary to state that the passages calling for separation (Rom. 16:17, II Cor. 6:14-18; Gal. 1:6-9, I Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 1:10-14; 3:10-11; Mt. 7:15; II John 7-11) are entirely directed against reprobates, anti-Christian errorists, enemies of Christ, in short, infidels. This sweeping assertion they must make in order to justify their 'occasional joint prayer.' ... Thereby it is manifest that they are opening the door not only to joint prayer, but to complete church fellowship with all those whom one cannot prove to be hardened and faithless enemies of Christ. ... " (CCF, para. 80; cf. also para. 56f. et al.)

As the CCF paragraph suggests, proponents of an anti-scriptural pos-

ture or position on prayer fellowship often have to skirt the applicable Bible passages. This very thing is happening in Missouri these days (more evidence, to our mind, of the politics involved). We quote from *Christian News*: "The April 11, 2003 ruling of the Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP) adjudicating the David Benke case was finally made public in May 12, 2003. It is a study in how to avoid giving clear answers to what were very clear questions. The 21 complainants had asked that theological answers be given to theological questions, but it simply didn't happen. Instead of giving serious consideration to the serious charges of violations of the First and Second Commandments, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution and Bylaws of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the breaking of the oath of office for a district president, the DRP chose to ignore both the Scriptures and the Confessions and examined, instead, synodical resolution 3-07A. ... In fact the Panel's decision makes over 25 ref-

erences to the controversial resolution and an additional 35 references to bylaws *but fails to make even a single reference to the Holy Scriptures!*" (Our emphasis, *DISPUTE RESOLUTION PANEL FAILS TO CONSIDER CHARGES AGAINST BENKE*, *Christian News*, May 26, 2003, pp. 1,10).

As the dispute rages on, LCMS President Dr. Gerald Kieschnick is in a key position. Unfortunately, reports are that Kieschnick is clearly in Benke's corner. Four "faithful vice presidents" (conservative) are said to have "pleaded with Dr. Kieschnick not to proceed against synod doctrine by defending Benke. . . . Dr. Kieschnick has been unmoved by any argument from the Bible. He only refers to obscure interpretations of CTCR documents." (Quote from "*A Handbook on the Synod Controversy . . .*")

Both sides in the controversy see difficult days ahead. Benke is quoted as saying, "It appears that tensions have been heightened and will be taken

NUB OF THE MATTER

From a small booklet—which was prepared by, and is being made available to, concerned Missouri Synod Lutherans—called "*A Handbook on the Synod Controversy: What's REALLY Going On?*", we quote only a few paragraphs which, as far as we are concerned, lay out the Missouri problem clearly enough. (The complete *Handbook* appeared in the March 3, 2003 *Christian News*.)

We quote first a few sentences which give indication of the "politics" being played over this issue:

" . . . The situation became a crisis . . . when Dr. Benke decided to defend himself in the court of public opinion rather than pursuing reconciliation with those who had raised their formal concerns. Dr. Benke hired a law firm despite the fact that our church changed its bylaws over 10 years ago to exclude lawyers from the process of dealing with disagreements between Christians."

A bit later the booklet mentioned sets forth the nub of the issue threatening to divide Missouri: *" . . . At Yankee Stadium, the organizers wanted to treat all denominations and religions equally. They had no intention of letting Jesus be proclaimed as The Way, the Truth, and the Life' apart from whom is no salvation or true comfort. Everything was blended together in one service. Moslems, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, and atheists all took part in this common event which mixed everything together."*

"Dr. Benke played a major part in planning the service, even though he has claimed that he wasn't intending to be syncretistic. Whether or not it was intentional doesn't really matter. The net effect was that it gave the impression that it is only important for people to follow their own 'faith traditions,' to worship the 'supreme being' in the way that seems best to them. This false belief, however, cannot be overlooked by any Christian who lovingly cares for the lost and longs to direct them to Christ. It certainly isn't something in which a Christian should take part."

to the national convention in 2004. Politically, it will be a battle. . . . There is danger of a formal rift" (5/26/03 CN, p. 10). Schulz, speaking for conservatives, is quoted: ". . . . To make their case, the panel simply quoted a convention resolution. If this approach is permitted to stand, there will be chaos in our synod since the Word of God will become subject to the word of man. . . . the future of a historically Bible-based denomination (is) at stake" (same ref.).

Dear reader, we take no delight in what we report. There is no joy in watching a once staunchly confessional Lutheran synod—the synod of "the American Luther," Dr. C. F. W. Walther—self-destruct. But it appears to be happening before our eyes.

Keeping Our Own Balance

For our part, we would be in sympathy with the LCMS conservatives in this struggle, right? Well, many of us see those very conservatives as part of the problem, inasmuch as they (including CN editor Rev. Herman Otten) have for many long years remained in fellowship with a synod which has refused to exercise doctrinal discipline against false teachers. More than that, by consistently refusing to apply the Bible's separation passages (cf. CCF quote above), these would-be conservatives belie the title of "conservative" as applicable to them.

The CN editor (once called by Dr. Kieschnick "the most powerful man in Lutheranism" due to Otten's considerable influence through CN's wide circulation) repeatedly indicts the LCMS (though the synod has refused to place him—the outspoken dissident he has been—on its roster of ordained ministers) as "another one of the U.S.'s 'any-

thing goes' denominations." One time Otten put it like this: "The LCMS is now almost a 'Broadening Church' which no longer has any real binding doctrinal standards. Convention after convention adopts fine scriptural resolutions but LCMS leaders seldom take any action against those on the LCMS clergy roster who reject what the Bible clearly teaches, the position of Lutheran Confessions, and what LCMS conventions resolve" (CN, Jan. 7, '02, p. 4).

Missourian "conservatives," where is the scriptural support for your remaining with a synod which condones rather than avoids those who "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine" which has been learned (cf. Rom. 16:17-18)?

Furthermore and finally, in the latest CN (May 26, '03) its editor makes a convincing argument backing up the editorial title *UNIVERSALISM ADVANCING IN LCMS*. "The decision of the 3 man LCMS dispute panel exonerating Benke and reinstating him as president of the Atlantic district is simply further proof that universalism is growing within the LCMS. LCMS President Kieschnick has repeatedly said that he believes that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. However, the record shows that he maintains that the LCMS should be broad enough for his close friends like Benke who refuse to confess that Christianity is the only divinely revealed faith, Christians and Jews do not worship the same God Christians worship, and non-Christians are lost if they do not confess Jesus Christ as their only Savior from sin" (p. 6).

The (political) beat goes on, and it is sad to behold.

—Pastor Paul Fleischer

Annual closing events at ILC



Immanuel Lutheran High School, Eau Claire, Wis. Graduates on their big day, May 24, 2003.

After the semester's work stood accomplished, exams finished, grades reported, and the athletic agenda almost completed—comes the sigh of relief. One can sense it in the evening air as in their lagoons near Lowes Creek the spring peepers are athrill with release from winter hibernation. You could hear it on the athletic field as the classes competed in a camaraderie of sporting events. You felt it in the Class Day festivities, as both academic and extra-curricular awards were granted to high achievers—and even in the by-now traditional spoofing of faculty, staff, and students, which followed.

This year's closing events had an added feature: amid the afternoon's agenda, friends of Lowell Moen shared a social hour celebration of his upcoming retirement. Among the well-wishes and congratulations flavored with cake and beverages, Lowell was awarded a plaque as memento of his long career in service to the CLC and ILC.. (Another note on this subject is scheduled for the next *Spokesman*.)

In the closing concerts on Friday evening, ILC students brought their

musical offerings to the assembly, and with plenty of power. We clicked off another notch in the winding-down of the school year. Graduation morning would just about complete the cycle of official events.

When I entered the Fieldhouse on Saturday morning and found a seat in the first row at the foot of the stage, my vantage point was backward, courtesy of intruders who had come by night and reversed the arrangement of seating/podium/bleachers for the graduation ceremony.

Be that as it may, the department



Lowell and Rita Moen receiving well-wishes and congratulations



NESTLED IN THE QUIET BEAUTY
OF THE TALL GREEN PINES,
GOD HAS SET OUR ALMA MATER,
GUIDING HEARTS AND MINDS.
BUILT ON JESUS' WORDS OF PROMISE --
O LORD, BLESS HER WELL --
THUS MAY E'ER OUR ALMA MATER
BE IMMANUEL.

heads rallied, the faculty promenaded in from the stage end, the graduates were given their diplomas at the other end of the gym, and President Pfeiffer delivered his fine address from a hastily improvised stage.

To be specific, Pres. Pfeiffer encouraged the graduates with "you can do it," basing his admonition on sections of Exodus, chapter thirteen. Were the children of Israel ready to say, "We can do it," when the Lord God opened an entrance to their promised land? Were they capable of facing the enemies of the Lord? The faith-weakened majority declined His assurance and support; yet by heeding the covenant that God had given them—and heeding it in their hearts—they could safely cross over

into hostile territory.

Our young Christians, though also faltering due to poor judgment and the self-confidence of youth, can be carefully optimistic about entering the land that lies before them, assured that they can do all things godly through Christ, who strengthens them. "In Jesus you will more than conquer," Pres. Pfeiffer assured the audience. In such a manner and with such a heavenly Champion, "you can do it."

Since the stage was being used by spectators, the diploma-awarding ceremony had a low-profile aspect and was less visible to many of us, who consequently depended on the printed list and the PA system to tell us that two Seminarians were presented to the Church, one BA student was graduate-ready for the Seminary, two BS students graduated as teachers, and five received the two-year AA degree.

In the high school department, thirty-two received their diplomas from Principal Schierenbeck. Pres. Pfeiffer invited folks to come to his end of the gym if they wished to take photos of graduates, and the accompanying photos are by courtesy of the parents of a graduate.

May the Lord of the Church bring all His children safely into His promised land, despite all the obstacles on planet Earth, for Jesus' sake!

—Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch, Reporter

Graduation 2003 at Immanuel Lutheran High School, Mankato, Minnesota—

“Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me...”

Sunday, June 8, began cool and rainy. However, the gloomy conditions could not hide brightly colored sunflowers adorning the shoulders of 15

high school graduates nor diminish the happiness beaming from their faces. That joy and happiness was echoed in several anthems of praise offered to the Lord by the assembled congregation.

Through the Scripture reading (1 Corinthians 1:18-25, 2:6-10), the apostle Paul pointed the assembly to God's true wisdom. Such wisdom is revealed and received only through the working of the Holy Spirit. How fitting, therefore, to observe graduation on Pentecost—the day on which we celebrate the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts.

Mr. Lane Fischer (Immanuel's 3rd/4th grade teacher & High School Choir Director) addressed the graduates by "Remembering the Lord's Goodness" and giving "Encouragement for the Future." Noting that this year's class is the 40th graduating class of Immanuel, Mr. Fischer directed them to recall the Lord's goodness in bringing them to this day and to give thanks to Him for His extravagant grace.

The graduates were reminded of just how different their lives would be if they didn't know Jesus and His saving love. Comfort in sorrow, certainty in trials, and confidence for the future are just a few of the gifts God gives out of His grace. The graduates were also encouraged in three specific areas: continue to make the Word of God the priority; continue to honor fathers and mothers; and avoid society's "live for the moment" attitude by being faithful stewards of physical and financial resources. In conclusion, the graduates were thanked for their labors in the work of God's kingdom and for being an encouragement to their fellow saints.

Ross Libby spoke on behalf of the graduating class. The Immanuel Grade School Choir and the High School Choir gave choral presentations. An ensemble of graduates' parents concluded the service by singing, "Go My Children with My Blessing."

Thus fifteen young men and women are sent forth to pursue further education, the workforce, or the military. For all graduates of 2003—and indeed for all of God's children—we offer the prayer of the graduates' Class Hymn:

Lord, take my hand and lead me upon life's way;
Direct, protect, and feed me from day to day.
Without Your grace and favor I go astray.
So take my hand, O Savior, and lead the way.
(Worship Supplement 2000, #784)

—*Pastor Wayne Eichstadt, Reporter*

Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain pictures of the Immanuel, Mankato, graduation by print time.--Editor

COVER: Matt Schaser