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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"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"

Isaiah 7:14

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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 a false church, 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.

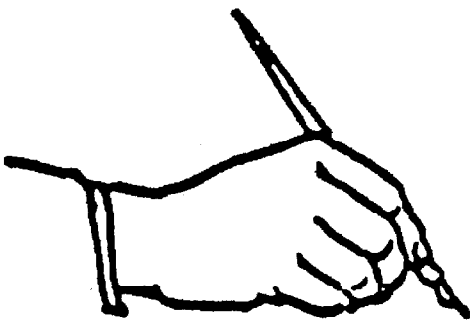
To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

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.



The President's Column

EVERY PASTOR IN THE CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE PREACHES THE PERSONAL UNION OF THE TWO NATURES IN CHRIST

Most people are acquainted with the beautiful Christmas Story as it is recorded by inspiration of God in the second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. Such passages as, "She brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7); "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14); "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11); and "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19) are commonplace in most Christian households. Matthew's record of the Wisemen from the East which contains such passages as, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2), and "The star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Matt. 2:9), and "When they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matt. 2:11), is also a portion of God's Word with which people are familiar especially at Christmas time. In the Gospel according to St. John, however, we find the entire story of Christmas compressed into only ONE verse which sets forth plainly the perfect deity and the perfect humanity of the Christ Child. There we read, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Commenting on this verse, Dr. Martin Luther illustrates its great importance with the following anecdote: "The following tale is told about a coarse and brutal lout. While the words 'And was made man' were being sung in church, he remained standing, neither genuflecting (kneeling) nor removing his hat. He showed no reverence, but just stood there like a clod. All the others dropped to their knees when the Nicene Creed was prayed and chanted devoutly. Then the devil stepped up to him and hit him so hard it made his head spin. He cursed him gruesomely and said: 'May hell consume you, you boorish ass! If God had become an angel like me and the congregation sang: 'God was made an angel,' I would bend not only my knees but my whole body to the ground! Yes, I would crawl ten ells down into the ground. And you vile human creature, you stand there like a stick or a stone. You hear that God did not become an angel but a man like you, and you just stand there like a stick of wood!' ... With this illustrative story the holy fathers wished to admonish the youth to revere the indescribably great miracle of the incarnation; they wanted us to open our eyes wide and ponder these words well."

Here in verse fourteen of the Gospel according to St. John, we find the great mystery of Christmas which even the holy angels of God cannot fathom. Yet it is this great truth which is oftentimes overlooked entirely or not given sufficient emphasis at Christmas time when much is said and sung concerning Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger, the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem to whom our Savior's birth was revealed, and the Wisemen with their precious gifts. This great truth that God "was manifest in the flesh" is called the "mystery of godliness" in I Tim. 3:16. It is a mystery which God has revealed to us for our eternal salvation. But this very mystery is regarded by many as an offensive part of Christmas so that it is not unusual to see the third stanza of Silent Night omitted when it is sung on the radio, TV, or on recordings. That stanza reads, "Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, Love's pure light Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth."

Without question, the most important fact of Christmas is that the "fulness of the Godhead," God whole and entire, He who is, from

eternity, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost dwells bodily in that which was miraculously conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, born in the City of David, and laid in a manger. Of the Baby Jesus the pastors of our Concordia Lutheran Conference therefore preach that this tiny human Baby is GOD, the Creator and Ruler of all things! True God and true Man are united in the Babe of Bethlehem in such a way that the human Baby partakes of all the attributes of the Godhead and that all the characteristics and activities of that human Baby are ascribed to the person of the Son of God. Yes, also God's attributes of eternity, omnipotence, and omnipresence are ascribed to Christ as a true man even as Jesus later said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), and to His disciples, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18), and to Nicodemus, "Even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). In Christ, man DID NOT become God (as is the case in so much of Greek and Roman mythology), but God was made man. "When the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4,5), the eternal Son of God took into His divine person a truly human nature, and by His miraculous conception in the womb of the virgin Mary and His humble birth in Bethlehem, He sanctified the sinful conception and birth of all the children of Adam, for "God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin FOR US, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21).

Since His incarnation, the human body of Christ is and will ever be the human body of the Son of God; the human soul of Christ is and will ever be the human soul of the Son of God; whatever Christ did as a true man He did also as true God, and whatever He continues to do as true God He also continues to do as true man unto the end of time and on into eternity. This is what makes His redemptive work unique and so precious! It was God who, having become a true man, was able to humble Himself and to take our place under His holy Law so that He would be able to perform the requirements of every commandment perfectly as the Substitute for every man, woman and child ever to be born in this sin-cursed world. The Bible therefore assures us, "As by one man's disobedience many [all] were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many [all] be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). The eternal Son of God, having become a

true man, was also able to humble Himself (Phil. 2:8) to such an extent that He bore in His own sinless body, in man's stead, the punishment which the entire human race deserved because of sin. This could not have been done were not the perfect deity and the perfect humanity of Christ joined together so as to form one undivided and indivisible Person. The Jews therefore killed the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15) and the blood of God (I John 1:7) was shed on Calvary for the sins of the world.

What the Bible teaches, and what the pastors of our Concordia Lutheran Conference therefore teach, about the Personal Union of the Two Natures in Christ is vitally important for our faith as Christians because here we are assured that the true man who kept God's Holy Law perfectly and suffered and died on the accursed tree of the cross was not a mere man only, for then His work would not have benefited us in the least, but also true God begotten of the Father from eternity.

True Godhead incarnate, Omnipotent Word!
O, Come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

-- P. R. B.

Isaiah 7:14

A "Rectilinear" Prophecy of Christ's Virgin Birth

"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign:
Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel." —Isaiah 7:14

It's back in the news again, not the virgin birth of Christ, but that old skeleton still rattling around in the closet of "modern" exegetes that Isaiah 7:14 is **not** a prophecy of the virgin birth of the Savior, nor of **any** "virgin birth" at all. The so-called "higher critics" of the Bible have long held that the Hebrew word ***almáh*** can legitimately be translated "young woman" or "maid", and that therefore Isaiah 7:14 should not be "forced" in English translation to "prove" the *"virgin"* birth of *anybody*, much less of Jesus Himself. And so we find most "modern" English translations of the Old Testament following that subversive "line" of the modernists who flat out **deny** the virgin birth of Christ and represent it to be a figment of Christian "mythology."

Why is it so **popular** among "modern" interpreters of the Bible to discount the virgin birth of Christ and to pull Scripture "props" out from under this blessed doctrine?? Why would they even **want** to cast suspicion upon Isaiah 7:14 and its completely proper translation in our beloved King James Version?? Why would anyone even **try** to discredit the time-honored view of this passage as a direct (or "rectilinear") prophecy of the miraculous conception and birth of Christ *"of the Virgin Mary,"* as believing Christians have confessed it in their creeds for eighteen centuries?? Is it because of *genuine evidence* recently uncovered in legitimate scholarship? —No! Is it because of *genuine concern* for Christ's sheep that they not be led astray into the byways of error? —Certainly not! Is it perhaps because it doesn't *really matter* what exegesis of this prophecy we accept, as long as we still have "respect" for the Sacred Scriptures?? —Not unless that "respect" is nothing but a sham and a pretense!!

To such willful and wanton perverters of divine truth should be directed the Savior's words in John 8:43 and 44, *"Why do ye not understand My speech? Even because ye cannot hear My Word. Ye are of your father, the devil!"* **Satan** is the artful master at turning Scripture on its head, of perverting it, and of casting doubt upon its sure and certain words. **He's** the one who invented the lie when in Genesis 3 he cunningly planted the seed of uncertainty in the ear of Eve with his contrived question, *"Yea, hath God said??"* And now we have modern-day sons of Belial, *"wise in their own conceits,"* who dare to attack the *"sign"* that *"the Lord Himself"* gave to indicate which *"son"* born of a woman would be *"God with us;"* and thus they undermine saving confidence in the son of Mary, the virgin of Nazareth, as *"the Christ, the Son of the living God!"*

Sadly, but not surprisingly, this same devilish "baloney" has infested the **Missouri Synod's** own *Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR),* which refuses to come up with a simple statement confirming the time-honored and thoroughly Scriptural position that Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament refer **directly** to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, and to no one else. Why would this commission of ranking theologians thus pander to the views of modernists and leave this issue "out on a limb" for Missouri Synod Lutherans for over eight years? Why could it not in several *minutes* formulate a simple statement —perhaps with the help of *children* who, like Timothy, *"have known the Holy Scriptures"* (II Timothy 3:15) and have accepted them as the verbally-inspired Word of God? The reason is **simple**: As we have testified with unflinching consistency since 1951, the **Missouri Synod** is a ***heterodox church body*** which officially tolerates error in its midst, refuses to discipline those who publicly teach and practice contrary to the Word of God, has no real unity in its caricature of fellowship, and is quite satisfied with the *status quo* of all-talk-and-no-action on the part of its "confessional" wing. Even its president, touted by supporters as a "confessional" and a "conservative", is either unwilling or unable to demonstrate the fortitude required of every Christian in Romans 16:17 and other passages to *"mark"* or identify those who cause divisions and offenses by their departure from sound doctrine and to *"avoid them"*. He is, *ex officio* at least, a member of the CTCR,

which, according to published reports, recently issued its unanimous opinion: *"We do not believe that a specific exegesis of given prophetic passages* [as Isaiah 7:14 and others laid before the Commission] *can be legislated."* Yet, according to news reports, the 1995 convention of the LCMS was able to "pass" a resolution confirming its *traditional* position on "rectilinear prophecy", though apparently not with the unanimity required by God's Word in I Corinthians 1:10. That's the way the Synod now for many years has determined matters of doctrine and practice: It hopes for at least a "majority" in favor of the truth. And so it continues to go in the once orthodox Missouri Synod: The more things change, the more they stay the same, and a heterodox church body by any other name is still **heterodox**!

We, however, do not hesitate to state in simple terms and without equivocation the FACT that **Isaiah 7:14 is a direct, rectilinear prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ, referring only and alone to that blessed event, and was fulfilled only by the conception and birth of Jesus of Nazareth of the Virgin Mary.** We do not argue with the linguist who says that *almáh* in Hebrew CAN be translated out of context by the English "young woman" or "maiden" or "maid" (marriageable but not married) as well as "virgin." The fact remains that in Isaiah 7:14 the word *almáh* **MUST** be translated "**virgin**." Why? Because the only *legitimate* exegesis of this passage is determined NOT by etymology or lexicography or linguistics or history or the study of manuscripts but by the Holy Ghost Himself. The principle rejected by modernistic theologians, namely, that Scripture is its own interpreter *(scriptura scripturam interpretatur),* is what makes the correct understanding (and translation) of Isaiah 7:14 **so utterly simple**.

The Evangelist St. Luke, in the first chapter of his Gospel account, records in detail the message of Gabriel *"to a **virgin** espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the **virgin's** name was Mary."* (v. 27). The Greek of the New Testament is as specific as it could possibly be about the gynecological status of Mary in her pre-gestational condition. The Greek word *parthénos*, unlike the Hebrew word *almáh*, allows of only **one meaning**, namely,

"**virgin**," as Mary knew herself to be, *"seeing I know not a man."* (v. 34). The operation of the **Holy Ghost** in the inception of Mary's pregnancy (rather than the wicked calumny that Mary had had a quick last-minute affair with a former suitor OR that she and Joseph had been sleeping together on the sly) is the **stated reason WHY** both Mary, and Joseph (according to Matthew 1:20), and **we too** can be certain that the *"holy thing which shall be born of [her] shall be called the **Son of God**"* (v. 35), not a "love child" produced by carnal intercourse. The Greek word διὸ [*"wherefore"* or *"for this reason"*] makes the virgin conception and birth of Christ essential to His identification as the true Messiah. To be sure, to the *"carnal mind [which] is enmity against God,"* a **virgin birth** is "unscientific," "impossible," and therefore must be a kind of "sanctified myth" created by the early Christians to distinguish their beloved Master from other religious prophets of His stature. We would indeed expect an **unbeliever** to reason in this fashion and to blaspheme the God of all grace, who caused the Redeemer of sinful men to be born in this miraculous manner. But for any professing **Christian** to reason and speak the same way and to challenge the virgin birth of our Savior as an impossible event is completely unthinkable, *"for with God **nothing** shall be impossible."* (v. 37).

Moreover, Matthew records the circumstances of Christ's conception and birth in the first chapter of his Gospel account, verses 18 through 25. There he quotes the Lord's angel announcing also to Joseph concerning Mary's pregnancy: *"That which is conceived in her is of the **Holy Ghost**."* And right here is where the exegesis of Isaiah 7:14 is easily settled; for Matthew points to **this event** as fulfilling *"that which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold, a **virgin** shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,' which being interpreted is, 'God with us.'"* If indeed we truly believe in the **verbal inspiration** of the Scriptures and their **inerrancy** as the Word of God Himself; if we believe, as we confess in our Catechism, that *"God the Holy Ghost moved the holy men to write, and put into their minds the very thoughts which they expressed and the very **words** which they wrote;"* then we also believe that in Matthew 1:23 the **Holy Ghost** quoted the **Holy Ghost** with divine, infallible precision, and that **God Himself** translated the

Hebrew word ***almáh*** for us with the Greek word ***parthénos*** and thus made any speculation on this point completely moot AND completely out of place. God Himself settled any translation "problem" for our comfort and assurance —a happy fact which all the church fathers recognized down through the ages by the grace of God.

But is Isaiah 7:14 a "**rectilinear**" prophecy, pointing **ONLY** to the virgin birth of Christ and fulfilled **ONLY** by the virgin birth of Christ? Consider the following questions:

—Does not Matthew **state** unequivocally: *"Now all **this** was done **that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet..."*?

—Does anyone (particularly one who already scoffs at the virgin birth of **Christ**) seriously think that there was ***another*** virgin birth at some time in the past to fulfill this prophecy??

—Does the Lord Himself *"give [us] a **sign**"* to point to His own Messiah, by an identifying mark so flawed that it can refer to any number of messiahs born at any number of times and places??

—Is it indeed a *"**sign**"* **at all** for "a young woman," "a maiden," a marriageable but never before married female (though not truly a **virgin**), to conceive and bear a son out of wedlock, when it happens hundreds of times every day??

—Did all those non-virginal young women or maidens who supposedly **also** fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy by giving birth to sons have offspring that could legitimately be called *"God with us," "the Son of God," "the Son of the Highest," "the Dayspring from on high,"* and the *"Horn of Salvation"*??

What profound absurdity presents itself when the truths of Holy Scripture, *"given by inspiration of God,"* are set aside in favor of bizarre theories and wild speculation! Indeed, those who reject **rectilinear Messianic prophecy** (directly pointing to Jesus and to Jesus alone) in favor of **"typological"** prophecy which *may* or *may not* point to Jesus AT ALL but only to someone or some event that by pure happenstance *resembles* Jesus and His life here on earth, such "theologians" are not worthy of the name; for they do not speak *"as*

the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11) but *"by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Romans 16:18). ***From this preserve us, dear heavenly Father!*** Let us rather hold fast in confidence to the clearly rectilinear prophecies *"spoken of the Lord by the prophets"* concerning our precious Savior; for *"**to Him** give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins."* (Acts 10:43).

Hail the day so rich in cheer for each earthborn creature!
God's own Son from heaven draws near, takes our human nature.
Of a virgin born is He; Mary, by the Lord's decree,
Is become a mother!
See the miracle of love:
God Himself from heaven above came to be our Brother!
Hallelujah!

-- D. T. M.

Peace On Earth, Good Will Toward Men

Luke 2:14

These well-known words of the holy angel are shamefully abused by those who would not follow the Biblical principle: Scripture interprets Scripture. There are those who maintain that the "peace" of which the angel spoke refers to a peace which must be established by the nations of the world, by men themselves. This means, in their opinion, that men must learn to control their baser instincts and personal cravings and aspire to higher ideals which will then foster peace. But all such philosophical prattle obviously contradicts the Word of God and the plain facts of history. The Lord teaches us in His Word that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). All men have been conceived and born in sin and iniquity (Ps. 51:5) and are therefore by nature the children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:3; 2:1). Now what can be expected from flesh born of the flesh (John 3:6)? "A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17). Out of the sinful hearts of every male and female proceed "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). And the Apostle James writes, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (4:1). And history is replete with ample testimony to the truth of this Scriptural teaching. There has been no true and lasting peace in the world ever since our first parents fell into sin! On the contrary, all the efforts and aspirations of well-meaning individuals to usher in a lasting peace among the nations of the world have resulted in failure.

Then there are those who call themselves millenarians or millennialists who refer this "peace" to a period just before the Final Return of the Lord Jesus on the Day of Judgment. Through a misuse of some figurative or symbolical Bible passages (Isaiah 11:6-9; 41:18,19; Rev. 20), such hold that prior to the end of the world Jesus will rule on earth for a thousand years together with His believing saints. During that time there will be an unprecedented peace and joy throughout the whole world which will experience a golden age. Now is that the "peace" spoken of by the angel of the Lord? Indeed not! The almighty Son of God tells us that "ye shall

hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom..." (Matt. 24:6,7). Thus discord and wars will continue throughout the world until the Savior's Final Return! The last days of the world will be anything but peaceful as we bear in mind the fact that the devil will be loosed for a little season and therefore if those days were not shortened for the elect's sake, not even the very elect would be saved (Rev. 20:3; Matt. 24:21,22). The Apostle Paul reminds the Christians that "we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). No wonder our Lutheran fathers rejected the claims of the millennialists which surfaced at the time of the Reformation as "the Jewish dream of the Messianic Kingdom" (see Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII and the Apology, Art. XVI, 53-57).

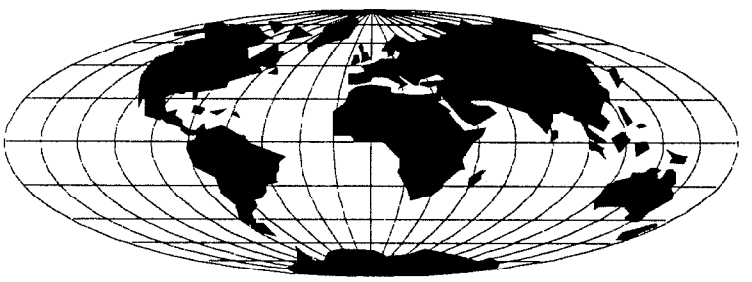
If this "peace" of which the angel spoke does not refer to any such worldly peace, to what does it refer? Here we must allow Scripture to speak for itself. Our Christian faith is not based upon the opinions and interpretations of sinful mortals, but solely upon the infallible and immutable Word of Truth (John 17:17), for "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3:16). And that blessed Word tells us that the peace which had been destroyed through the fall of our first parents, God restored through the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6). O what it cost our dear Savior to gain that peace! "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed..." "The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:5,6). Because of Christ's substitutional sacrifice, the sins of the whole world have been graciously forgiven. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. 5:19). There was no merit or worthiness on the part of man to induce God to send Jesus -- it was solely His love beyond all comprehension. Therefore the "good will" spoken of by the angel refers to the good will of our dear heavenly Father which He revealed toward men in sending His only begotten Son to be our Savior to free us from sin, death, and hell. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian congregation. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both

unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh" (2:13-17).

The "peace" which the angel announced to the shepherds is set forth in the precious Gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15) which God has commanded to be proclaimed to the whole world (Mark 16:15). This Gospel of peace is not an empty shell, but the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom. 1:16). As soon as the individual sinner has been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12:3), then this "peace" is made his very own. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Now the God of hope fills us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 15:13). While there is no peace to the wicked (Is. 48:22), our consciences can be at rest, for "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). We are now "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). The gates of heaven are open to us; "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). What an undeserved Christmas present! Being the recipient of the gift of God which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23), should prompt me to be more diligent in bringing forth the fruits of a grateful heart to please Him "who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

-- M. L. N.

Around the World



with editorial comment

by M. L. Natterer

Every year, some 350,000 teenage girls have babies out of wedlock - a figure that has dramatically increased over the last several decades. It's not just low-income youth. Today more than half of all teen-agers - boys and girls - have had sex by the age of 18, and more than 15 percent of teen-age mothers come from middle-class homes. Middle-class girls, even more than those raised in poverty, begin sexual experimentation with romantic myths - that they'll marry their boyfriend, finish school, raise a loving family and get a good job. But as these three white middle-class girls demonstrate, some myths do not conform to life's realities. THE MYTH: We'll get married ... THE REALITY: According to Child Trends, a Washington, D.C. research organization, more than half of teen-age mothers are not residing with their child's father by the time that child reaches grade school ... THE MYTH: My baby and I don't need a man ... THE REALITY: Fewer than half the teens who give birth out of wedlock marry within the next few years ... THE MYTH: I can still get an education and a good job ... THE REALITY: According to The Alan Guttmacher Institute, only 70 percent of women who give birth as teen-agers finish high school ... (Reader's Digest, September 1996)

According to the above article, the birth rate for unmarried teens has jumped from 16.7 in 1965 to 46.4 in 1994. There is simply no doubt about it! Our government has certainly played a role in bringing about this dramatic rise in teen pregnancies through its immoral programs of encouraging illicit sex relations by handing out condoms in the schools and the ease with which abortions can be lawfully secured. Those who advocate premarital chastity are looked down upon and often

experience the stinging sarcasm of those who openly espouse premarital sex. But look at the disastrous consequences which follow in the wake of those who do not want to make a commitment lawfully to be husband and wife as is brought out already in the above article! For a woman to enter into a mere living-together arrangement with the assurance of the man that they will marry at some future time is sheer stupidity! Time and time again the man invariably sees some other woman who looks more appealing to him and then comes the separation. The woman is often left with a child or two and, being unable to provide a decent living, ends up in the welfare system. Premarital sex may be favorably looked upon by the worldlings, but the Word of God does not recognize any adjustment to the evil spirit of the times. "Flee fornication" (I Cor. 6:18); "Be not deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters ... shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9,10); "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). Those who set aside this Word of God in favor of their own lustful appetite must be warned, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

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After 25 years in the pulpit, at the head of a congregation of nearly 1,000 people, (Spring Lake, Mich.) a storm is raging around the Rev. Richard A. Rhem. The reason for the dispute is that Mr. Rhem says he no longer believes that faith in Jesus is the sole way to salvation. Jews, Muslims and others, he says, may be as likely to enter heaven. In departing from traditional Christian doctrine that proclaims Jesus alone as Savior, Mr. Rhem has shaken the Reformed Church in America, a denomination of about 200,000 members that has roots in the Netherlands of the 16th century and its modern headquarters in New York. The controversy surrounding Mr. Rhem began when a local newspaper reported that his congregation, Christ Community Church, had allowed a small congregation of homosexuals to worship in its chapel. Called before a classis meeting in October, Mr. Rhem was asked to explain whether he shared the governing body's view that homosexual activity is sinful. One minister there also questioned his broader views on Scripture and salvation ... The classis began an

inquiry into Mr. Rhem's beliefs and soon asked him to recant. He refused. In drawing up its censure of him in July, the classis raised the possibility of a church trial, action that could have led to his being defrocked. The body later decided against that step ... (New York Times, Aug. 22, 1996).

The only way to heaven is given to us in such crystal-clear language in the Word of God. The almighty Son of God declares, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). That Christ is the only way of salvation is also expressed in that Bible passage which was probably one of the first verses we committed to memory as children, "For 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). Likewise, "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). And in the Great Commission which the Savior gave to His disciples, He commanded them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15,16). The Apostles went forth preaching, "neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The proof from Scripture is so abundant and so overwhelming that "if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:3,4). Believing that Jesus alone is our Savior from sin, death, and hell, is the only way to eternal life. The words of Jesus stand as the unalterable truth of God: "if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). And "if any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... he is proud, knowing nothing" ... (I Tim. 6:3,4).

No spires. No crosses. No robes. No clerical collars. No hard pews. No kneelers. No biblical gobbledygook. No prayerly rote. No fire, no brimstone. No pipe organs ...

The list has asterisks and exceptions, but its meaning is clear. Centuries of European tradition and Christian habit are deliberately being abandoned, clearing the way for new, contemporary forms of worship and belonging. The Next Church constitutes, its champions say, a distinctly American reformation of church life, one that transcends denominations and the bounds of traditional churchly behavior. As such, it represents something more: a reconfiguration of secular communities, not just sacred ones ... The churches are remarkable chiefly for their size. Many of these mostly Protestant congregations count thousands of people in attendance on a weekend ... These large and dynamic congregations may number no more than 400, but they are the fastest-growing in the country ... (The Sunday Oregonian, Sept. 22, 1996).

The lengthy article states that these "Mega Churches," as they are popularly called, are springing up throughout our country. In Gresham, Oregon, for example, one such Mega Church packs 4,500 people into four services over a weekend. Obviously with these nondenominational Mega Churches doctrine is relegated to the back burner. No true Scriptural unity exists (I Cor. 1:10) but a large hodgepodge. The Lord of the Church, however, commands "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded" (Matt. 28:20). And the Lord's Apostle gives the charge to pastors, "preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Why must the pastor so carefully instruct his people? The Apostle continues, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:2-4). The Holy Scriptures alone are to be the sole Source and Norm of all teaching in the Church. Those who would lay it aside in favor of a Mega Church entertainment center are simply building upon sinking sand. For the Church is built upon "the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 20). Those who belong to the Church have been made members of it by the Holy Spirit who by the Gospel has worked the true saving faith within their hearts and preserves them in the faith by means of that same Word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The believers "are kept by the power of God through faith (see Rom. 1:16) unto salvation" (I Pet. 1:5). And the Head of the Church reminds those who claim to be His followers, "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32). We are to go to church not to be entertained, but to have our faith strengthened by the Word of God which our divinely appointed overseer (Acts 20:28) is obligated to preach from the pulpit! The hour is coming when the Lord of the Church will demand a strict accounting from all pastors. Woe betide those who have not faithfully preached His Word in all of its truth and purity!

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The Word becomes incarnate
And yet remains on high,
And cherubim sing anthems
To shepherds from the sky.
Repeat the hymn again:
"To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"

While thus they sing your Monarch,
Those bright angelic bands,
Rejoice, ye vales and mountains,
Ye oceans, clap your hands.
Repeat the hymn again:
"To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"

Since all He comes to ransom,
By all be He adored,
The Infant born in Bethl'em,
The Savior and the Lord.
Repeat the hymn again:
"To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"

And idol forms shall perish,
And error shall decay,
And Christ shall wield His scepter,
Our Lord and God for aye.
Repeat the hymn again:
"To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men!"

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