the Concordia Lutheran

"The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35.

"Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path" Ps. 119:105.

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The Lord Thy God

Is With Thee

Whithersoever Thou Goest!

Joshua 1:9

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EDITOR:
Rev. Paul R. Bloedel
9658 - 54th Avenue South
Seattle, Washington 98118
ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Rev. E. R. Stallings, Jr.
110 Grasmere Court
San Antonio, Texas 78218
LAY MEMBER:
Mr. Robert G. Bloedel
10200 - 62nd Ave. South
Seattle, Washington 98178

Address all subscriptions, renewals, and remittances to: **Scriptural Publications, 10200 - 62nd Ave. So., Seattle, Washington 98178.** A special notice of expiration will be inserted in the issue which terminates your subscription.

Officers of the Concordia Lutheran Conference

PRESIDENT:
Rev. Mark W. Dierking
Box 33, Wilmot, S.D.
VICE-PRESIDENT:
Rev. Paul R. Bloedel
9658 - 54th Avenue South
Seattle, Washington 98118
SECRETARY:
Rev. David T. Mensing
Central Ave. at 171st Place
Tinley Park, Ill. 60477
TREASURER:
Mr. Victor K. Bloedel
10200 - 62nd Ave. South
Seattle, Washington 98178

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 Statment 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 a 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 Church fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are, by God's grace, "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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The President's Column

BE PREPARED, FOR THE LORD JESUS IS COMING!

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." --Luke 21:28

As I write this column, the news media is full of the "Crisis in the Gulf,"--another "war" in a history which has been full of wars. This war, however, is taking place in the so-called "cradle of civilization" where the history of man began. Some have asked sincere questions regarding passages in the books of Revelation, Daniel and others as to whether the beginning of the end of time is also centered in this same area, and thus, whether this war is a precursor of the end. As to the passages, we will leave the discussion of those to another time. But as to the question as to whether this is a precursor of Christ's Second Coming, the answer is an unequivocal "yes," and it is with regard to our readiness for our Lord's Second Coming that I want to address in this column.

If you think about it, on the one hand it's strange that it takes an event like the troubles in the Middle East to raise our Christian consciousness to the fact that the time of Christ's Second Coming is indeed imminent--and not so strange on the other hand. It **is** strange because we, as Christians, should always be thinking of and looking to that Last Day, the day of our deliverance from this veil of tears into everlasting bliss. On the other hand, it is **not** so strange when we consider that the Lord Jesus knows our sinful flesh--our weaknesses. He knows that we would need such things as this war to remind us that our days on this earth are numbered so that we would watch and pray that that Day not catch us unawares, and thus He provided this and other warning signs for our spiritual and eternal benefit. As to those signs, Jesus says, "**Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when**

they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand," Luke 21:29-31. Our Lord has graciously set these signs before us, including this "new" war in the Persian Gulf, so that we might know that the Day of Judgment is nigh at hand.

Brethren, take the time to read Matthew 24-25, Luke 21 and other passages of Scripture which speak of the Last Day and of those things which we are to watch for as signs of His return. Reading these passages, one cannot but be convinced that we are indeed living in the last times, those last days before the Lord Jesus will come in all His glory to **"judge the world in righteousness,"** Acts 17:30b. The signs are all there for all men to see--and see them we must. As Christians, each of us must therefore BE PREPARED, FOR THE LORD JESUS IS COMING!

The question is, "How can you be sure you are prepared?" In answer to this question, ask yourself: Do I believe with all my heart that God has forgiven me all my sins for the sake of the perfect life and bitter sufferings and death of His dear Son, our Savior Jesus Christ? If you can honestly answer "yes" to **this** question, then you are prepared. But remember, such faith is not just "words." Faith in Jesus is a living, vibrant power which must show itself in your life, in your words and in your actions.

It is for that reason that the Apostle Peter, in his Second Epistle, in which he speaks of the Second Coming of Christ at some length, urges Christians to **"give diligence to make your calling and election sure,"** (1:10). How do you do this? **First** of all, by turning to the gracious promises God gives you in His Word: **"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,"** II Pet. 1:2-4.

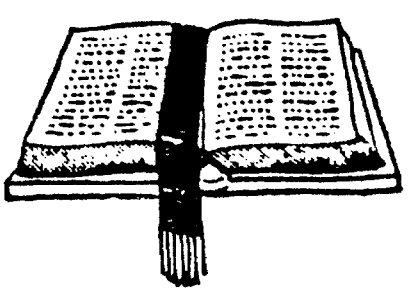
It is these promises which work and strengthen saving faith in your heart, changes you, creates a New Man in you--a

New Man which produces the fruits of faith. These fruits, unlike justifying faith which is worked in your heart by God alone, are something which **you** must cultivate, with God's help, **in your life as a Christian,** bringing your old sinful flesh into subjection to the New Man in you and striving after righteousness in the fear of God. To that end Peter continues by saying: "**And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (love),**" I Pet. 1:5-7). Thus, it is evident that where there is faith, there are also the fruits of faith, which, according to Peter, assure you that you are indeed the elect of God, ready to meet your God and Judge. "**For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,**" I Peter 1:8).

The Day of the Lord is at hand! It is imperative, therefore, that each and every one of us be ready to meet our Lord--not on our own merits, to be sure--but on the merits of Him who died for us, through whom a New Man has been created in us--a New Man which must, with God's help, bring the Old Man under subjection so that we always are prepared, ready to meet our Lord, our Judge, our Savior and our God! So even as these seemingly catastrophic events take place around us, events which may affect our lives for some time to come (according to God's wisdom and purpose for us), each of us, as God's elect, may with joy "**look up, and lift up (our) heads; for (our) redemption draweth nigh.**"

Your Servant in Christ,

Rev. Mark W. Dierking, President



CONVENTION DIGEST

Already on the weekend prior to the convention itself, delegates and visitors began to arrive in Lebanon, Oregon, for the 39th Annual Convention of the Concordia Lutheran Conference, hosted by St. John's Lutheran Church, the Rev. M. L. Natterer, Pastor. According to usual custom, the convention was preceded by a two-day **Pastoral Conference** (June 19-20) and a meeting of the Conference **Board of Directors** (June 21). The pastor and members of the congregation welcomed guests from afar into their homes, cooperated in the preparation and serving of delicious meals in the church's fellowship hall, and arranged for welcome opportunities for Christian recreation and wholesome fun during unscheduled evening hours, by God's grace showing themselves patterns of loving, cheerful and generous hospitality to their brethren.

The Convention itself opened on Friday, June 22nd, with a service of convocation at 9:30 a.m. The local pastor, the Rev. M. L. Natterer, served as liturgist; President Mark W. Dierking of Wilmot, South Dakota, delivered the keynote sermon based on Joshua 1:9. He divided his message according to the threefold exhortation of the Lord to Joshua: **I. "Be strong!" II. "Be of good courage!"** and **III. "Be not dismayed!"** and encouraged the Conference brethren to **go forward** in the work of the Lord, prompted by His command and promise to be with them and to prosper their efforts. Our **strength** to do the Lord's bidding, our **courage** to proceed in the course to which He has directed us, and our **determination** under God to put our faith-courage into action are all dependent upon the Lord's precious Word through which the Holy Spirit moves and enables us to do of His good pleasure. By faith in that Word, we can and should **step forth** (as did the Children of Israel into the Jordan River), undismayed by threatening obstacles, overwhelming odds, and the evil efforts of Satan to deter us from our task; for we are God's dear children through faith in the Savior, and nothing shall be able to separate us from His love nor from the glory that shall be revealed in us in the Promised Land of heaven. The sermon was followed by the offering and a special prayer led by Pastor Natterer, after which Hymn 427 was sung ("How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord") and the service concluded with the customary liturgy.

The opening session of the Convention was called to order by the President shortly after 11:00 a.m. with a brief devotion. **Ad hoc** committees for convention business were then appointed by the chair, according to the Prospectus, from the delegates present from the various congregations. The **Committee on Registration and Excuses** reported the presence of five pastoral delegates, six lay delegates, and six alternate delegates. No lay delegates were present from St. Stephen's, Wilmot, or from Peace, Tinley Park. Total delegate votes to be cast were **thirteen.**

In the **Annual Report of the President,** Pastor Dierking briefly summarized progress made in various areas of Conference work, notably in the setting up of our peripatetic pre-seminary and seminary training program; in meetings with an interested layman in Nebraska and with Pastor David Redlin of Tuscon, Arizona; and in the publication of our Conference periodical in spite of problems with its timely appearance. Of special encouragement to the delegates was the President's note that the Lord had graciously spared us the kinds of heart-rending problems that had plagued us in years past, for which fact we praise and magnify His abundant mercy and grace toward us. This report was accepted, pending review by a committee appointed by Vice President Mensing.

The Convention **Agenda** was approved with only minor changes; and, after the report of the press Committee, the sessions were adjourned for the noon meal.

The Friday afternoon session was opened with a brief devotion conducted by Pastor Natterer. The session was highlighted by the presentation of the **First Part** of the **Convention Essay** entitled: **"The Crosses that the Christian Bears Are Evidence of God's Love for Him."** This essay, delivered by the Rev. David T. Mensing, Pastor of Peace Ev. Lutheran Church, Tinley Park, Illinois, was presented in three parts: **I.** The **Nature** of Our Crosses, **II.** Their **Purpose** at the Hand of our Heavenly Father, and **III.** The **Manner** in Which We Christians Should **Approach** and **Bear** Them. The essayist pointed out in his introduction that the crosses of Christians are inextricably linked to the cross of their Savior and that the unbelievers therefore are unable to understand the Christian concept of cross-bearing and the Christians' attitude toward the trials and tribulations they are called upon to bear for

Jesus' sake. The first part of the essay dealt with those things NOT to be considered "crosses" according to Scripture (namely, **the sufferings of the ungodly** which are punishments for sin and unbelief; **troubles which people bring upon themselves** as the result of specific sins and vices, and **self-chosen burdens and afflictions** by which some would seek the sympathy of God, earn His compassion, or perhaps even pride themselves as patient sufferers.) Rather, **true crosses** are those things which the Christian is called upon by God Himself to bear for **Jesus' sake**, for the sake of His **Gospel**, for the sake of God's love to poor sinners in Christ, and for the sake of their **faith** in Him. Crosses include therefore also "self-denial", the **renunciation** of all things that endanger or destroy discipleship, weaken faith, and impede growth in sanctification. (Readers are encouraged to study the **Essay** in detail either when it is serialized in the CONCORDIA LUTHERAN or when it appears in its entirety in the official PROCEEDINGS of the Convention.) The presentation of the Essay was interspersed with lively participation on the part of the delegates in discussion from the floor. In response to information from the Committee on Missions that our sister congregation in San Antonio may have the opportunity of procuring a house of worship, fellowship hall and parsonage, the **Board of Directors recommended** that this committee, together with the convention Resolutions Committee, draw up objective guidelines for the lending of Conference funds to member congregations in need of assistance in acquiring property. The recommendation was adopted. These will appear in their entirety in the PROCEEDINGS.

The Treasurer's report concerning the past fiscal year was adopted, as was also the Initial Report of the Finance Committee with its proposed 1990-91 Budget.

Election of officers and standing committees yielded the folowing results:

PRESIDENT: Pastor Mark W. Dierking
VICE PRESIDENT: Pastor Paul R. Bloedel
SECRETARY: Pastor David T. Mensing
TREASURER: Mr. Victor K. Bloedel

BOARD MEMBERS-AT-LARGE
(**Midwest**) Mr. David Steinke, (**Farwest**) Mr. Mark Natterer

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Pastor Paul R. Bloedel (**Editor**),
Pastor E. R. Stallings (**Asst. Editor**), Mr. Robert G. Bloedel

COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
Pastor E. R. Stallings (**Chairman**).
Pastor Paul R. Bloedel, Mr. Raymond S. Kusumi,
Mr. David Steinke

COMMITTEE ON MISSIONS
Pastor M. L. Natterer (**Chairman**),
Pastor David T. Mensing, Mr. Daniel M. Bloedel,
Mr. Paul Steinke, Mr. Lloyd E. Martin

COMMITTEE ON LUTHERAN UNION
Pastor Paul R. Bloedel (**Chairman**)
Pastor David T. Mensing, Pastor M. L. Natterer,
Mr. Victor K. Bloedel

FINANCE COMMITTEE
Mr. Victor K. Bloedel (**Treasurer**)
Mr. Daniel Steinke, Mr. Phillip Martin, Mr. Mark Natterer

PUBLISHING HOUSE BOARD OF CONTROL
Pastor Paul R. Bloedel (**Chairman**)
Pastor Mark W. Dierking, Mr. Robert G. Bloedel,
Mr. Victor K. Bloedel, Mr. Raymond S. Kusumi

The **Report of the Missions Committee** highlighted the chairman's contacts with Pastor David Redlin of Tuscon, AZ, as well as Pastor Eibes of the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship, the former contact having borne significant fruit by God's grace. Also reported was the Committee's recommendation that a **subsidy** of $2000 be granted to **St. Stephen's Ev. Lutheran Church** of Wilmot, South Dakota. This subsidy was **granted** by resolution of the Convention. Informal information regarding possible property acquisition by Holy Scripture, San Antonio, was also discussed in preparation for the later discussion on the proposed "Guidelines".

The Saturday sessions were opened with a devotion led by Pastor Stallings. First on the agenda was the continuation of the **Essay.** Pastor Mensing concluded **Part I,** which could not be finished on Friday, and then proceeded with **Part II** concerning the **purpose of the Christian's crosses** at the hand

of his heavenly Father. In this section the essayist pointed out that the crosses themselves, being God's **rebuke, correction, chastening** and **instruction** as He **disciplines** us, fall properly within the scope of His holy **Law** even though they are not given to us out of His anger but out of His love. These visitations of the Law, therefore, do not **in themselves** work sanctification, but they contribute to sanctification as **the Law serves the Gospel** by drawing the Christian closer to the Lord and His Word. It is of course the **Gospel** alone that works and strengthens faith, and accomplishes sanctification, peace, fruitfulness and righteousness, as it confirms to us our blessed sonship of the Father and His love for us in Christ Jesus and takes the grievous chastenings, afflictions, trials and rebukes of the Law and turns them to our benefit, "yielding the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby", Heb. 12:11. This part of the **Essay,** too, was accompanied by lively participation in the form of edifying discussion of the Word.

The **Report of the Committee on Theological Education** given by Pastor Stallings briefly outlined the curriculum of our seminary program, together with the present assignment of courses to each of our pastors. Also proposed for consideration by the delegates were the following recommendations:

...that the Conference budget each year an amount of guaranteed minimal support for seminary students to enable them to plan their fiscal affairs, and that this amount be reviewed at least annually by the Conference;

...that for fiscal year 1990-91 this minimal guaranteed support be $300 per month;

...that the Conference go on record, in accord with our Scriptural position regarding the support of the Christian family (I Tim. 5:8), making it very clear that the Conference has no right to expect a married student's wife to support him and his household during the years of seminary study; and

...that the Conference, as far as possible, assume the financial responsibility of moving a student from place to place during his peripatetic seminary training, as economically as possible, the student therefore making his plans in consultation with the CTE and the local pastor involved.

Each of these recommendations was **unanimously adopted.**

Saturday afternoon's session saw the adoption of the reports of the Committee to Review the President's Report and of the Auditing Committee, as well as the further Report of the Finance Committee regarding the **new budget,** to which had been added the $2000 subsidy for St. Stephen's and an increase to $3000 of the usual annual subsidy for Scriptural Publications for Conference printing work. The **Report of the Committee on Lutheran Union** indicated no new overtures of the Conference to other "conservative" Lutheran groups, primarily because of their **entrenchment in false positions** which stand in the way of **true** union on the basis of **true unity,** and no overtures from such groups toward our conference to warrant a response.

The GUIDELINES proposed jointly by the **Committee on Missions** and the **Resolutions Committee** were adopted with only three changes. (Please see your PROCEEDINGS when they appear.) There having been no official **requests** for funds at this time, no loan was granted; nevertheless, the enabling mechanics are now in place to do so should a request be made.

The reports of the **Editorial Committee** and the **Board of Control** of the publishing house concerning the special work of the Conference through the printed Word, were adopted by the Convention. Both reports summarized work by the respective committees during the past year, as well as goals and special projects for the future. The Saturday session last heard the report of the **Business Manager** of Scriptural Publications which indicated the solvency of our publishing operation.

Sunday morning saw delegates and guests in attendance at the regular **Divine Service** of St. John's Lutheran Church, in which its pastor, the Rev. M.L. Natterer, served as liturgist, and Rev. E.R. Stallings, Jr. of San Antonio preached the sermon. The theme of the sermon was, **"They Are Blessed Who Are Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake."** The text was Matthew 5:10-12, in which the Savior instructs us concerning one particular aspect of Christian crossbearing, namely, that of suffering **persecution** for Jesus' sake. The sermon answered three questions: **I.** What is persecution? **II.** Why is persecu-

tion inevitable and something we must be willing to suffer? **III.** How is a Christian actually blessed in being persecuted? In his sermon, Pastor Stallings pointed out not only the **necessity** that we be **willing** to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, but the comforting **assurance** that our Savior will give us the strength to endure persecution, and that we shall be blessed in such suffering, both here on earth and at length in heaven, as the reward of God's free grace in Christ Jesus. Moreover, it is **by faith,** that we **bear** the persecution, strengthened by the Word; and it is **by faith,** clinging to that same Word, by which we **look forward** to the glory that shall be revealed in us. Following the sermon, the brethren present partook of the Lord's Supper together in testimony of their blessed unity of spirit as guests of St. John's congregation, Pastor Stallings assisting Pastor Natterer in the distribution. After the service, the entire assembly gathered for the noon meal several blocks from the church.

The afternoon session began with a brief devotion led by Pastor Mensing. He then presented the third and concluding portion of his **Essay** on how we Christians are to **regard** our crosses and **muster the strength** necessary to **bear** them. Knowing their Source, our dear heavenly Father, and the salutary purpose He has intended them to work for us, His children, our New Man of faith regards crosses and chastisements as **necessary,** as **good,** as **profitable,** as the manifestation of the Father's **love** to us. Yet, because of our flesh, we cannnot bear them as patiently, gratefully and joyfully as we should. It is only God's grace in Christ Jesus that enables us to bear them **at all;** and that grace in abundance is promised to us in His precious Word as our comfort, our joy, our hope, our confidence, and our neverfailing Source of strength to bear the crosses He has in love laid upon us for our everlasting blessing.

Following the Essay, the **Budget for 1990-91** was adopted in its final form. Also, the **Resolutions Committee** presented five additional resolutions (besides the GUIDELINES adopted earlier), resolutions of special thanks to Pastor Bloedel for his untiring work in the publishing house, to the officers and standing committees, to the pastors for their sermons, devotions, and the essay at our convention, and to St. John's congregation and its pastor for their loving hospitality as

hosts for the brethren. All these resolutions were unanimously adopted.

Also adopted were the final report of the **Committee on Registration and Excuses** and the report of the **Conference Statistician,** Mr. Ray Kusumi. As to the **time and place of the 1991 Convention,** the delegates unanimously accepted the kind invitation of **St. Stephen's Ev. Lutheran Church in Wilmot, South Dakota,** to host this meeting on the weekend of **June 21, 22, and 23.** The business of the convention having been therewith concluded, the final session was adjourned at 4:50 p.m. with a brief devotion conducted by the President. All in all, it had been a most brotherly and fruitful meeting; and the delegates and guests returned home edified with the Word, rejoicing in our blessed unity in that Word, and determined by God's grace to go forward in the work of His kingdom among us with "good courage", standing in His strength alone to the praise of His holy Name.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. David T. Mensing,
Secretary

— From the painting by Hofmann

CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN

Convention Essay. . .

The Crosses that the Christian Bears Are Evidence of God's Love for Him

The Rev. David T. Mensing
Pastor, Peace Ev. Lutheran Church
Tinley Park, Illinois

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."
--Hebrews 12:6

The crosses of a Christian are inextricably linked to the cross of his dear Savior--in their **nature**, in their **purpose**, and in their **effect**-- so that only a true believer in the Lord Jesus and in His vicarious atonement for the sins of the world has crosses laid upon him, recognizes their salutary purpose at the hand of his heavenly Father, and profits from them in accordance with His good and gracious will.

To the unbelieving scoffers of this world who know not God, who aren't the slightest bit interested in or even curious about Him, and who resist every effort of His Holy Spirit to convert them and to rescue their souls from everlasting death, the cross of Jesus Christ is plain "**foolishness**" (I Corinthians 1:18), and the whole concept of a **vicarious** (**substitutionary**) **atonement** for the offenses of mankind against a jealous and demanding God -- a blood-atonement accomplished by the crucifixion of God's only-begotten Son (Hebrews 9:12; I Peter 1:18-19; I John 1:7) -- they find repugnant to their so-called "civilized sensitivities". Why? Simply because "**the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned**" (I Corinthians 2:14). And, in their fleshly arrogance, they deliberately keep themselves in the dark by stubbornly resisting the sincere efforts of the Holy Spirit of God to enlighten their understanding, that they might believe and be saved. Instead of giving heed to "**the foolishness of preaching**" (I Corinthians 1:21), they profess themselves to be wise (Romans 1:22)--wise in the wisdom of this world, wise in technology, law, philosophy, medicine and economics--and be-

come **fools** in the process by cutting themselves off from the wisdom of God that maketh "**wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**" (I Timothy 3:15). Not only is the Gospel of Christ's cross too "simplistic" to be believed, they say, but it is too **degrading,** too **sadistic** and too **gory** to have any appeal for an intelligent, educated and self-reliant person. Besides, it attacks a person's pride and robs him of his self-esteem by ruling out any meritorious participation or cooperation by which he could effect his **own** reconciliation with God--assuming that is even necessary. Such is the warped, arrogant reasoning of the unbeliever. And, since the natural man closes his ears to the indictment of God's Law and steadfastly refuses to acknowledge his utterly helpless, wretched and lost condition in the sight of God, he has absolutely no **appreciation** for the **value** of Christ's sacrifice on his behalf. He feels no **need** for salvation. Consequently, the cross has **no appeal** for him whatsoever, and he recognizes **no personal debt of gratitude** to the crucified Christ for the suffering He endured in man's place.

Moreover, the unregenerate person finds it ironic that Christians, who claim to be at peace with God through faith in Christ's merits (Romans 5:1), have to **suffer** so much here in this life, and that they regard it as a **privilege,** and actually **rejoice** when they are called upon to bear tribulations, trials, pain and scorn because of their faith! The blasphemer throws up his hands, as it were, in mock dismay and shouts, "Why, Christians appear to be just as sadomasochistic as the Christ, whose name they bear!" Indeed, scoffers treat the Christians' attitude with ridicule and disdain, and, at the instance of Satan, delight therefore in compounding the sufferings with **additional persecutions**!

Thus the Romans, for example, delighted in feeding Christians to the lions, burning them as human torches, crucifying them, and tearing them asunder, while from the arena's sand their hymns of praise to their Redeemer rose heavenward in **thanksgiving** for the opportunity to suffer for His Name's sake! And, while we "**have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin,**" (Hebrews 12:4) there are those round about us who take pleasure in seeing us **suffer as well and gleefully await their opportunity to taunt us and revile us for Jesus' sake**! Shall we **shrink back from our crosses** and **endeavor to escape them,** dear brethren? Not if we want to

remain Jesus' disciples and to share with Him "**the glory that shall be revealed in us**" (Luke 14:33; Romans 8:18), not if we truly value the cross of our Savior and the peace with God that He purchased and won for us (Romans 5:1,10-11), not if we **earnestly desire** to be dealt with by our heavenly Father **in love** as His dear children (Hebrews 12:6-8)!

Dr. Luther spoke highly of the cross under which we Christians are called upon to languish here in this world, characterizing it as a sort of **badge** we wear, the "**marks of Christ,**" not merely "**painted on the wall**"--not merely an **external** identification which can be erased or covered over if and when convenient--but "**branded in the flesh and blood of the Christians,**" as Paul also describes them in Galatians 6:17. In fact, Luther's **personal seal,** with which all of us surely are familiar, depicts the **blessedness** of Christian cross-bearing, with the heart of the believer resting on a bed of roses, even as it languishes beneath the cross. ("**Des Christen Herz auf Rosen geht, wenn's mitten unterm Kreuze steht.**" -- "The Christian's heart rests on roses, e'en when it 'neath the cross reposes.")

Sadly, we find precious little space in our Synodical Catechism (1943) devoted to this important topic, considering the fact that it is probably our chief and most frequently used summary of Christian doctrine in confirmation classes, adult instruction classes, and in the Sunday School. We note only brief mention of it in the answer to Question 225, where we read: "**This good and gracious will of God includes. . . C. Everything that God wants us to suffer patiently according to His good pleasure,**" and in the answer to Question 236, which states: "**God is said to tempt man when He tests, or tries, the faith of His children for the purpose of purifying and strengthening them.**"

It is therefore both timely and appropriate that we give particular attention at this convention to the subject of Christian cross-bearing, with special emphasis upon the encouraging fact that our crosses are evidence of God's love for us, His dear children. We shall consider, first of all, the **NATURE** of our crosses, secondly, their **PURPOSE** at the hand of our heavenly Father, and finally, the manner in which we Christians should **APPROACH AND BEAR** them.

I.

In discussing first of all the **nature** of crosses, let us identify those things which, properly-speaking, are **NOT** crosses at all, in spite of popular views to the contrary, and which therefore we shall eliminate from further consideration later on.

--The sorrows, troubles and sufferings of the ungodly are **not** crosses but **PUNISHMENTS**, the visitation of God's "**wrath of indignation**" (Luther) against them **a**) because of their **SINS** for which they well deserve His anger, displeasure and retribution, and **b**) because of their **UNBELIEF** whereby they reject their only hope of salvation and estrange themselves from God's mercy and grace to all mankind in Christ Jesus.

It is not that God **hates** them and desires their **eternal ruin** (or, as Calvin claimed in defiance of Holy Scripture, that He has ordained them to eternal damnation); for God Himself swears by His own existence: "**As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live**" (Ezekiel 33:11). And the Apostle Peter echoes this very same divine intent, stating in his Second Epistle, chapter 3, verse 9, "**The Lord is. . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**"

It is not that God does **not love** also the wicked from His heart of **perfect** mercy and grace in Christ, for Jesus Himself told Nicodemus: "**God so loved the WORLD, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). God for Christ's sake reconciled "**the WORLD unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them**" (II Corinthians 5:19), and thus, out of **love** for poor, lost and condemned sinners, "**justifieth the UNGODLY**" (Romans 4:5).

But the ungodly, those who **reject in unbelief** the grace of God in Christ, their Redeemer, "**deny the Lord that bought THEM, and bring upon THEMSELVES swift destruction**" (II Peter 2:1) by insisting that they be dealt with according to God's justice. Thus they spurn the love, mercy and grace of God, which He earnestly desires them to have, and according to which their sorrows, troubles and sufferings **would** work to

their good and blessings as the manifestation of God's fatherly love. Instead, however, they choose rather to endure the full brunt of God's wrath and displeasure, temporal and eternal punishment, as "**aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world**" (Ephesians 2:12).

--Neither are the miseries, debts and punishments which people bring upon **themselves** as the result of crime, violence and vice to be considered "crosses" which the Lord has laid upon His children because of their faith; for the Apostle Peter addresses the Christians and says: "**Let none of YOU suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters**" (I Peter 4:15); "**for what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your FAULTS, ye shall take it patiently**?" (I Peter 2:20a). Yet, for the **CHRISTIAN** who has fallen in weakness into "**great shame and vice**" but who, by God's grace, has sincerely repented of his sins and cast himself humbly and confidently upon his Savior for forgiveness, even the **temporal consequences** of such sins, "**the due reward of (his) deeds**" (Luke 23:41), God has graciously promised to turn into good for him (Romans 8:28).

--But Christians are not to **choose** and bring upon **themselves** tribulation and suffering, want and deprivation, when these have not been laid upon them by the Lord. For such self-imposed burdens **are NOT properly-speaking** "crosses" at all, but misdirected efforts at gaining God's favor (or at least His compassion) by their sufferings. Luther calls those who would impose crosses upon themselves "**work-saints**" and "**the devil's martyrs**" who suffered not according to the will of God but at the will of Satan; for **he** it is who would have us be justified by the Law and fall from grace! (Galatians 5:4).

--It should be amply evident that Christians not presume to lay burdens upon **others**, in an effort to keep them humble, to crush any propensity for pride within them, and thus to be God's instruments, as it were, to lead such sufferers to heaven. Indeed, the laying of burdens upon **another** is **PERSECUTION** which flies in the face of God's holy Fifth Commandment! To the innocent **victim**, such a persecution is indeed a **cross**; but laying burdens upon **others**, even with the best of motives and intentions, is nothing short of **meddling into GOD'S BUSINESS**, whose prerogative it is, and to whose

inscrutable wisdom it belongs, to lay true crosses upon His children which they are able to bear (I Corinthians 10:13) and which will redound to their profit (Hebrews 12:10). "**Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of GOD commit the keeping of their souls to HIM**" (I Peter 4:19).

What then **ARE** the crosses that the Christian bears? As noted in the introduction to our essay, the cross of a Christian is inextricably linked to the cross of the Savior -- not merely in the outward similarity of both being a source of pain and suffering, but in this, that because the Lord Jesus willingly endured HIS cross, despising the shame, the pain, the anguish and the mockery heaped upon Him, all to purchase our release from the slavery of sin and bondage to the devil (Hebrews 12:2-3), so **we**, as the redeemed children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, must be willing to bear **our** crosses--our "mini-crosses" in comparison to His--after Him, as **evidence of our faith** and **in demonstration of our thanksgiving** for His sacrifice in our place. Thus it is only a **CHRISTIAN** who is said to bear "**crosses**"; for those crosses consist in the suffering that a believer is called upon to bear **for JESUS' sake, for the sake of HIS cross, for the sake of the Gospel of "Christ crucified**" (I Corinthians 1:23), **for the sake of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,**" whom He sent "**to be the propitiation for our sins**" (I John 4:9-10) and for the sake of our faith in Him, whereby "**we are all the children of God**" (Galatians 3:26) and as such enjoy very particularly His fatherly divine love.

The question then very naturally arises in man's sin-blinded reason: If Christians as the children of God are at **peace** with Him and dwell in His **love,** how is it that they must **suffer** for Christ's sake, suffer so **manifold** and **so grievous** a load of trials and tribulations? How is it that they must suffer **at all**?

It is true that, as the result of Christ's redemptive work, because of the justification or forgiveness of the whole world by God on account of that work, and because of our personal enjoyment of peace with God through faith in that Objective Justification for Jesus' sake, we Christians are indeed in a most **blessed state** of comfort and joy, of peace and hope. Nevertheless, the full glory that is ours even now as the inheritance of those who, as God's adopted children and heirs

with Christ -- that glory has not yet been revealed in us and delivered to us in **full measure,** but is anticipated, "**hoped for**" (Hebrews 11:1; I Peter 1:3-4) as definitely to be expected **in heaven.** For the Apostle John writes in his First Epistle, chapter 3, verse 2, "**Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.**"

In the meantime, God has ordained that our high dignity as His children and the glory in store for us should be **concealed,** and that our present existence should be characterized by a **lowliness** reminiscent of our **SAVIOR'S** lowliness in His State of Humiliation. Thus we are called upon to "**suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together**" (Romans 8:17).

Our sufferings, moreover, "**the sufferings of this present time**" (Romans 8:18), often make it LOOK to **others** and, in our weakness, even to **us,** as if we were NOT the children of God because, to the simpleminded, sin-warped manner of human thinking and human judgment, it should be the **wicked** that suffer, not the **righteous;** it should be the **devil's** children that should be tortured and tormented, not the children of **God**! (Job 21:7-15). Nevertheless, under the cross **it goes just the opposite:** The wicked prosper, while the righteous suffer want; the scoffer is revered, while the believer is smeared; the unbelievers are exonerated before the world, often "getting away with murder," as we commonly say, while Christ's "disciples indeed" are accused of "**all manner of evil falsely for (His) sake**" (Matthew 5:11). And this seems to be a strange and puzzling phenomenon to those who do not understand the "**end**" of the wicked from God's own Word (Psalm 73) and who do not likewise appreciate "**the glory that shall be revealed in us**" (Romans 8:18).

But this matter of cross-bearing MUST be well-understood, yea, **properly** understood, by every Christian, lest in time of trial and temptation he lose heart, despair of the love of God, despise the chastening of the Lord, and end up a "**bastard**" child (Hebrews 12:8), giving up his birthright, his legitimate claim to the heavenly Father's inheritance. For such are they "**who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away,**" Jesus tells us in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:13). "**From this preserve us, Heavenly Father!**" (Luther, 1st Petition).

Luther writes: "A Christian, **just because he IS a Christian,** is subject to his dear holy cross, so that he must suffer either from other people or from the devil himself, who torments and terrifies him with tribulation, persecution, poverty, sickness; or inwardly in his heart by means of his poisonous darts." Thus the Lord chastens us betimes by permitting **Satan** to vex us, as He did in Job's case, or by permitting the children of this **world** to persecute us, as He did in Paul's case. **Again Luther:** "The fact that Christians hold to the Word in faith, that they put their hope in the Son of God, comfort themselves with His death and resurrection, fear God and desire to live according to His will, (and) earnestly desire that through their confession others may come to the knowledge of God and faith, **this** the devil and the world cannot endure. For this reason they constantly torment the Christians."

We think immediately of Job in the Old Testament, whom Satan robbed of his property, cattle, servants and children; ravaged with storms, hail and fire; and whose body he plagued with excruciatingly-painful boils. Friends and relatives deserted him; and even his wife turned against him, urging him to give up his faith and to die without God! And yet, in permitting Satan to try Job's faith, God Himself set a limit beyond which the Tempter dared not go in afflicting him, showing us that it is **GOD** who chastens us, though He use the devil and other agencies to accomplish the tribulation (Book of Job).

We also consider as the classic enumeration of chastisements laid upon a faithful Christian the list of St. Paul's tribulations in II Corinthians 4:8-11, **". . .troubled on every side . . .perplexed . . .persecuted . . .cast down . . .bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus . . .delivered unto death for Jesus' sake**"--as well as the infirmities he suffered for the cause of the Gospel, as he lists them in II Corinthians 11:19ff, ...bondage, beatings, labors, stripes, imprisonments, stonings, storms at sea and shipwreck, perils of all sorts, both at the hand of **God** in nature ("perils of waters," "perils in the wilderness," "perils in the sea," etc.), and at the hand of the wicked (including "robbers," his own "countrymen," "the heathen," and "false brethren.") He endured also "weariness and painfulness," "hunger and thirst," "cold and nakedness," just to name a few, **PLUS** the heavy responsibility of caring for all the local congregations esta-

blished by God's ordinance in the cities where the preaching of the cross had borne fruit. In addition to all **these** chastenings or crosses, Paul was given a special affliction, "**a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet (him),**" of which the Lord declined to relieve him, giving him instead a special measure of His grace, sufficient to enable Paul to bear the infirmity by relying upon God's strength instead of his own (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

Moreover, since Christians are burdened with their sinful flesh until they are rid of it in death, they find that the flesh, in the service of Satan, would have them **deny** their Savior, **resist** and **renounce** His will, and **refuse** to bear **any** suffering, persecution, trial or tribulation for Jesus' sake, preferring a life of ease and the enjoyment of worldly pleasures for a season. Thus, **bearing the cross** also involves **self**-denial, the renunciation by the New Man of everything that interferes with Christian discipleship; for Jesus says: "**He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me**" (Matthew 10:38). For Jesus' sake, therefore, we must be willing if need be to sacrifice temporal peace and tranquility, honor among men, the friendship of worldly acquaintances, relatives and loved-ones, as well as temporal possessions (Matthew 10:34; Luke 6:22; II Corinthians 6:14; Matthew 10:35-37; and Matthew 19:21-22). Even our **life itself** should never be counted dearer to us than our Savior and the eternal blessings of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation which He won for us. (Luke 14:26)

This aspect of the Christian's cross, namely, **self**-denial, that is, the renunciation of all things that endanger or destroy discipleship, weaken faith, and impede growth in sanctification, is a matter of great **difficulty** because of the Old Adam, and belongs to the on-going struggle within the Christian between the "spirit" and the "flesh", the battle in which the spirit **must triumph** and mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts. For Christ Himself tells us: "**Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple**" (Luke 14:33); and Paul, the great example to us of **self-denial** for Jesus' sake, declares: "**Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ**" (Philippians 3:8).

Our discussion of the **nature of the cross** would not be complete without noting very specially that the crosses that the Christian bears are, in and of themselves, manifestations of God's holy **Law** by which He chastens **His children,** that is, **whips** them, as does an earthly father when he spanks his own son or daughter (Hebrews 12:9-10). Indeed, His chastenings are often so "**grievous**" (v. 11a) that He characterizes them in the keynote text of our essay as "**scourges**" (v. 6). They are His "**rebuke**" and "**correction**" (v's. 5 and 9), which are functions of the **Law.** But these crosses are laid upon the Christians by their heavenly Father, not because He **hates** them, not because He desires their **hurt,** but because, in Christ Jesus, He dearly **loves** them and deals with them as with **sons** (v. 7). We shall explore more fully the **purpose** of the Christian's crosses in Part II of our essay and see that, contrary to one's initial, carnal reaction unaided by God's Holy Spirit, there are **no contradictions in these sacred truths,** but rather a blessed and reassuring comfort "**unto them which are exercised thereby**" (v. 11).

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