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“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35.

“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105.

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“Thanks be
unto God
for His
unspeakable
Gift!”

II Corinthians 9:15



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture,** what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are *"perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

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Remembering Luther's Birth

"Remember them ...who have spoken unto you the Word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

—Hebrews 13:7

November 10, 1483 — What a significant date for every true Lutheran! It was on that day that Martin Luther, the reformer, was born in Eisleben, Germany.



He was not the first one who attempted to cry out against the errors that had crept into the Church down through the years. The Italian priest, Jerome Savonarola (1452-1498), and the Bohemian priest, John Hus (1373-1415), had protested as well and then were burned at the stake for their testimony. But God had decided that the time had finally come to cleanse the Church of such soul-destroying errors and to bring the glorious light of the Holy Gospel back to the people through the work of His chosen instrument, Martin Luther.

Recently two books made their appearance from the Roman Catholic Church: *Not by Faith Alone — The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* and *NOT BY SCRIPTURE ALONE — A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura*. Both of these books have been given the official approval [*Nihil obstat* (“Nothing stands in the way”) and *Imprimatur* (“Let it be printed”)] of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. What a coincidence that these books from the Roman Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2:1-12) should be made available to the public precisely during the time in which we observe the Reformation and the work of God’s Reformer, Martin Luther! There is **no** *Biblical* evidence for the Roman Catholic doctrine of gaining heaven by our works. On the contrary, “*a man is justified by faith **without the deeds of the law***” (Romans 3:28); “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that **not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God, **not of works**, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9); “*And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work*” (Romans 11:6).

What about the faith of Martin Luther? Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as taught in God’s Word was the essence of Luther’s teaching. What joy flooded his heart and calmed his troubled conscience

once he came to the knowledge of that truth in God's Word! Listen to his own words: "Then the whole Scripture was opened to me and also heaven itself. Immediately I felt as if born anew, as if I had found the open gate of paradise." And upon what was his faith based? Not upon his feelings, but upon God's Word alone. Luther declared, "To me God's Word is above all, and the majesty of God is on my side."

And this remained his firm conviction until the end, as we hear him declare in the last sermon which he preached in Wittenberg: "I shall swerve not one finger's breadth from the mouth of Him who said: 'Hear ye Him.'" Finally, when Luther lay on his deathbed on February 18, 1546, again it was God's Word which comforted him and which he openly confessed before the witnesses present. If Luther had doubted the truth of his teachings, or if he would have recanted on his deathbed, everyone would have looked upon that which he had preached and written with utter disgust. While the enemies of Luther spread terrible ridiculous lies about his death, the group of witnesses who were present heard him as he recited John 3:16 and prayed: "O my heavenly Father, Thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thou God of all comfort, I thank Thee that Thou hast revealed unto me Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, on whom I believe, whom I have preached and confessed, whom I have loved and lauded, whom the wicked pope and all the ungodly abuse, persecute, and blaspheme. I pray Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, let my poor soul be committed into Thy keeping. O heavenly Father, I know assuredly that, although I must give up this body and be removed from this life, I shall still abide with Thee eternally, and that no one can pluck me out of Thy hand." When asked by his colleagues if he was willing to die faithful to Christ and the doctrine he had preached, he answered distinctly: "Yes."

If Luther had preached and spread his own ideas and notions, then most assuredly we would be sinning were we to follow his example; then he would have been nothing else than a servant of the father of all lies. But, thanks be to God, he preached God's Word; and therefore our faith is not based upon Luther, the man, but rather upon God's Word, which he so courageously confessed. We Lutheran Christians of today should be more earnest and conscientious in striving to follow the unswerving faith which Luther had in the Word of God. We should hold steadfastly to that Word so that we are not as little children which are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). For only those truly "remember" Luther who believe and confess all of God's Word and hold it to be the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice!

—M. L. N.

O Give Thanks unto the Lord!

*“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,
because His mercy endureth forever!” —Psalm 118:1*

By the world's standards, this country of ours is one of the most affluent if not the richest land on the face of the earth. For, in spite of pockets of poverty here and there, and aside from scattered underemployment, unemployment, and even homelessness which have beset so many people in our rapidly-changing economy— the average American today **has** and **earns more** *per capita* than his counterpart anywhere else in the world. All one has to do is watch the news on television, or some “special” about so-called “third world” countries, or an appeal from social relief agencies like “Feed the Children” to be struck with the **great bounty** that we enjoy as Americans compared with other people!

And yet, by-and-large, our countrymen are notoriously ungrateful people (and that's no judgment of hearts!). The very word “thanks” has almost disappeared from our everyday vocabulary, and many parents no longer teach their children to say “thank-you” to people who give them something or do them a favor! Indeed, many regard their standard of living with all its comforts, amenities, and luxuries a sort of “right” which is theirs as Americans, for which they owe no thanks to anyone but **themselves** for their hard work, diligence, and perseverance! And they don't hesitate to add concerning the less fortunate here in this world that “they have only themselves to blame.”

Even we Christians have nothing of which to boast concerning our gratitude to the Lord for His blessings. For our old sinful flesh is just as ungrateful as that of the worldlings round about us, so that we need to be reminded over and again by God Himself in His Word of how much *we owe Him* for His grace and mercy to us poor, undeserving sinners, yea, for ALL His benefits both temporal and spiritual! And that is precisely why the Lord's Psalmist exhorts us in this well-known Scripture text and table prayer: **“O give thanks unto the Lord!”**...not only for His **benevolent providence** of us and of all His creatures, but *especially* for His **enduring mercy** to us poor sinners in Christ Jesus, our Savior!

Indeed, as we look about us in the world and behold the wonders of creation brought forth in the beginning by God Himself using only the power of His almighty Word, we must confess with the Psalmist: “O

Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all! The earth is full of Thy riches!" (104:24). The "heavens" with their innumerable cosmic bodies keeping time like a finely-tuned watch "declare the glory of God," and His unspeakable "handiwork" is evident in the beautiful spacious sky with its magnificent cloud formations and breathtaking sunsets, the Bible tells us (Psalm 19:1). Before man's fall into sin, that terrible act by which all of God's creation became blighted and ruined, "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was **very good**" (Genesis 1:31), incapable of improvement; for it



had been fashioned by Him, who is the epitome of goodness, God Himself. Consequently, when we behold His wonders, which today bear the weaknesses, scars, and imperfections which sin brought upon them, they still appear marvelous in our eyes — far too complex to have come about by pure chance, as the evolutionists claim — far beyond the ability of man to produce even in cheap imitation of God's creation! And we "stand in awe of Him" (Psalm 33:8) as we peer into outer space with electron and satellite-mounted telescopes, as we stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon, as we fly at 600 miles per hour over and through towering cloud formations, and as we watch by means of microphotography the development of a tiny baby in the womb of its mother! Yes, the creation of our own body cries out and demands that we render due thanksgiving to God for His goodness, that we declare with David: "I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made! *Marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well!*" (Psalm 139:14).



—***"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good!"***

But the evidence of God's goodness is not limited to His creation. For the world is not just "coasting along" *on its own*, re-creating itself, maintaining itself in its so-called "ecological balance," nor yet providing for itself as a self-sustaining entity. No, that too is the **Lord's** doing, who not only created all things but, the Bible says, preserves His creatures, "***upholding all things by the Word of His power***" (Hebrews 1:3). In His benevolent providence of us and of all His creatures God further demonstrates His **goodness** in the way He "*preserves man and beast*" (Psalm 36:6) by "*giving them their meat in due season*" (145:15), satisfying their needs, even clothing them and giving them shelter. And this He does **very especially** for **US**, brethren, who "*are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:26), for **US** whose "*heavenly Father,*"

Jesus says, “*knoweth that [we] have need of all these things*” (Matthew 6:32). What things?? We confess with Luther “that He richly and daily provides [us] with all that we need to support this body and life.”

Moreover, in His Kingdom of Power, our “*good*” Lord also rules and governs all things to His own glory, for the welfare and safety of His creatures great and small, and particularly in the interest of His believing children. Accordingly, “He defends [us] against all danger and guards and protects [us] from all evil,” so that we can and should confidently “*cast all [our] care upon Him,*” who careth for us, Peter reminds us (I Peter 5:7). And “all this” our Lord does for us “purely out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in [us].”

This **benevolent providence** is then the FIRST reason for which the Lord’s Psalmist exhorts us: “*O give thanks unto the Lord!*” Don’t just take all these temporal blessings for granted, as if they are “coming to you” as some sort of natural right; —they’re NOT! They are the **gifts** of the Lord’s **goodness and mercy** to us and to all creatures, “for all which it is [our] DUTY [as grateful recipients of these gifts] to **thank** and **praise**, to **serve** and **obey** Him.” —

Ingratitude, on the other hand, is a grievous sin and shame before God, born of selfishness, greed, and sinful pride which boasts, “*My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth!*” (Deuteronomy 8:17). It is the boast of those who “*forget God,*” the Bible tells us, who “*walk after other gods and serve them and worship them*” (v. 19) —**idols** such as Mammon and one’s own Self, the love of which ends up drowning men in destruction and perdition (I Timothy 6:9)! “*O give thanks unto the Lord,*” your all-wise, almighty, and benevolent God, “*for HE [alone] is [truly] good!*”

“... Don’t just take all these temporal blessings for granted, as if they are “coming to you” as some sort of natural right; — they’re NOT! They are the **gifts** of the Lord’s **goodness and mercy** to us .”

But that is surely not the only reason for which we should render Him our thanks. The very **BEST** and **MOST IMPORTANT** reason is “*because His mercy endureth forever.*” The context of the entire 118th Psalm shows without a doubt that the “*mercy*” of which David speaks by inspiration of the Holy Ghost is not merely God’s benevolence (or kindness) to all men, to all His creatures, in His divine providence; but

this is a special *mercy*. God's spiritual gifts, above all other gifts, are the result of His *enduring mercy* and *grace* to us poor undeserving sinners in Christ Jesus, our Savior. *Justifying grace*, the **chief** gift from which all other spiritual gifts flow, is not an *absolute* gift out of God's *sovereign will*, as are His providential gifts in the Kingdom of Power, which all men, even the wicked, and all the animals receive from His hand (Psalm 145:15-16; Matthew 5:45); but His *grace* is bestowed upon the sinner only *for Christ's sake*—in view of the fact that Jesus, by His *vicarious atonement*, paid the price required by God's justice for the world's redemption. He kept God's Law in our place and bore the punishment that we deserve because of our sins, so that now God can be *merciful* to us, *kind* to us wretched, undeserving sinners, for Jesus' sake forgiving us all our iniquities! "*God was in Christ*

“...We Christians have the **most** to be thankful for of all creatures on the face of the earth. For “[we] know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Corinthians 5:19), the God whose “*mercy endureth forever*.”

That is the foremost gift of all, to which the Apostle Paul refers in II Corinthians 9:15, where he says: “*Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!*” It is the gift which we receive **by faith alone** —by faith in the merits of Christ, totally apart from any work or worthiness of our own; and it is that gift from which all other spiritual gifts flow our way! Without that gift of the Lord's **enduring mercy** in Christ Jesus, all His other gifts would be of temporary value only, here in this life; “*for what is a man profited,*” Jesus asks us, “*if he shall gain the whole world [full of temporal benefits] and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul??” (Matthew 16:26).*

We Christians have the **most** to be thankful for of all creatures on the face of the earth. For “[we] know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ;” **we** have the **Means** of His Grace, the precious Gospel and the Sacraments, through which that grace is both announced and conveyed to us; **we** have the gift of His **Holy Spirit**, who works through those Means of Grace in our hearts, who called us to faith in Jesus, enlightened us with His spiritual gifts, sanctified our lives to be conformed to His will and dedicated to His service, and still preserves us in the true and saving faith by Jesus' Word, in which we must continue with all diligence. **We** have the **most** to be thankful for, “*because His mercy endureth forever,*”

even to **us** who have often rewarded His mercy with ingratitude and indifference, with lukewarm affection for His Word and Sacraments, and with lives in which we have all too often served ourselves and failed to serve *Him*. It is indeed of **His enduring mercy** that we have not been consumed by His wrath, that His compassions have not failed us, and that He still extends to us His mercy and grace in the proclamation of His precious Word!

So what are we going to **do** about it? “*Shall we continue in sin,*” in **ingratitude**, in **disregard** of our spiritual blessings, “*that [His] grace may abound??* **God forbid!**,” writes the Apostle Paul in Romans 6, verses 1 and 2. What shall we **do** then? “**O GIVE THANKS unto the Lord, for He is good; because His mercy endureth forever!**” And let us make sure, by God’s grace, that our thanksgiving is not merely the expression of our mouth, but the heartfelt expression of our heart and soul, as we speak to ourselves (Ephesians 5:19) the exhortation of the Psalmist: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities*” as the foremost of His blessings! And let us then put our **actions** where our **mouths** are, and ever more gratefully, ever more diligently day-by-day, gladly *hear*, gladly *learn*, gladly *meditate upon*, and gladly *keep* His precious Word, the “*delivery-wagon,*” Luther called it, in which He conveys all these unspeakable blessings to us; until by His grace we render Him at last the **perfect** thanksgiving that His mercy **deserves**, to the everlasting glory of His grace in Jesus Christ, our Savior!

*Then shall thanks and praise ascending
for Thy mercies without ending
rise to Thee, O Savior blest!
With Thy gracious aid defend us;
let Thy saving Word attend us;
bring us to Thy home of rest! Amen.*

(TLH 282, 4 adapted)

—D. T. M.



Anticipating with Joy Our Savior's Advent

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?”

—I Thessalonians 2:19

An “advent” is a “coming”; when used with reference to the Christian religion, it denotes a coming of Christ. In the above-quoted verse (as well as in the verse that follows), the Apostle Paul is writing about the great joy that the Christians in Thessalonica bring to him and his co-workers, “*Silvanus and Timotheus [Timothy]*” (1:1), especially in connection with the “*coming,*” or advent, of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Last Day. This *advent* of Christ will indeed be a most joyous occasion for all true believers, since it will mark the entrance into heaven for the Christians who are still living, and since it will also include the resurrection and glorification of the bodies of those whose souls have already been taken to heaven. However, there could be no joy in this advent of Christ if not for two other *advents*, namely, His *coming into the world to be our Savior*, and His *coming into our hearts* through the Gospel.

The season of Advent begins every new church-calendar year on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Since it is the season that leads into the celebration of our Savior’s birth, the obvious *advent* that we have as our main focus at this time is the coming of Christ as a baby in Bethlehem. Anticipation of this great advent brought joy and comfort to the Old Testament believers whose saving faith rested in the fulfilling of the Gospel prophecies concerning the future advent and saving work of the Messiah. This joyous anticipation first began for God’s people with the promised advent of the Seed of the woman, who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15) and thus free mankind from the sin, pain, and death that Adam and Eve brought upon themselves and their descendants when they yielded to the devil’s temptation in the Garden of Eden. That the Old Testament Christians anticipated the advent of Christ with much joy is evident from the prophecy recorded in Zechariah 9:9-10: “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of*

Jerusalem. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off. And He shall speak peace unto the heathen; and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” Approximately 4,000 years after the first Gospel promise (*protevangel*), just prior to Christ’s advent in the flesh, Zacharias expressed the joyous confidence of the Old Testament believers, namely, that God would “*perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life*” (Luke 1:72-75).

We can observe how much joy Christ’s advent brought to the believers at that time by noting the reactions of those who were privileged to learn of His birth. When the “*good tidings of great joy*” were proclaimed by an angel to some shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth, they immediately rushed to see the baby in the manger whom the angel identified as “*a Savior, which is Christ the Lord;*” and they spoke of Him to others (Luke 2:10-17). After Simeon had been led by the Spirit into the temple to see the baby Jesus, “*then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God*” in the words of the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:28-32). So also when Anna, the prophetess, saw the baby Jesus, she “*gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*” (Luke 2:38).

Though this glorious coming of the Savior took place over 2,000 years ago, nevertheless it also brings great joy to us Christians still today because of what Christ through His first advent accomplished for our salvation. When the foreordained time had come, Christ, “*who is over all, God blessed forever*” (Romans 9:5), took into His divine Person a true human nature and placed Himself under the requirements and penalty of His own holy Law *as our Substitute* in order to redeem us from the punishment that we deserve by nature on account of our innumerable violations of that Law and thus to bring us into a loving, filial relationship with God. “*When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5). The Gospel assurance that God in Christ reconciled the whole world unto Himself (II Corinthians 5:19) and declared “*peace, good will toward men*” (Luke

2:14) to all people (v. 10) is inextricably connected with the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, we anticipate the celebration of His advent into the flesh (John 1:14) with great joy.

Now in order for a person to receive the blessings of redemption purchased and won for all people by Christ, he must trust and believe in the only-begotten Son of God as his only Savior from sin. *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”* (John 3:36). But how does one become a true believer in Jesus? The Bible tells us that man is not able to bring himself to faith by his own reason or strength — by “making his decision for Christ,” or “asking Jesus into his heart,” or “turning his life over to the Lord” as the Arminian Reformed require people to do. Jesus told His disciples: *“Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you”* (John

“...The Bible tells us that man is **not able** to bring himself to faith by his own reason or strength — by ‘making his decision for Christ,’ or ‘asking Jesus into his heart,’ or ‘turning his life over to the Lord.’”

15:16). On account of the original sin in which we were all conceived and born, none of us by nature are able to come to the Lord (nor do we even *want to* by nature); for the Scriptures describe us in our natural condition as being *spiritually blind* (I Corinthians 2:14), *spiritually dead* (Ephesians 2:1), and *enemies of God* (Romans 8:7-8).

But what about when Jesus says: *“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28)? Does this not imply that an unbeliever *can* choose to come to Christ? No. On the contrary, this verse is an *invitation of the Gospel*, which carries with it the almighty *power of God* to convert the heart and create the saving faith that accepts the gracious invitation. The Gospel is the *incorruptible seed*, which, Peter says, brings about the new birth of faith (I Peter 1:23, 25). Writing to the Romans, the Apostle Paul identifies the Gospel of Christ as *“the power of God unto salvation”* (1:16); and in his prayer for the congregation in Ephesus, Paul emphasizes the fact that it is *God’s almighty power*, not their own, that brought them into the Christian faith: *“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power”* (1:17-19).

So then, even though in our natural condition of sin and unbelief we are both unwilling and unable to come to Him, *the Lord Jesus still graciously comes to us* through the Gospel. Jesus describes this gracious *advent* into our hearts as follows: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). Through the message of God’s loving kindness and forgiveness in the Gospel, Christ graciously knocks on the door of our heart; and it is through this very message of God’s grace that the Holy Ghost works the faith by which we welcome the Lord Jesus into our heart. It is also by the Gospel, received in a believing heart, that Christ comes with the blessing of spiritual *strengthening* — building us up in our faith and the certainty of our forgiveness and salvation (Acts 20:32). This wonderful advent of Christ into our hearts by faith gives us Christians much cause to rejoice, because the benefits of His work of redemption are now our own personal possession. We should, therefore, also eagerly anticipate His *continued* coming to us through His Word and Sacraments in the services of His house, as well as through His Word in our own private use of the Scriptures.



As we ponder the Gospel of Christ in our heart each day for our spiritual edification, we should also keep in mind another glorious *advent* of the Savior, namely, His coming to judge the world in righteousness on the Last Day. In contrast to His *first advent*, in which Christ came in weakness and humility (refraining from the full and constant use of His divine attributes), His *final advent* will be in great power and glory —showing Himself to be the King over all. “When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory” (Matthew 25:31). This great advent does not mark the beginning of the fictitious millennial kingdom on earth that the Reformed are anticipating, but will instead signal the end of the world. In his second epistle, the Apostle Peter wrote: “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (3:10).

This same apostle also wrote by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: “The end of all things is at hand” (I Peter 4:7), which simply means that the Last Day is coming *soon*. At this point, the unbelieving scoffers say: “Hah! Peter surely didn’t know what he was talking about. It has been

almost 2,000 years since he wrote those words, and the world is still standing.” The Apostle Peter was fully aware that such things would be said (II Peter 3:3-4). While it is true that Peter did not know exactly when the Last Day would come, that does not change the fact that he wrote those words by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; therefore, what he wrote about the end of all things being close “*at hand*” was most certainly true at that time, as it is also most certainly true today. Of course, now we are even closer to the Last Day than at the time of Peter.

Since the time of Christ’s visible ascension into heaven, the true believers have been eagerly awaiting His visible return (Acts 1:11), His final advent; and they rightly understand that His return could come at any

time. Shortly before His suffering and death, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the end times and gave them various signs to watch for as indicators of His second coming. These signs include, among other things, wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, floods, the spread of the Gospel into all the world, a general increase in wickedness, and the rise of many false teachers who shall deceive many (Matthew 24:5-14, 37-39; Luke 21:8, 16-17, 25-26; etc.). To a certain degree, those signs were already noticeable at the time when Peter wrote his epistles; and they are, indeed, very noticeable in the world around us today. The various signs of the last times were not given so that we would be able to calculate the exact hour of Christ’s return, but so that we would remain *at all times* watchful and ready for His final, glorious advent. So it was good and proper for the Christians at the time of the apostles to be constantly prepared for the Last Day; and this is true also for us Christians today.”

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While these signs may seem particularly discouraging and depressing at times when we consider all of the spiritual and moral decay so prevalent in the world around us, yet when we think about the future advent of Christ on the Last Day, our hearts should be encouraged and made joyful —knowing that the hour of our deliverance from the sin and suffering of this earthly life is drawing near. Jesus told His disciples: “*When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21:28). Because we can observe these things coming to pass in the world around us, we should, even now, have our heads lifted up with joyous anticipation —

knowing that His visible advent in power and glory could take place very soon (perhaps even today or tomorrow).

With reference to His final *advent*, Jesus states three times in the last chapter of the Bible: “*I come quickly*” (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20). Keeping in mind that Christ’s return will be *sudden* (Matthew 24:27) and *unexpected* (II Peter 3:10), we need to “*be.....therefore sober, and watch unto prayer*” (I Peter 4:7). Being spiritually *sober* means keeping a clear and serious mind concerning the things of our Christian faith and life —not becoming intoxicated with the sinful pleasures of this world or with the poison of false doctrine. Being spiritually *watchful* means staying alert and being aware of the various tactics used by the devil, the world, and our flesh to try to lead us into sin and error with the final goal of overthrowing our faith.

“...Being spiritually *sober* means keeping a clear and serious mind concerning the things of our Christian faith and life —not becoming intoxicated with the sinful pleasures of this world or with the poison of false doctrine.”

When we trust and believe in Jesus Christ alone as our Savior from sin, then we *are* ready for His final advent and can eagerly look forward to it. Thoughts of the great judgment to come on the Last Day should not cause us to dread the glorious return of Christ; for we are assured in the Gospel that, on account of the perfect life, suffering, and death of the Lord Jesus as our Substitute, all of our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12); and our iniquities will not be remembered against us (Hebrews 8:12). Therefore, instead of being judged on the basis of God’s justice, we will be declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s righteousness at His throne and will be taken to heaven. This is our blessed Christian confidence which is built upon the work that Christ accomplished in His first advent manifested to us in the Gospel, which is made our own by His advent into our hearts by faith, and which causes us to anticipate with joy Christ’s final advent.

“*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” (Revelation 22:20).

—P. E. B.



God's Gift of Love – Our Christmas Treasure

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” —I John 4:9

“Are you done with your Christmas shopping?” This is a question which is often asked of us during the weeks leading up to the Festival of **Christmas**. All genuine Christians ought to answer that question with an unhesitating “Yes!” The response might be: “Really?” And the sheep of Christ ought to confirm their first answer by saying: “Yes! Really! But Someone else long ago did the ‘shopping’ for me. And the ‘shopping’ I am talking about is not the same shopping you are talking about.” The surprised reaction to this answer might be: “**Where** are you going with this conversation?” Then we can, by God’s grace and with His help, declare: “I am going to the precise ‘place’ where all people ought to go when they converse about **Christmas**; I am going to tell you and show you **why** you and I (and every other person) absolutely need God’s great, marvelous, undeserved, unearned, free, and everlasting Gift of love — our **Christmas Treasure from Him**. He ‘bought’ (I Corinthians 6:20; I Peter 1:18-19) this Gift for you, for me, and for all people in the world. In other words, **He did all the ‘shopping’ for us**. To give you more info, I want to share with you this article from the November-December issue of the *Concordia Lutheran*. Read it! You will better understand what I have been saying to you.”

The Festival of **Christmas** is very, very important because of its **true, real meaning**. And the true and real meaning is **not** tied to cash registers at Target, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, etc., or to how much **we** spend on gifts for others, or on how much time **we** take to do **our** Christmas shopping. But the true and real meaning of **Christmas is** most certainly and most inseparably tied to Christ Jesus, who came into the world “to save sinners” (I Timothy 1:15). He visibly came into the world when He was born at Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7); He came for sinners like you and me, genuinely and really to save us sinners. This is why Christ is our priceless **Christmas** treasure; with Him we have **eve-**

rything we need properly to celebrate **Christmas**; we **do not need** to receive any other gifts; we **do not need** to give to others any other gifts. This is why **without** Christ (John 3:36b), **without** His conception (Luke 1:31-35), **without** His birth (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20-23), **without** the promise of and the purpose for His coming into this world for all sinners (I Timothy 1:15), and **without** all that He did for all sinners following His conception and birth (Isaiah 53:5-7; I John 1:1b and 2), there cannot be and will not be a real, true, and God-pleasing celebration of the Festival of **Christmas**. This is the reason we will review in the following paragraphs **why Christ Jesus (and no one else) visibly “came into the world to save sinners”** (I Timothy 1:15).

Let us, first of all, review a very basic question: **Who is a sinner?** Everyone is a sinner. Romans 3 confirms this fact when it “blares out” these words of truth: *“There is no difference, for **all** have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (vv. 22b-23). A sinner is a person who, **already at his conception and birth was not perfect and holy** as God Himself is holy and perfect (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48). And we know from the Holy Scriptures that the **one sin** of our human father, Adam, brought God’s judgment and condemnation on **all** the descendants of Adam. This changeless truth is spelled out in Romans 5, where we are told: *“As by **one** man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon **all** men, for that **all** have sinned.”* ... *“By the offense of **one** [Adam] judgment came upon **all** men to condemnation”* (vv. 12, 18a; see also Job 14:4). This is **inherited** or **original sin** or **sinfulness**. Furthermore, a sinner is someone who, **following his birth, has not been holy and perfect** in his thoughts, desires, words, and actions as the Triune God is holy and perfect in His thoughts, desires, words, and actions (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48). This unholiness and these imperfections are called **actual sins** because they are **acts** done by the sinner; they are a result or product of the inherited sin or sinfulness (Matthew 7:17b, 18b). Actual sins can be sins of commission, **doing** something contrary to God’s Law (I John 3:15), or sins of omission, **not doing** what the Law of God requires of us (James 4:17). So, *“sin is — and will always remain — the transgression of the Law”* (I John 3:4b). And, ultimately, **SIN** is the real reason why the Festival of **Christmas** is so important and so necessary for all sinners.

Secondly, we will review another basic question: And **what is the holy** (Leviticus 19:2) **and just** (Deuteronomy 32:4) **God’s reaction and response to sin and to sinners?** He, as the holy, sinless, just, and perfect God, not only hates all sin, but He also hates all sinners. Really? Yes,

really! We know this for certain from the testimony of **God's** own written Word of truth. The psalmist, in clear, easy-to-understand language, confesses to his God: "*Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee. ...Thou hatest all workers of iniquity*" (Psalm 5:4-5). This is the God with whom all people have to deal during their short stay in this world (Proverbs 15:3; James 4:14), at the time of their death (Hebrews 9:27), and on the final day of this world (Matthew 25:31-32); "*There is none other God but One*" (I Corinthians 8:4). Without God's magnificent Gift of love, our Christmas Treasure, that is, Christ Jesus, all sinners would be and remain under the wrath, anger, condemnation, and judgment of God on account of their sins, no matter how much "lip-service" (Matthew 15:8; 7:21-23) they give to singing Christmas carols and outwardly going through "the traditions" of Christmas.

It is common today to hear the catchy saying: "God hates sin, but loves the sinner." The "God hates sin" part of this saying is true, as we have shown; but the "[God] loves the sinner" part is false; it is a lie; it is pure deception. What should we do with such a saying and with those who promote and support it and thereby bring about divisions and offenses contrary to the teaching of Scripture? The answers of Scripture are vital for us to remember: "*Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good*" (Romans 12:9b); "*Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good works and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*" (Romans 16:17-18). When we have the right, Scriptural understanding of **Christmas**, then, according to our new man, we cannot but speak and do what God's Word teaches us in gratitude for His Gift of love to us — our Christmas Treasure from Him. Jesus declared: "*If a man love Me, He will keep My words*" (John 14:23a). Therefore, **the love of God in Christ** for the world of sinners moves and constrains (II Corinthians 5:14) faithful Christians, according to their "*new man*" (Ephesians 4:24; II Corinthians 5:17), to "*avoid*" **worshiping with and praying with** heterodox members of their family, who often **want** them to join them in worship at their heterodox congregations because "it's Christmas, after all;" and **they want** to do things as a "family."

Thirdly, we will review a question which brings us to the real essence of Christmas: **How can God's just and holy hatred toward sin and toward all sinners be removed**, so that they will no longer be under

His just and holy wrath “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18a)? This great work **has already been done for all sinners through and on account of Christ Jesus**, who is God’s Gift of love — our **Christmas Treasure from Him**. What does I John 4 tell us and all sinners? “*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that **God sent His only-begotten Son** into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us, and sent His Son** to be the propitiation [the satisfactory ransom and payment] for our sins*” (vv. 9-10). God’s one-way love for the world of sinners was revealed, made known, and manifested to us and for us in the **promised sending** (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; see also Galatians 3:16; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 53:4-7; etc., etc.) and then in the **actual fulfillment of the promised sending** of His only-begotten Son, namely, the birth of Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem (Luke 2:7; Matthew 1:18-25). This Gift of **God’s love** in Christ is most certainly a divine Gift; it is completely from God; it is a one-sided and a one-way Gift; **our** love for God has absolutely **no place nor any consideration** in the giving of this Gift, Christ Jesus, our **Christmas Treasure**. In the Holy Scriptures we repeatedly hear about this Gift of God’s love in, through, and on account of Christ Jesus, our **Christmas treasure**: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. ...God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” (John 3:16, 17); “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. ...For He [God the Father] hath made Him who knew no sin [Christ Jesus] to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him [Christ Jesus]*” (II Corinthians 5:19, 21). So, the term **Christmas** (though not a Biblical designation for the festival of Christ’s birth) is a very fitting and proper name for this festival because it points to the right Person and to the right Gift!

“... This Gift of God’s love in Christ is most certainly a divine Gift; it is completely from God; it is a one-sided and a one-way Gift.”

Fourthly, we will review another vital question: How did Christ Jesus satisfy the justice and thus remove the hatred of God toward all sinners? He did this through His **active obedience** to the demands of God’s Law in behalf of all sinners. He Himself declared: “*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I am not come to*

destroy, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17; see also Galatians 4:4-5). Christ Jesus fully satisfied God’s demands of us that we be holy and perfect according to the standard of His Holy Law. Therefore, in Christ Jesus and in Him alone, all sinners are declared righteous, right and acceptable before God (II Corinthians 5:21). The Prophet Jeremiah identified the Savior for all sinners as “*the Lord our righteousness*” (23:6). How beautiful-sounding are the words of Romans 5: “*By the obedience of One [that is, God’s Gift of love, our Christmas Treasure, Christ Jesus] shall [the] many be made righteous*” (v. 19). Just as the one disobedience of God’s commandment by Adam brought sin and death on the many people who were Adam’s descendants, so by the perfect obedience of God’s commandments by the One Savior, the only-begotten Son of God, the same many descendants of Adam are declared and looked upon as righteous before God.

Furthermore, Christ Jesus satisfied the justice and removed the hatred of God toward all sinners also by His **passive obedience**. Without complaint, He suffered, even to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:8), the “*wages*” (Romans 6:23) of sin, even suffering the real torments of hell for us and all sinners (Matthew 27:46), torments

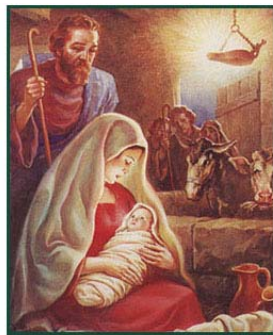
“... In Christ and in Him alone (Acts 4:12) we have for ourselves the real, true joy of the Festival of Christmas, even if we receive no other gifts from anyone else, and even if we are not able to give any gifts to others.”

which we should have endured ourselves (Galatians 3:10). The punishment for all of our sins and the sins of the whole world was charged to His account; therefore, “*with His stripes we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:5), that is, our sins are completely forgiven and pardoned, not charged to our account (II Corinthians 5:19). What a Gift from God in Christ for all sinners! Alluding to our opening paragraph, God did everything in Christ for us and all other sinners; He did all of the “shopping” for us; He bought, with Jesus’ active and passive obedience, freedom from the curse of His Law and from the curse of hell (the everlasting punishment deserved by all sinners for their sins — Mark 16:16b; Matthew 25:41, 46a); He declared His love for the world of sinners in the Gift of His only-begotten Son (John 3:16); He announced peace and reconciliation between Himself and the world of sinners through the one, the only Peacemaker (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27a; Luke 2:14b) and Mediator (I Timothy 2:5) between Him and all sinners, including you and me. Now, “*he that believeth on Him [God’s Gift of love, our Christmas*

Treasure — Christ Jesus] *is **not condemned*** [for his sins and for being a sinner];... [but] ***hath everlasting life***” (John 3:18a and 36a). In Christ and in Him alone (Acts 4:12) we have for ourselves the real, true joy of the Festival of **Christmas**, even if we receive no other gifts from anyone else, and even if we are not able to give any gifts to others.

Because the above is most certainly true, we must reject and condemn all “religions” and “religious organizations” which teach and promote a “religion” **without Christ, without His substitutionary obedience and sacrificial suffering and death for the world of sinners**. Those who believe in and follow such Christless “religions” and such Christless “religious organizations” which leave out the Christ’s vicarious satisfaction of God’s justice on behalf of all sinners, (they) are under and will remain under the holy hatred and just wrath of God (John 3:18b, 36b) — at Christmas and at all other times of the year— because they reject, ignore, leave out, or ridicule the “*one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all*” (I Timothy 2:5-6). Likewise, **celebrating Christmas without Christ** and the reason why He came into this world at His birth — “*to save sinners*” (I Timothy 1:15)— **is an offense to God**, who “*sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him*” (I John 4:9). Furthermore, let us be on guard that we do not view Christmas as just another “headache” holiday because of company coming to our home, gifts to buy, letters and/or cards to send, things to bake, etc., while overlooking or minimizing the “heart and soul” of **Christmas**, God’s Gift of love — our **Christmas Treasure**, Christ Jesus, who came into this world to save all lost and condemned sinners (Matthew 18:11). Really, **Christmas** is most certainly a day of and a festival for **thanksgiving**, as expressed so pointedly by the Apostle Paul: “*Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift*” (II Corinthians 9:15).

—R. J. L.



Our Hopes for the New Year

*“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,
to them who are the called according to His purpose. ...”*

—Romans 8:28-30

For most people, “Happy New Year!” is a mere wish, a kind and friendly expression of hope that no calamity, no misfortune, no grave illness or sadness will befall one’s neighbor or loved one during the year ahead. Whether things will indeed **turn out** that way is an entirely different matter, as even the most optimistic well-wisher will readily admit. For it is simply not in his power to **deliver** on that wish! And, if asked what **will** determine a person’s happiness, success, health, and good life in the new year, the typical worldling will shrug his shoulders or throw up his hands in want of a solid, reliable answer. “Life’s a crap-shoot,” you hear people say. “You take what you get.” Another might venture the optimistic cliché: “Look on the **bright** side! Things could be a lot **worse!**” By and large, people regard life as a sort of **gamble**; and they plainly say so when they use such *negative* expressions as: “It’s just not in the stars!” “He was dealt a bad hand.” Or *positively*, “Just lucky, I guess!” or “The odds seem to be in my favor!”

Then, of course, there are those who **imagine** that they are actually *in control* of their *own* destiny — like the man whom Jesus called a “fool” in Luke 12, verse 20. They think that they will make their own “happy new year” through good investments, hard work, and “clean living;” and so they plan out their future on the basis of the “leading economic indicators,” actuarial tables, and the performance of their investment portfolios! To **them**, reverses in life come as a complete shock, and any unforeseen change in their “game plan” throws their whole existence into chaos and despair! And they find to their dismay that they never really were “in control”!

People in both categories are in for a mighty “rocky” new year, simply because they have no way of knowing **for sure** what life will bring. They have **no assurance**, no **real hope**, nothing to give them true **peace of mind**, as the new year approaches... just **one big question mark** to haunt them from day to day!

We **Christians**, on the other hand, can be upbeat and confident as we

look forward to 2007! Why? Oh, because we have **peace** of mind and conscience, real **assurance** of happiness, and **freedom** from worry and anxiety! For the Apostle Paul shows us in our title-text that we Christians rest OUR hopes for the New Year upon our **gracious God** because of what He has **already done** for us and because of what He promises **yet to do** for us.

Paul begins with a statement of assurance and of certainty which has been gravely twisted and misapplied by the children of this world. He says: “*We know that all things work together for good.*” People paraphrase this passage every day —people who don’t have the slightest idea where it’s from or what it’s about, who have no interest in religion or the Bible or God for that matter— and they try to **comfort** one another by saying: “It’ll all turn out for the best, you’ll see.” Sadly, their comfort is as hollow as a dried-up gourd! For the blessed assurance here in our title-text, dear to the heart of every true Christian, is **limited** —not as to its scope, but as to its beneficiaries, as the words themselves clearly show. “*We know, we [Christians] know,*” says Paul, “*that all things work together for good to them that love God,*” NOT to them that hate Him, despise Him, think they can do just as well without Him, and feel quite frankly that they don’t need Him! Unbelievers can take no comfort from this passage whatsoever, for its assurance doesn’t apply to **them at all**! The Psalmist Asaph writes, for example, that even the *seemingly prosperous* among the wicked in this world have nothing to look forward to but “*slippery places, ...destruction, [and]... terrors!*” (Psalm 73:18-19). For **them**, it’ll all turn out for the WORST if they continue in their unbelief!

No, beloved brethren, the Lord’s Apostle very specifically **limits** the beneficiaries of this assurance to “*them that love God,*” to them, as we shall see, who rest their hope in confident faith upon what **God has already done for them** and who “*love [Him]*” because He loved them first (I John 4:19) ...namely, to His believing children, all true Christians.

Now, what has God **already done for us** which identifies **US** as the beneficiaries of this assurance for the new year ahead and throughout our lives? Paul summarizes all of it briefly in just a few words when He says that we Christians are “*the called according to His purpose.*” God’s **purpose** for sinful mankind is that “*all men be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (I Timothy 2:4), for “*the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:9). God’s earnest call goes out to **all men** in the Gospel

of salvation. Sadly, however, many **refuse** His gracious call, **spurn** His grace, and **reject** salvation, the Bible tells us, “*resist[ing] the Holy Ghost,*” and thus are lost by their own fault. Such people keep from themselves the blessings of salvation, as well as the assurance in our title-text that “*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*”

And now, the Apostle lists in chronological detail **what** the Lord has **already done for us** to make us the heirs of everlasting life and beneficiaries of the assurance upon which our hopes for the new year rest: He “*foreknew*” us, Paul says. God looked ahead from eternity, from “*before the foundation of the world*” (Ephesians 1:4), and **chose us to come to faith** (Acts 13:48b). He “*predestinated*” us “*to be conformed to the image of His Son*” and thus to be “*brethren*” together with Christ, our Elder Brother, in the “*household of God*” (Ephesians 2:19) — NOT because He saw anything good in **us**, NOT because He fore-saw **our faith** and knew that we wouldn’t resist His Holy Spirit the way others would —no, He did all this “*not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*” (II Timothy 1:9).

“*Moreover,*” Paul says, “*whom He did predestinate, them He also called*” —called to faith by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel; “*and whom He called, them He also justified*” —made them the personal recipients of the forgiveness which He declared for all the world in Christ (II Corinthians 5:19); “*and whom He justified, them He also glorified.*” As the “*heirs of salvation,*” we are **already now**, as “*partaker[s] of Christ’s sufferings*” by faith in Him, destined to be partakers with Him “*when His glory shall be revealed,*” Peter tells us in his first epistle (4:13); we already **now** have a “*crown*” to which we must hold fast, lest we lose it (Revelation 2:10; 3:11); we already **now** have the “*hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27), the **expectation** of having in its indescribable fullness that glory which is **even now** ours as the adopted children of our heavenly Father by faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior, having been “*prepared for [us],*” Jesus says, “*from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34). No wonder Paul writes in the 18th verse of this same chapter that “*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*”

All this our gracious God and Lord has **already done for us** as testimony of His great **love** for us, as the basis for our **trust** in Him, as the foundation upon which to rest our **hopes** for the New Year and for our

entire future as His dear children! All this **confirms to us**, makes us “**KNOW**, that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”—“**ALL things**,” whether they appear to be good or bad in this present time, joyous or grievous, happy or sad—“**ALL things**” will be turned into **good** for us because of what our loving Father has **already done for us** and for our salvation!

“What shall we then say to these things?” What is the inescapable conclusion to which we must come, also in regard to those things which He promises **yet to do for us**? “If God be **for us**,” [and that fact is **obvious** from what the Apostle has already shown us here in Romans 8], “who can be **against us**?” (v. 31). With our almighty God and Lord fighting **for us**, in whom He has a special “vested interest,” what enemy, temporal or spiritual, would be so foolish as to *imagine* a victory over us as even a possibility?? Yea,

*Tho’ devils **all the world** should fill,
all eager to **devour us**,
we tremble **not**, we fear **no ill**,
they shall **not** overpower us!*

For not only does the Lord Himself fight **for us**, but He makes **us** able to fight as well, to **resist the devil** steadfast in the faith, to **refuse** the enticements of worldly friends and acquaintances, to **do battle** with and daily **defeat** our own sinful flesh, to **turn a deaf ear** to false prophets and ear-tickling teachers of religion—all of this made possible for those who “take unto [themselves] the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:13) by faithful continuance in His Word. “I will not fail thee nor forsake thee,” He promises you, dear fellow-Christian (Joshua 1:5); and on that promise you can most assuredly rely as you march forward to meet the enemy as a soldier of the Savior’s cross, confident of victory!

But the Lord does not only promise to **defend** us against our **enemies** in the new year ahead and all through our life here in this world; He also promises to **provide** us with **everything we need**, blessings both temporal and spiritual, as the gifts of His precious grace. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us **all things**?” (v. 32). After having “invested” in us His only-begotten Son as the ransom-price for our redemption, don’t think for one minute that the Lord would spare any

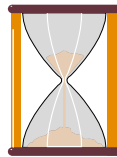
further cost to secure that investment for eternity!! That simply wouldn't make any sense at all, Paul tells us! —No, our gracious God will “*freely*” for Jesus’ sake “*give us all things*” **in addition to** what He has **already** given us, namely, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation; faith to accept and receive those treasures; and a renewed life of righteousness as the fruit and evidence of that saving faith.

What a promise to set our minds **at ease**, as we look ahead to the new year! For even with life’s temporal uncertainties, we Christians have no cause whatever to whine and wring our hands in anxious care and worry, saying with those who have no heavenly Father: “*What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek!)...But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,*” Jesus tells us, “*and all these things [these “extras,” these minor “fringe benefits”] shall be added unto you.*” (Matthew 6:31-33) So, “*cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you*” (I Peter 5:7), careth **so much** that He “*spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all!*”

“*Happy New Year!*” is no idle wish from one Christian to another. Rather, it is the expression of **firm conviction** that our gracious God and Lord will continue to shower down upon us in this coming year an **abundance** of blessings both temporal and spiritual, as He has in the past, and as He has promised to do in the future; that “*all things [will] work together for [our] good*” in accordance with His all-wise and gracious will for us; that He will mightily **defend us** from all our enemies of body and soul; and that He will generously and freely **provide us** with all that we need for our temporal and spiritual welfare here in this present life, until the glory unspeakable for which we have been *fore-known, predestinated, called, and justified* by His surpassing grace and favor is **ours** in its **fullness** in our heavenly home above!

As we thus **rest our hopes for the new year upon our gracious God and Lord** and confide in His sure promises, may each and every one of us have, in the fullest sense of the word, a truly **Happy and Blessed New Year**, for Jesus our Savior’s sake!

—D. T. M.



Especially for our Christian youth and their parents...

The Christian and the Party Scene: “What Saith the Scriptures?”

“Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness... so that day come upon you unawares.” —Luke 21:34

At this time of year many of us are invited (and even expected) to attend various parties centered around the holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Eve. While parties, as such, are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God and for that reason fall under the umbrella of Christian liberty (Galatians 5:1, etc.), it behooves all true believers in Christ Jesus, their Savior, to “*walk circumspectly* [with their eyes wide open and looking around for danger 360°] *not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:15-16). The Apostle Peter exhorts us: “*Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (I Peter 5:8). And the **standard** according to which we are to judge and evaluate the appropriateness of “social get-togethers” as to their compatibility with a life of Christian sanctification is, of course, the Word of God. “*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way [clean up his act]? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word*” (Psalm 119:9). Holy Writ tells us all we need to know to lead a Godpleasing life as the fruit and evidence of faith in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:15-17). On the basis of God’s own Holy Word, therefore, we shall consider how the Christian can (and indeed should) evaluate the so-called “party-scene” and thus choose carefully, in the fear of God, the kind of social activities he can in good conscience attend.

What do we commonly mean by a “party”? The noun “party” is generally defined as “a social gathering for conversation, refreshments, entertainment, and so forth.” The verb, used in an informal sense, means “to go to parties, especially to a series of parties.” Nowadays the verb “to party” is also used as a slang-expression meaning “to enjoy oneself thoroughly and without restraint” (*Random House College Dictionary*). Parties may celebrate special occasions (holidays, birthdays), or they may be routinely convened simply for social interaction and mutual

enjoyment. The purpose of the party may determine the form the party will take. Parties may be large or small, public or private, fancy or ordinary; they may last a few hours or be protracted for days. Parties have been given and held throughout history in every culture and nation; but that fact, in and of itself, neither validates nor condemns the hosting of or attendance at parties. Since “parties” as such are not forbidden by God’s Word, we do not here address the question of whether or not a Christian should be a “party-goer.” However, it is necessary to examine both the purpose and the proposed activities planned for a party in order to differentiate between parties that are appropriate for Christians and those which are not.

What characterizes a party that is *spiritually harmless* and therefore can be attended by a Christian in good conscience? Certainly it is a party that not only serves a good *purpose* (celebration of a birthday, confirmation, wedding, graduation, etc.) but also is *conducted* according to sound, wholesome Christian standards of behavior normed by God’s Law. Such a party gives an opportunity for Christians to share their lives with each other and enjoy one another’s company without involving the guests in temptation to evil. A harmless party encourages *moderation* in food and drink and presents *wholesome* entertainment which fosters Godpleasing interaction between people and mutual enjoyment of the occasion —but within the limits of propriety established by Holy Scripture. The Bible records several examples of such “harmless” parties. One example is found in the Book of Job. In Job chapter 1 we learn that Job’s children, whose father had been blessed with great riches, celebrated their birthdays with fine feasting. The lavish dinner-parties themselves were not condemned by God nor even spoken of in a negative manner. Nevertheless, pious and God-fearing Job was concerned that his children not overindulge, not succumb to the temptations of the flesh, and not fall into sin on such occasions; and so he prayed for them and offered sacrifices of penitence after each feast (Job 1:4-5). In the New Testament, we find several examples of our Lord Jesus and His disciples attending feasts. For example, Matthew (Levi) made the Lord a great feast in his own house (Luke 5:29ff). The Savior also attended a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee and performed a miracle to supply

“...Job was concerned that his children not overindulge, not succumb to the temptations of the flesh, and not fall into sin on such occasions; and so he prayed for them.”

the very best wine when the supply had run out (John 2:1ff). Many times the Lord and His disciples were guests at feasts given at Lazarus' house by his sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38ff., John 12:2ff.). And, although our Savior never sinned (I Peter 2:22), He was falsely called a glutton and a drunkard by His enemies because He attended such feasts (Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34). Indeed, despite opportunities for overindulgence, which may well have overcome *other* guests, Jesus endured such temptations — temptations that try us still today — “yet *without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). Obviously then, the *character* of a party —its nature, purpose, and conduct— determines its acceptability for a Christian. And the believer, to whom much has been given (Luke 12:48) in the ability to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14) on the basis of Scripture (Psalm 119:9; etc.), must judge that acceptability carefully beforehand, lest he become a partaker in other men's sins (I Timothy 5:22b).

“...the *character* of a party —its nature, purpose, and conduct — determines its acceptability for a Christian.”

The Bible also mentions parties which take on the nature of a godless and worldly indulgence of the flesh in hedonistic* pursuits, where everyone attempts “to enjoy himself thoroughly and without restraint.” A consistent Christian cannot, in good conscience, attend or participate in such parties. [**Hedonism* is the philosophy that pleasure is the principle good and that the pursuit of pleasure should be a person's way of life.] In such parties, sin and vice are encouraged and indulged in freely. One of the major components making up a *spiritually dangerous* and *wicked* party is the abuse of alcohol (or drugs). While God allows the *moderate* use of alcohol for man's pleasure (Psalm 104:15; etc.), civil law often restricts even such *moderate* use to those of a certain age, to certain places, and to certain times; and we thus find Fourth Commandment constraints in place. But God also emphatically forbids *drunkenness* as a gross outward sin of the flesh and the pastime of the heathen (Ephesians 5:18). The Apostle Peter in particular describes the obvious connection of *drunkenness* to partying: “*For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*” (I Peter 4:3-4). Note how unrestrained *passions* (various lusts, including illicit sexual desires and activities) are found linked together with “*excess of*

wine” which refers to “a debauch with wine, drunkenness, an extravagant indulgence in potations long drawn out such as may induce permanent mischiefs on the body” (Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 226). The Bible often warns that drunkenness leads to other sins (Proverbs 23:29-35; Hosea 4:11; Isaiah 5:11-12), as well as to poverty (Proverbs 21:17, 23:20-21) and shame (Proverbs 28:7). Scripture warns: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). But note that drunkenness is also connected to two terms that refer to **partying** in I Peter 4:3, “*revellings and banquetings*.” “*Revellings*” (cf. also Galatians 5:21) is translated “*rioting*” elsewhere in Scripture (Romans 13:13); and in these references it is connected to drunkenness also. This word refers to feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and at which the participants indulge in carnal revelry and behavior characteristic of spiritual fools. The word translated “*banquetings*” also refers to drinking parties, carousals, and here includes the notion of “*riot*” and “*excess of wine*.” How often parties run to (or end up running to) the “*excess of riot*” (I Peter 4:4). Peter speaks here of a wild and unrestrained indulgence of the flesh — again, of *hedonism*. The Bible records numerous examples of feasts which led to idolatry (Exodus 32:6, Daniel 5:1ff.), lust (I Corinthians 10:6-8), drunkenness (I Samuel 25:36), and even murder (Mark 6:21ff.). Wicked parties which promote unrestrained indulgence of the sinful flesh in drunkenness and in numerous other sins and vices (violence, fornication, theft, etc.) must be AVOIDED by a Christian for the sake of his or her immortal soul. For Peter exhorts every Christian: “*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*” (I Peter 2:11).

Our Lord Jesus Christ issued this special warning to His disciples regarding the temptations that arise before Judgment Day: “*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares*” (Luke 21:34). Our Savior warns us about falling into these common sins “*at any time*”—for any day could be *our* last day or *the* Last Day. He specifically mentions “*surfeiting*,” which refers to both carousing and intoxication, as well as the result of such excess, drunken headache and hangover; for the word literally means “to toss about the head,” referring to dizziness and staggering, when the head refuses to function. In other words, Jesus specifically warns against the unrestrained partying so popular today. He also mentions “*drunkenness*” and “*the cares of this life*,” for these are two common

attendants to “*surfeiting*.” People often party to get drunk and to find a temporary escape from the worries and anxieties of real life. But our Savior says: “Don’t fall into such sins *at any time!*” You may be deceived and seduced into “misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (Luther) and not have time to *repent!*

Now sometimes Christians think that they can attend worldly parties where drugs and alcohol are abused and where lascivious behavior is commonplace and not be tempted to indulge in such things themselves. Foolish self-confidence and carnal security are resident in our sinful flesh (Romans 7:14-24), are not always successfully combated and restrained by the New Man of faith (vv. 22-23), and therefore leave us vulnerable to temptation by our own lusts (James 1:14), not to mention by the lusts of the world and the pride of life (I John 2:16). We should therefore not attend such parties because, as Christians, we are not to tempt God by willingly exposing *ourselves* to sin and danger. Paul warns “*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall*” (I Corinthians 10:12). How can we pray to the Lord, “*Deliver us from evil,*” when we willingly and even deliberately expose *ourselves* to evil? Moreover, as we confess in our *Catechism* (Q/A 64b), “we should flee and avoid every OPPORTUNITY for unchasteness.” Once we succumb to temptation and fall into sin, it is too late. How many Christians have trusted in themselves and then have fallen into gross outward sin? Note the many examples from *Scripture*, both in the Old Testament and in the New, of once pious and stalwart Christians who grievously sinned against God, and many even lost their faith entirely! The list is almost endless! Due to the vicious combination of peer pressure (Cf. the September-October issue) and their own self-confidence, young people are easily *talked into* and *led into* drunkenness and drug abuse at a party. Some fall into fornication while drunk or high and father children or become pregnant. Others unwittingly take an overdose of drugs courtesy of some joker who slips something into their drink. And many drink and then drive, and end up killing people with their cars—sometimes even themselves. Reports of such tragedies fill the newspapers; it’s not at all rare! —There are literally

“...Remember that, once something terrible happens, it’s too late to turn back the clock; and, if a person survives the tragedy —physically and even spiritually—the temporal consequences he may have to live with may quite literally destroy his life!”

thousands of incidents every day involving drinking or drugs, severe falls, pool drownings, house fires, hit and run accidents, and the list goes on. Remember that, once something terrible happens, it's too late to turn back the clock; and, if a person survives the tragedy — physically and even spiritually— the temporal consequences he may have to live with may quite literally destroy his life! Why ruin your life for just a few hours of fleshly “happiness”?

Instead, trust your faithful God to bless you with *true* happiness and *inner* contentment. Rather than turning to parties where the abuse of alcohol, drug use, and “sexploitation” in one form or another are the game-plan for the evening, find true joy and peace in your *Savior*. As St. Paul exhorts us: “*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for [anxious about] nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you*” (Philippians 4:5-9). The Lord Jesus promises you: “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things (food, clothing, shelter, etc) shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33).

By God's grace, we are “*accepted in the Beloved,*” God's only-begotten Son, who paid for our sins with His own blood! (Ephesians 1:6-7, I John 1:7). And “*He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32) — not only the proper Godpleasing desires of our heart here in this life as we delight to do His will (Psalm 37:4), but mansions in heaven for all true believers, where we shall enjoy fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore! (Psalm 16:11). Indeed, “*He died for all,*” not only to earn for all mankind those imperishable joys and treasures in the life to come, but “*that they which live,*” those who are now spiritually alive by faith in the all-sufficient merit of His sacrifice, “*should not henceforth live unto themselves,*” just doing their “own thing” in heedless disregard of His will and of His earnest warnings, “*but unto Him which died for them and rose again.*” (I Corinthians 5:15).

“*THEREFORE, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*” (v. 17), minded no longer to serve sin (Romans 6:6), being “*dead indeed unto sin*” but, motivated solely by His love and mercy and grace, “*alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord*” (v. 11). There indeed is the proper Christian motive that keeps us from forfeiting heavenly bliss in exchange for the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25)! One day we shall attend the very best “party” of all—the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride, the Church of all true believers, there to be glad and rejoice forevermore (Revelation 19:1ff.). God grant that, holding fast to the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ, and being saved by grace through faith in Him alone, we shall feast together with our God forever and ever. In Jesus’ Name, Amen!

Questions for Discussion for Parents and Teens

1. How is the word “party” defined by the dictionary? What does the slang-expression “*to party*” mean?
2. What is a “*harmless party*”?
3. Give an example of a “*harmless party*” from the Bible.
4. Why did the enemies of Christ *slander Him* as a glutton and a drunkard?
5. What is a “wicked” and “spiritually *harmful*” party”?
6. What other sins may drunkenness *lead to*?
7. What special *warning* does Jesus give us in Luke 21:34?
8. Give Scriptural reasons why we should not think we can attend worldly parties and at the same time imagine ourselves to be *immune* to temptation.
9. Where should Christians find *true* joy and peace?
10. What should ever *motivate* us to shun and flee opportunities to sin and to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (I Peter 2:11)?
11. What great feast do true Christians have to *look forward* to?

—E. J. W.

OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

It deeply saddens us to announce that Pastor Mark W. Dierking of Wilmot, South Dakota, suddenly and without any previous hint of disharmony, disagreement, or disunity resigned from the Concordia Lutheran Conference just prior to the regular fall meeting of its pastors, where his participation had been joyfully anticipated by his brethren. All efforts to persuade him to attend the Fall Pastoral Conference were unsuccessful, including several urgent telephone calls; and his eleventh-hour offer to call the assembled pastors at a prearranged time during conference sessions was withdrawn by him at the last minute.

Pastor Dierking's summary resignation came as a complete shock to all of us inasmuch as he never once admonished us on the basis of Scripture, individually or collectively, for heresy (Titus 3:10), for causing divisions and offenses contrary to God's Word (Romans 16:17), or for even a casual intrusion of public error into our midst (I Timothy 5:20; *Brief Statement* ¶29); and therefore he had no just, Scriptural cause to leave us. Nevertheless he suddenly announced in writing his disavowal of our Scriptural position on the sinful character of modern worldly social dancing, reversed himself on his previous approval of the same, admitted his long-standing duplicity on the matter, and acknowledged that his fellowship with us has been nothing but a hypocritical sham for the past twelve years. As a matter of record, he consistently held *with* our Conference its *unanimously affirmed* Scriptural and historical position, as the minutes of pastoral conferences and conventions clearly document. He voted his approval of an extensive pastoral conference paper on the subject in 1994, of an addition to it in 1998, of a statement of practice in 1999, of a short tract and its publication the same year, of a brother pastor's study paper in 2004, and of the "Reaffirmation of Our Scriptural Position" unanimously adopted by the Summer Pastoral Conference in 2004, unanimously adopted also by the Conference in convention assembled the following day, and published in the *Concordia Lutheran* (July-August, 2004). Whether he ever taught *his congregation* that Scriptural application of Sixth Commandment principles, we have no way of knowing; although we rightly assumed all along that he did so. Since, therefore, he had no Scriptural cause to leave us, his resignation was clearly an act of *sinful separatism* contrary to the Word of God (I John 2:19); and his acknowledgment of longstanding duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy without a word of contrition or expression of repentance now manifests his theological double-mindedness and instability (James 1:8), as well as his betrayal of those

who regarded him as a trustworthy brother in the faith (Proverbs 27:5-6).

We earnestly pray for Pastor Dierking's repentance for these grievous sins, as well as for the fruits meet for true repentance; and we beseech the Lord of the Church on behalf of his congregation that it recognize the gravity of these sins and offenses in the perfect light of Holy Scripture, deal with their now heterodox pastor according to God's Word, and endeavor with us "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3) for Jesus' sake.

—Rev. Edward J. Worley, President

"So help us God!"

"In response to Pastor Dierking's allegation that we are divided on the matter of modern, worldly social dancing, and in order to give **unmistakably clear testimony**, both to Pastor Dierking, to others outside of our fellowship, and to our own people who look to us, their God-given shepherds, for uniformity of doctrine and consistency of practice in our congregations, we declare ourselves as pastors **1)** as being in **full agreement** with the published Scriptural position of the Conference on modern, worldly social dancing, **2)** as having **no mental reservation** about our declared conviction, and **3)** as **committed**, by the grace and with the help of God, **to teach these principles** and **to apply them with unreserved consistency**, also **testifying with unashamed clarity**, both in public and in private, the truth of God's precious Word in this matter and **our determination to hold fast to it in both our teaching and in our practice. So help us God!"**

The above resolution and solemn oath was **UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED** by a **rising vote** of the Fall Pastoral Conference, Jackson, Michigan, October 25, 2006. Pastors present and voting were:

Pastor Edward J. Worley, President	Pastor David G. Redlin
Pastor Robert J. Lietz, Vice President	Pastor Ross A. Mahan
Pastor David T. Mensing, Secretary	Pastor Paul E. Bloedel

"Men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." — Hebrews 6:16

Certainly nothing new among us...

***Proverbs 5:20 is a *sedes doctrinae*¹
that forbids illicit, intimate physical contact
apart from holy marriage.***

*“And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange
woman and embrace the bosom of a stranger?”*

We hold, as did our orthodox fathers², that Proverbs 5:20 is a clear and certain *sedes* forbidding illicit intimate physical contact between those who are not married to one another and that, in the application of Sixth Commandment principles to social practices condoned and even fostered by modern society, this passage is legitimately cited as proscribing specifically *the romantic embrace between those not married to one another*, common in modern social dancing.

The very specific actions that the words themselves express, both *etymologically* and *contextually*, describe a man’s **romantic embrace** [“embrace” Hebr. חָבַק “hug”] of the **bosom** [“bosom” Hebr. חָסֵם “cleavage,” “chest,” “bosom”] of a **woman to whom he is not married** [“a stranger” Hebr. זָכָר “strange,” “foreign,” “non-relative,” “adulterous,” “different”]³. This passage expresses in clear and certain terms, not requiring further explanation, elucidation or exegetical study, by means of a rhetorical question which answers itself, the fact that such activity is sinful. The excellent literal translation in the KJV makes knowledge of Hebrew completely unnecessary. Intimacy which, according to the context, is the romantic, sensual, intoxicating ecstasy arising out of physical attractiveness to and familiarity with *one’s own spouse* is reserved exclusively for marriage (Hebrews 13:4). One who is “foreign” to the marriage bond is not entitled to such attention and familiarity. Thus, “*embrac[ing] the bosom of a stranger*” “cannot be indulged in by consistent Christians without serious injury to their consciences and probable lasting harm to their souls.”⁴ It belongs to the “*uncleanness*” that should “*not be once named among you* [i.e., professing Christians] *as becometh saints*” (Ephesians 5:3) since it is behavior *inappropriate for believers*. The passage clearly and certainly forbids illicit intimate physical contact —“improper touching”— between those who are not married to one another **in any venue** as the violation of chastity. Thus this *sedes* is properly applied not only to

petting, groping, fondling, etc., but also to the *romantic embrace* in modern social dancing between those not married to one another, specifically in what is commonly referred to as “close dancing.”

The very same familiarity in any other venue is regarded as “improper touching” even by the world and is adjudged to be “prosecutorial misconduct” at best and “taking indecent liberties,” “sexual harassment,” and even “sexual assault,” in the ultimate extreme. [Even the heathen, according to their *natural knowledge* of God and *natural law*, regard certain behavior as improper (Romans 2:14; I Corinthians 5:1) and condemn it.] Note also the obvious difference —obvious also from the context in Proverbs 5— between an illicit romantic embrace and the innocent and completely proper non-romantic casual hug or embrace between little children, between children and their parents, grandparents, etc., between brethren [even “*men with men*,” NOT doing that which is “*unseemly*,” Romans 1:27, but that which is innocent and entirely proper, cf. John 13:25], and the like (Genesis 33:4; Luke 15:20; Acts 20:1, 37; etc.). They are not the same thing.

¹A *sedes doctrinae* is a clear and certain passage of Holy Writ which establishes and proves a doctrine. The words mean literally “a seat of doctrine.” A *sedes* is so clear in and of itself that it neither needs nor permits of any interpretation.

² Cf. Fuerbringer, Engelder, Kretzmann, *et al.*, *Concordia Cyclopedia*, 1927 and later editions: “The embracing of the bosom of a stranger, one with whom a man is not united in an estate sanctioned by God Himself, is an act impure in itself, Prov. 5, 20...”

³ Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, VI (on the Book of Proverbs), Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, reprinted 1982, pp. 130-132; also Strong, James, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Hebrew-Chaldee Dictionary, Nos. 2263, 2436, and 5237 respectively.

⁴*Concordia Cyclopedia*, 1927, p. 197.

See also the following resources (arranged by date of origin) available from *Scriptural Publications* which set forth in detail our Scriptural position on the basis of clear *sedes* and show conclusively that this position is nothing new but goes back in Lutheranism to Dr. C. F. W. Walther and even to Luther himself:

Eckhardt, E., “Tanz,” in *Homiletisches Reallexikon*, Blair, NE, 1906.

Natterer, M. L. (trans.), *Walther and the Dance*, from Walther’s *Tanz und Theaterbesuch*, 1884 (1955).

When we condemn “modern social dancing,”... This Is the Old Orthodox Position of the Lutheran Church. Two articles from *Concordia* [later *Lutheran*] *Cyclopedia* (1926 and 1954).

Graebner, Theodore, “No Longer on the Borderland, but Inherently Sinful,” from *The Borderland of Right and Wrong*, Sixth Ed., 1941.

Mensing, David T. “*Shall We Dance?*” A Pastoral Conference paper unanimously adopted and authorized to be printed (1994).

“*Going to the Dance? Who me?? I’m a Christian!*” A tract unanimously authorized to be printed (1999).

“Reaffirmation of Our Scriptural Position on the Modern Social Dance,”
Unanimously adopted by the Pastoral Conference and by the 53rd Annual Convention, Seattle, WA (2004), *Concordia Lutheran*, July-August, 2004.

—D. T. M.

This always has been and continues to be

Our Scriptural Position on the Modern Social Dance

“They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.” —I Peter 4:4

We unequivocally and unreservedly believe, teach and confess that the modern, worldly, lustful social dancing of our day is **sinful recreation** contrary to God’s Word and is therefore inappropriate for Christians. The position of the Concordia Lutheran Conference regarding the sinful character of modern social dancing is **truly Scriptural** both as to its doctrine and as to its practice; and the passages upon which our position is based (chiefly Ephesians 5:3-4 and 6-11; I Peter 2:11; 4:1-5; Proverbs 5:20; II Timothy 2:22; and Colossians 3:17 among also many others) are clear and certain *sedes doctrinae* which establish the Sixth Commandment principles governing the “*chaste and decent life*” of both single and married persons. We hold that the modern, worldly, lustful social dancing of our day is **not an adiaphoron**, that is, not a matter neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God but left to our Christian liberty, as is innocent dancing which has none of the objectionable features condemned by Scripture. God’s Word forbids sexually explicit, suggestive and provocative behavior which panders to the lusts of the flesh, and God’s Word forbids intimate bodily contact, including the romantic embrace, between those who are not united in marriage.

We do not condemn and legalistically lump together ALL dancing, as some erroneously claim in an effort to discredit our Scriptural position and to distract people from the clear prohibitions of God's Word; but whatever Scripture condemns, man dare not ignore, excuse or validate. Neither subjective judgment, common custom, social venue or a claimed pious motive makes pure what God has forbidden.

This position among us is **nothing new** but has been **consistently articulated** among us since the earliest days of our Conference in its official organ, in position papers unanimously adopted and in tracts unanimously approved by our Pastoral Conference, and in resolutions unanimously confirming it and specifically affirming its practice among us. Moreover, **the terms** "modern dance" and "worldly dance" used by our fathers, as both they and we have specifically defined, described, and specified them, are as appropriate today as then, and are the links in the chain of consistency that binds us doctrinally to our historical orthodox past.

Inconsistency in practice belies orthodoxy in doctrine, gives offense to those who look to Christians for the example of a Godly life, and makes a mockery of Christian profession. Therefore it behooves our pastors, in order to be **consistent in our practice** with regard to the condemnation of all lewd behavior contrary to the Sixth Commandment, that, concerning the sinful character of modern social dancing, they denounce and earnestly warn our people against attendance at social events where modern social dancing is the prominent activity. (Examples of such events include, among others, proms, turnabouts, homecoming and other social dances, as well as club dancing.)

This Scriptural position was *reaffirmed* by a rising vote of the 2004 Plenary **Pastoral Conference** in Seattle, Washington; unanimously adopted also by the **Board of Directors**, to be recommended to the **Convention** for adoption; and unanimously adopted by the **Concordia Lutheran Conference** in convention assembled on June 25, 2004.

NOTE that **Pastor Mark W. Dierking himself** moved its adoption on the convention floor.

It was subsequently printed in our *Concordia Lutheran*, July-August, 2004, and appears above in view of Pastor Dierking's recent sinful separatism from our Conference.

—Ed.

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E-mail: m.l.natterer@comcast.net

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E-mail: revworley@comcast.net

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The Rev. MARK W. DIERKING, Pastor*

*Pastor Dierking is no longer in fellowship with our Conference

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The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor

233 North Cuyler Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302 (708) 386-4145

E-mail: robertjlietz@yahoo.com



“... let us be on guard that we do not view Christmas as just another “headache” holiday because of company coming to our home, gifts to buy, letters and/or cards to send, things to bake, etc., while overlooking or minimizing the “heart and soul” of Christmas, God’s Gift of love — our Christmas Treasure, Christ Jesus, who came into this world to save all lost and condemned sinners (Matthew

God’s Gift of Love –
Our Christmas Treasure...

