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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"Father, if thou be willing,
remove this cup from me:
nevertheless not my will,
but thine, be done."

Luke 22:42

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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.

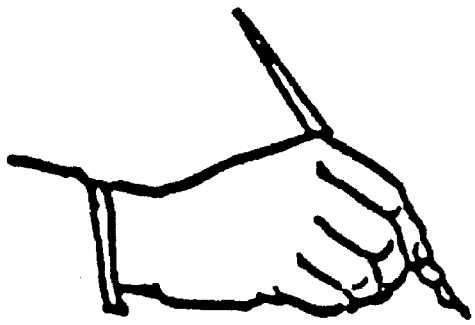
To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

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 ACTIVE AND PASSIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

The name "Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah" which means in English "The Anointed One." It is the **title** of our Savior's office for, since His conception and birth, He who is one with the Father and Holy Ghost from eternity has been, according to His human nature, anointed with the Holy Ghost without measure. *"God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him,"* (John 3:34*). "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power,"* (Acts 10:38). As the Old Testament priests and kings were anointed with oil before exercising the functions of their respective offices, the Lord Jesus was anointed with the *"Oil of Gladness"* (the Holy Ghost) to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. *"God, thy God, hath anointed Thee with the Oil of Gladness above thy fellows."* (Psalm 45:7).

The **PROPHETIC OFFICE** of Christ **began** with His Baptism by John in the Jordan River, **was exercised during His earthly life** by His preaching and miracles through which He revealed Himself as the Son of God and Redeemer of the world, **was continued** by the Apostles and **will continue to the end of time** through the verbally inspired writings of the Apostles and Prophets by means of the pastoral office which He has instituted to be established in the visible local Christian congregations for the regular and consistent preaching, teaching, hearing and learning of His Word. Titus 1:5.

The **PRIESTLY OFFICE** of Christ **began** with His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, **continued throughout His earthly life**, and **will continue until the end of the world**. To His priestly office belongs His active and passive obedience (to which this articlewill direct itself), and His intercession for us with His heavenly Father.

The **KINGLY OFFICE** to which Christ was anointed **began** at His conception and **will continue into all eternity**--even though in **His state of humiliation**, during His earthly life, He did not fully exercise His Kingly Office because, having taken upon Himself *the "form of a servant"* (Phil. 2:7) for our sakes, He did not always and fully use the divine attributes which were nevertheless His also as a true man. In His **state of exaltation**, which began with His descent into Hell and His triumphant resurrection on Easter morning, the Lord Jesus always and fully uses the divine attributes which are His, also according to His human nature, and by which He rules and fills all things with His divine power and majesty, governing and protecting His Church here on earth and finally leading it to glory everlasting in heaven. As our King, the Lord Jesus, true God and true man, is present everywhere and rules the entire universe (the Kingdom of Power) for the benefit of the true believers (the Kingdom of Grace) whom He will finally receive into the blessedness of His everlasting kingdom in heaven (the Kingdom of Glory).

As mentioned above, the Active and Passive Obedience of Christ belongs to His **priestly** office. Those, in Old Testament times, who were anointed to the priesthood were to be exclusively from the house of Aaron--descendants of Aaron and his sons, of the tribe of Levi. The Lord God Himself specified what special articles of clothing the priests were to wear and what special sacrifices they were to offer for the people: Offerings of atonement for their sins, peace-offerings, and thank-offerings. They were to represent the people before God. By means of the sacrifices offered by the priests in their behalf, the priests were able to procure for the people the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation **through the promised Messiah**, the Christ, to whom all of the Old Testament sacrifices pointed and from whose sacrifice on the cross they received their power and efficacy. Christ alone is

the one and only true Lamb of Sacrifice "*which taketh away the sin of the world*," (John 1:29).

In Christ we have a **perfect** High Priest, not of the Aaronic Priesthood, but prefigured by Melchizedek, the priest of Salem (to whom Abram "*gave tithes of all*,"--Gen. 14:18-20; Heb. 7:1,2), who suddenly appears upon the pages of Old Testament History without any reference to his lineage, his birth or his death (Hebrews 7:3). Because the Lord Jesus, **as true God**, has no lineage and no beginning or end, the Bible therefore says of Him, "*Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*," (Psalm 110:4; Heb. 5:6,10; Heb. 6:20; Heb. 7:17,21).

As our "*priest forever*" (Hebrews, chapters 5-7), the Lord **Jesus fulfilled the Holy Law of God perfectly and vicariously**, namely, in the stead of every human being ever to be born on earth. The Bible says, "*As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so **by the righteousness of One** the free gift came upon all men unto righteousness of life. For as by one man's disobedience many (**the many**, namely **the multitude of mankind**) were made sinners, so by the **OBEDIENCE** of One shall many (**the many, namely the multitude of mankind**) be made righteous.*" (Romans 5:18,19). This, of course, is known as Christ's **active obedience** which is proclaimed in all its truth and purity by every pastor in our Concordia Lutheran Conference. It is through His active obedience that our dear Savior has taken away all our guilt, that we might stand righteous and holy before God--clothed alone in Christ's perfect righteousness, not in the filthy rags of our own good works or merits. As the sin of Adam is imputed (charged) to all people, so that we are all guilty of Adam's transgression, so the Bible teaches that the very opposite is also true, namely, that the righteousness of the Lord Christ is imputed to all mankind. In this way the Lord Jesus, our Savior, true God and true man, has, as our perfect High Priest, removed all our guilt. As our Substitute, His righteousness covers all our sins.

Not only, however, were we sinners--standing GUILTY before our just and holy God--but, because of our sins, we **also** stand

CONDEMNED by God's inflexible justice, deserving the wrath of God, death and everlasting torment in Hell. Here, too, the Lord Jesus became our perfect High Priest. He not only took upon Himself our guilt and fulfilled God's Holy Law perfectly in our stead (His active obedience), BUT He also suffered the punishment of eternal damnation for us (His passive obedience)--that punishment which we and all people deserve by our sins. This, too, our perfect Savior eliminated when He sacrificed Himself on the accursed tree of the cross--thus completing His great Work of Redemption for the whole world when He cried out on Golgotha, "*It is finished,*" (John 19:30)--that all who believe in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. How sad it is that there are those, even the vast majority of people, who "*deny the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction,*" (II Peter 2:1) for "*he that believeth not shall be damned!*" (Mark 16:16).

By the grace of God, in every congregation in our Conference, our pastors, therefore, proclaim both the Active and Passive Obedience of Christ for the eternal salvation of all mankind. Yes, "*such an High Priest became us* (we needed) *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests* (of the Old Testament) *to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins and then for the people's; for this He did once when He offered up Himself,*" Heb. 7:26,27. And we are able to sing with meaningful praise:

"Jesus, Thy **blood** and **righteousness**
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
In these before my God I'll stand,
When I shall reach the heavenly land."

-- P. R. B.

Fixing the Blame but Denying the Guilt

"[Pilate] took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.'" —*Matthew 27:24*

Who was ***really*** to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? This question continues to be bandied about like the proverbial "hot potato," and the accusations continue to fly back and forth, some directed at the Jews, some directed at the Romans. Some have maintained and continue to say that **the Jews** are <u>really</u> to blame because they *"delivered"* Jesus to the Romans *"for envy"* (Mark 15:10), having regarded Him as a threat to their political control of the people, having resented His scathing indictments of their hypocrisy, and having plotted *"to put Him to death"* one way or another (John 11:47-53). Besides, not only their leaders but *all* the Jews present in Pilate's courtroom eagerly accepted responsibility for Jesus' death and voluntarily took the blame upon themselves and upon their children after them (Matthew 27:25). Nowadays, of course, it is "politically incorrect" even to *mention* these documented facts and to blame the "poor, persecuted Jewish people" for what amounted to the *lynching* of Jesus Christ by a bloodthirsty mob brought together and fired up by their own leaders. Why, the Roman Pope himself in recent years yielded to the world's collective "outrage" and absolved the Jews of any responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus! And yet, his unilateral action —spooned out like a transparent "sop" to placate the outrage of *B'nai B'rith* and of modernistic "Christians" like Dr. Martin Marty and to gain for himself a "plus" in public relations— hardly changes the indisputable facts.

But who is speaking up for the "poor Romans" whose extinct culture is curiously without apologists in this debate?? Apparently only Pontius Pilate, who knew full well that he was being "used" by the

Jews as a convenient "hit-man" to do the deed with the appearance of legality (John 18:31). In the title-text above, Pilate ceremoniously "washed his hands" of the whole business and in the process etched a perverted twist into an idiom and image common to many of the world's languages: *"To wash one's hands of..."* that is, to deny moral responsibility for something. Pilate knew he was not innocent of Jesus' blood, and his perversion is as transparent as the Jews' motive. Let's examine it briefly: Pilate was a "professional" jurist who presided every day over cases more serious in terms of public safety and criminal justice than *"The Jews vs. Jesus of Nazareth"*. He examined Jesus in considerable detail in open court concerning the civil charges preferred against Him by the Jews, and he had in King Herod Antipas a professional "consultant" who likewise *"questioned with [Jesus] in many words"* (Luke 23:9). BOTH men found *"nothing worthy of death"* having been done by Jesus; and Pilate stated for the record **several times**: *"I find **no fault** in this man."* If indeed he had followed his own *natural law* instincts of what was right and wrong (according to the conscience still operative within him) and set Jesus **free** —without first scourging Him— we might be able to see, at least from his perspective, the "innocence" Pilate claimed. BUT, **in spite of his "not guilty" verdict**, Pilate **a)** permitted Jesus to be abused by Herod's soldiers and found Herod once again to be a "kindred spirit" in the kind of justice both apparently dispensed, and a personal friend (Luke 23:12); **b)** ignored his wife's pleading to disassociate himself from the Jews' plot against Jesus because of a dream she had that night (Matthew 27:19); **c)** had Jesus cruelly scourged for no reason (Luke 23:16); **d)** offered Barabbas, a murderer, as a "swap" of equal value for an innocent man (Luke 23:19); **e)** handed Jesus over to his soldiers for mockery and abuse; **f)** sentenced Jesus to be crucified as the Jews had required; and **g)** had the sentence carried out by men under his personal command. Some justice!

Why did he do it? Pilate was the consummate politician; and the lessons of reality in history teach us that it is a "rare bird" indeed who can be a responsible jurist and an effective politician at the same time. For that very reason, the judicial branch is kept separate from the executive and legislative branches of our government to give

judges independence from political pressure. Pilate, however, was a political appointee. And when he saw that his judgment carried no weight with the Jews but rather that *"a tumult was made"* by arguing with the chief priests (Matthew 27:24), Pilate was *"willing to content the people"* (Mark 15:15) and *"gave sentence that it should be as **they** required"* (Luke 23:24). In this he yielded to the political pressure of the screaming mob and permitted himself to be intimidated by the chief priests, who questioned his loyalty to Caesar, and suggested that if he set Jesus free he would be aligning himself with a traitor (John 19:12).

Neither **the Jews** nor **Pilate** was *"innocent of the blood of this just person."* But then neither was **Judas**, who had betrayed Jesus; neither was **Peter**, who denied Him three times instead of coming to His defense; neither were the other disciples, **all** of whom *"forsook Him and fled"* (Matthew 26:56). **Nobody** gets off the hook on this one! Trying to shift the blame from one to the other, or attempting to fix greater blame upon one than upon another, does absolutely **nothing** to reduce the guilt that must be borne for the persecution, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. In fact, attempts to detract from one's own guilt by deflecting it to others only proves the intensity of the guilt in the first place —a guilt **too great to bear**!

Who then was ***really*** to blame? Who was ***really*** guilty? Who is ***ultimately*** responsible for what happened to Jesus? **YOU** are, dear reader; and so am **I**! Every sinner who ever walked the face of this earth and who will ever yet live in this *vale of tears* is **personally responsible** for every blasphemous word spoken, for every sadistic slap and punch, for every cruel lash landed on the Savior's back, for the puncture of every thorn, and for the rip of every nail! "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" asks the old Negro spiritual. Indeed we were, for *"surely He hath borne **our** griefs and carried **our** sorrows; ... 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,"* we confess with the prophet. And Isaiah adds the overall, "blanket" cause for the Savior's entire passion, saying: *"For the transgression of my people was He*

stricken." (Isaiah 53:4-5; 8a). And so we confess with Paul Gerhardt in that favorite Lenten hymn (L.H. 172):

*My burden in Thy passion, Lord, Thou hast borne **for me**,*
*For it was **my** transgression which brought this woe on Thee!*
I cast me down before Thee; wrath were my rightful lot.
Have mercy, I implore Thee! Redeemer, spurn me not!

As hard as that is to *hear* (and even harder to *acknowledge*) because of the perverse sinful flesh which clings even to the Christian like an ever-present albatross, we have every reason to **rejoice** in the fact that God's Holy Spirit, through the precious means of His grace, has *"shined in our hearts"* and worked in them not only the courage to admit humbly and contritely our *guilt* and our *responsibility* for Jesus' passion, but also the *joyful confidence* that **by Jesus' wounds and suffering and death**, we have been ***redeemed*** from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. As our Substitute, Christ assumed all our guilt —even our bloodguilt of His suffering and death— and bore all our punishment *"in His own body on the tree"* (I Peter 2:24) in order to lay before the bar of divine justice a ransom of sufficient value to purchase our redemption and to reconcile us to His heavenly Father [Christ's ***Vicarious Atonement***]. And that sacrifice of His Son was accepted as "payment in full" for the sins of the world when God raised Him up the third day to exaltation and glory; for it was the **perfect payment** in view of which God *"reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them"* (II Corinthians 5:19). Thus the Apostle Paul includes both Christ's **redemptive work** and God's **objective justification** of the world in one striking statement concerning Jesus our Lord, *"who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification"* (Romans 4:25). And herein we find comfort, even as we ponder during the holy Lenten Season upon the Savior's passion and the great woe we heaped upon Him, *"that being justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1).

How sad to note, however, that there are so many in our world today who, like Pilate, try to maintain a kind of "neutrality" when it comes to Jesus Christ. The most striking example is, of course, the "silent

majority" of those who refuse to commit themselves one way or the other to the Redeemer of lost mankind. In spite of Jesus' statement, *"He that is not **for** Me is **against** Me,"* many of these **claim** that they have nothing "against" Christianity; they're just not "for" it. Among them are those who find it "politically incorrect" to maintain that a person will indeed NOT get to heaven apart from Jesus Christ and without true faith in Him as his Savior. To get such people "off the fence" we might quote Jesus Himself in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."* or in John 8:24, *"If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."* —Then there are those who say they "have no quarrel" with Jesus "as Savior and Lord" but are unwilling to stand up for the truth of His **Word**. These claim, for example, that, since a person can conceivably be a true Christian without holding to purity of doctrine in every article of faith, therefore *orthodoxy* should not be insisted on; and "differences in doctrine and practice shouldn't be permitted to divide Christians." Jesus Himself emphatically challenges such ***fence-sitters*** in Luke 6:46, *"Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* and in John 8:31-32, where He says: *"If ye continue in My Word, **then** are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the **truth**..."* Of these latter "Pilates" whose *credo* seems to be *"What **is** truth?"*, there is a considerable number of well-disguised *"wolves in sheep's clothing,"* professing **Lutherans** even, who like to identify themselves as "conservatives" and "confessionals" but who have the honesty of sorts not to represent themselves as "orthodox". Among these are, quite frankly, **spiritual adulterers** who make prostitutes look like rank amateurs! They are quite literally "in bed" spiritually with anyone who "walks the walk and talks the talk" of a ***"conservative"*** without being **sure** of such a person's doctrine and practice in everything. Such "easy girls" apparently regard St. Paul's exhortation in I Corinthians 1:10 as too impractical to carry out in these days where a person's "fellowship" has to be kept track of on a database. Paul writes: *"...that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* "Not so!" they cry. "We have to reach out to all those of our cause [whatever **that** is], and work out the details later." And so they practice what we call ***selective fellowship***, a finely-chopped form of spiritual promiscuity:

"Brother **A** and I are in fellowship together. Brother **A** is, of course, a member of a heterodox church body; but he's a *conservative.* He communes at conferences with others in that body with whom **I** could never commune, but he's trying to gain them after all! He also writes for a *conservative* paper. I'm also in fellowship with Brother **B** in a still different synod. He's a *conservative* too, but he and Brother **A** are NOT in fellowship. There still seems to be something standing between them. It's probably one of those doctrines that isn't really divisive of fellowship. It's hard to tell anymore what is divisive and what isn't, you know what I mean? I wish them both God's richest blessings in their work."

If such pastors preached and practiced with the same care about wedded love and faithfulness between husbands and wives, one might wonder what "indiscretions" they would consider as "divisive" of the marriage bond! They would probably advocate "open relationships" as long as the various partners at least profess "love" for one another! —***"Be not deceived! God is not mocked!"*** These same "theologians" are quick to fix blame for divisions in the churches upon **us** who, in obedience to God's command in Romans 16:17, left heterodox bodies years ago to *"be separate"* (II Corinthians 6:17); but they acknowledge no guilt for the extreme factionalism which characterizes the Lutheran "face" today, factionalism which they themselves perpetuate by "all talk and no action" concerning error and errorists, and "sweet talk and lots of action" with those who like them (and like Pontius Pilate) pander to the people, telling them what they want to hear (II Timothy 4:3), and still dare to call themselves "conservatives". "I am innocent of what is going on in Synod today. I've washed my hands of the whole mess. YOU do something about it. I have my pension to consider." And people always think of Pontius Pilate as the moral wimp!

Make no mistake about it, **we too** are tempted to be "fence-sitters" when it comes to Jesus and His Word. *"The flesh is weak,"* Jesus warns us; and in it *"dwelleth no good thing,"* Paul adds in Romans 7:18. Our flesh too would have us compromise with error and errorists to expand our emotional "comfort zone". The flesh makes even discerning Christians hesitate to call a sin a "sin" even when the

Scriptures show it for what it is. Our flesh finds the whole process of Christian admonition "distasteful" and would rather have us ignore a brother's trespasses than to approach him in an evangelical manner to *"gain him"*. That same flesh often makes the men of the congregation shrink back from acting upon a case of discipline in which a sinning brother *"refuses to hear the church"* and the Savior Himself demands action. And it is the flesh which makes Christians "wonder" whether an excommunicated person is ***really*** and ***truly*** *"an heathen man and a publican"* in his heart and in the sight of God, even though Jesus assures us that the Scriptural action of the congregation *is as valid and certain* ***in heaven also*** *as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us* ***Himself***. [Luther] (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23).

Let us all, by God's grace, **get off** and **stay off** the proverbial "fence" that seeks to straddle between right and wrong, between truth and error, between Christ and Belial, between righteousness and unrighteousness! We can't have it **both ways** and still be faithful to our precious Savior, who says in unmistakable terms: *"He that is not* ***with*** *Me is* ***against*** *me; and he that gathereth not* ***with*** *Me* ***scattereth abroad***" (Matthew 12:30). May He grant us ever better to be *"strengthened with might by His Spirit in the* ***inner*** *man,"* to stand up boldly for Him and for His precious truth against any and all odds in *"the good fight of faith"* until by His grace we are privileged to enjoy the rest which He has prepared for us from the foundation of the world!

--D. T. M.

Christ's Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

(Luke 22:42)

The Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is a familiar scene, particularly to the Christians. What unfolded there, as described in the Gospel account, has been placed on canvass by the brush of such eminent artists as Heinrich Hofmann and Warner Sallman whose well-known paintings of this scene grace the wall of many a Christian home. Here in the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus began His intense bitter anguish as He foresaw the ordeal which lay before Him. The sins of the whole world lay upon Him as He proceeded to carry out the purpose for which He came into the world -- to redeem us from sin, death, and hell. Look what lay before Him? It was not simply the vehement hatred of His own countrymen (John 1:11); it was not simply the whipping and the agonizing death upon the cross -- this was indeed horrible enough to look forward to -- but the fact that He who was without sin bore the sins of all mankind upon Himself and that He would endure the tortures of the damned in hell, this weighed down his soul to such an extent that "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). No wonder He cried out saying, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not my Will, but Thine, be done."

It was natural for the Savior to cry to His Father in heaven. Jesus is the only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father. "When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4:4). "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). At Jesus' baptism the voice of the heavenly Father announced, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). And when Jesus was with His three disciples on the mountain and transfigured before them, "behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matt. 17:5). Only Jesus could declare, "All things are

delivered to Me of My Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and He to whom the Son will reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). Then look at the high priestly prayer of the Savior as He prays, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee" (John 17:1). Remember how the Lord Jesus told Philip, "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" ... "I am in the Father and the Father in Me" (John 14:9-11). Therefore every faithful Christian confesses with the Apostle Peter, "We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69).

And now in the Garden He pleads with His heavenly Father asking Him, if it were His Will, to remove this intense suffering of body and soul. But this was the plan which God had decreed for our salvation. And the only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father does not rebel against the Will of the heavenly Father, but willingly subjects Himself declaring, "nevertheless not My Will, but Thine, be done." Only He who is true God and true Man in one undivided Person "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), would be able to make sufficient atonement for the sins of the world! Jesus had stated earlier in His ministry, "I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own Will, but the Will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38).

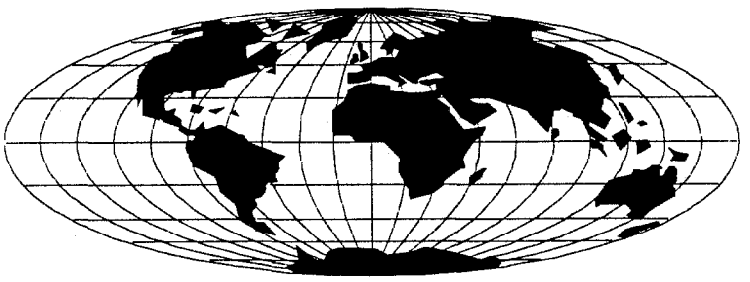
The words which the Savior uttered in the Garden should serve as an example for us Christians. Because of His sacrifice our black corrupted sin-stained robes have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). We who have no merit or righteousness of our own, now have by faith the righteousness of Christ (Philip. 3:9). By His substitutional suffering and death, our dear Savior has redeemed us who were "under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5). "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1). Should we not also willingly submit our will to the Will of our dear heavenly Father, who "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)?

Jesus is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). His Will is holy and perfect. Our

will is shackled with the Old Adam which, as Luther correctly observes, we must carry around with us like an old sack until finally we die. We must acknowledge with the Apostle Paul, "I know that in me (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). And our sinful flesh desires only a "bed of roses" and wants to hear nothing of taking up our cross and following the Savior (Matt. 10:38). When our path through this life is beset with various afflictions and trials -- illness, physical disabilities, loss of a job, persecution because of our faith, etc. -- do we rebel against the manner in which the Lord is guiding us through this vale of tears, or do we cheerfully and willingly submit ourselves to the good and gracious Will of our heavenly Father whose dear children we are by faith in His Son? After all, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:28). And "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). He knows what is best for us and never makes a mistake. The Apostle Paul knew that the "thorn in the flesh" with which he was plagued was given him for a reason. "Lest I should be exalted above measure" he declares. And when he besought the Lord to remove it the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And how did the Apostle react? He willingly submitted his will to the Lord's Will and says, "most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:7-10). He helps us in every trial with His promises of help and strength. He comforts our fearful hearts with the blessed assurance, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). His wisdom never falters, and His love for His dear children never wanes. Therefore we should leave all things to God's direction, willingly submitting our will to His perfect Will. And when our brief course on earth comes to an end and He takes us to Himself in the joys of heaven, we shall praise Him with songs of thanksgiving into all eternity for having lead us through this world of sin and sorrow, and for preserving us in the one true faith even unto our end.

--M.L.N.

Around the World



with editorial comment

by M. L. Natterer

On a bluff above Utah Lake, with the snow-dusted Wasatch Mountains for a backdrop, the Mormon Church has raised a building whose pale granite surface reflects the dazzling Rocky Mountain sunlight. A gilt inscription atop one wall identifies it as "the House of the Lord." ... In 1980, the Mormons operated 19 temples, including the famous one in Salt Lake City. Since then, it has built 30 more, on every continent but Antarctica. Fifteen more are planned. Costing about $18 million apiece, each temple marks the expansion of the once Utah-bound church into a global organization, most of whose 9.5 million members live outside the United States ... Temples serve for marriage, where husband and wife are "sealed for time and eternity" as they stand between two mirrors placed to reflect their images endlessly. God, said Joseph Smith, revealed to him that the baptismal pool should be on the temple's lowest floor, where ceremonies represent death and resurrection. Activities move upward from there, in accordance with the Mormon belief that existence is an eternal progression toward divinity. The "sealing rooms" are on the upper floors, along with the "endowment rooms," where Mormons receive religious instruction, learning that everyone begins as God's spirit children, long before birth. Life on earth is a time of testing, of who will obey God's laws. The temple's highest point is the celestial room, representing heaven's top level (Mormons believe there are three levels), reserved for the obedient. It is a luminous space, with plush white chairs, walls trimmed with gold leaf and a massive chandelier. "Everything is pointed toward the celestial room," said Robert J. Matthews, president of the Mount Timpanogos Temple. (The Sunday Oregonian, October 13, 1996)

The "House of the Lord" is the place where Christians regularly gather to hear the Word of the Lord proclaimed by their divinely-called pastor in all of its truth and purity. Therefore to refer to a

Mormon building as the "House of the Lord" is a misnomer! The Mormon cult is a system hatched by Joseph Smith who declared that he had received the Book of Mormon (golden plates) from the Angel Moroni. Brigham Young declared concerning this book, "Every Spirit that confesseth that Joseph is a prophet, and that the Book of Mormon is true, is of God, and every Spirit that does not is of Antichrist!" Listen to their blasphemous teaching! "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as any man's;" and this being cannot occupy two distinct places at once." ... "Adam is God, the Supreme God, the Creator of this world, our God, and the only God with whom we have to do. He is our Father and our God. Who is the Father? The first of the human Family." (Doctrines and Covenants (Sec. 130:22). Joseph Smith had belonged to the Masonic Lodge, and it is perfectly obvious to any honest investigator that he very cleverly made use of the Masonic rituals in the temple ceremonies. The blessed teachings of Holy Writ, (the Triune God, salvation by grace through faith alone, baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc.) are all rejected in favor of the teachings of a false prophet who had the colossal brazenness to palm off this fraud upon an unsuspecting public as the very "oracle of God!"

In the '90s, infidelity sparks more outrage than it did a few decades ago. And more of the cheaters are women ... In the Newsweek Poll, 70% say an affair is always harmful to a marriage; 22% say it can sometimes be good for a marriage ... 50% say adultery is wrong because it's immoral; 25% because it can break up a marriage; 17% because of the danger of AIDS and other diseases ... 51% think that extramarital affairs are more common now than they were 10 years ago; 27% say affairs were about as common then as now ... 36% say some or most of the married people they know have had affairs; 37% say they know only a few married people who have ... Men still have more extramarital affairs than women, but the gap may be closing. In fact, young wives seem to be unfaithful more than young husbands.

(Newsweek, September 30, 1996).

We Christians know that it is not a public opinion poll which establishes what is right or wrong but the Word of God! And His Word condemns adultery. In the Old Testament adultery was punishable by death (Lev. 20:10). In the New Testament adultery is condemned in no uncertain terms. The Apostle states that an adulterer shall not inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9,10). And the in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (13:4). The Lord Jesus states that adultery is a Scriptural grounds for divorce (Matt. 5:32; 19:19). A Christian congregation dare not tolerate an unrepentant fornicator in its midst but must, as the Apostle states, "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:13). It should not be forgotten, however, that while the Lord Jesus permits a divorce in the case of fornication He does not require that a divorce be obtained. There are, of course, a number of factors to be taken into consideration. Sometimes a divorce raises more problems than it solves. One should always consider the children in the home who certainly need the security and warmth that a home provides. Furthermore, when there is a divorce, the responsibility of raising the children falls upon one spouse which is by no means an easy task in this day and age. If a spouse falls into the sin of adultery only once and seeks forgiveness from the other spouse promising with the aid of the Holy Spirit to avoid that sin in the future, would it not be far better for the wronged spouse to forgive and continue in the marriage rather than go through heart-rending divorce proceedings? On the other hand, where a spouse flagrantly persists in the sin of adultery, there the innocent spouse may have no other alternative but to secure a divorce in order to protect the children from an evil example in the home. Dr. Luther writes, "Sometimes there is no hope for improvement, or the reconciliation of the guilty one and his restoration to good graces is followed only by his abuse of this kindness ... For one oversight is still pardonable, but a sin that takes mercy and forgiveness for granted is intolerable" (What Luther Says, Vol. 2, p.902). In the final analysis, however, the decision in such cases must be left to the conscience of the innocent spouse.

†††††✝†††††

Her hands clasped in prayer, a Palestinian seamstress stared intently at an icon of Jesus painted on a column in the Church of the Nativity, just above the grotto where tradition says Jesus was born. "Look, look," Jesus' face was barely visible in the shadows of the candle-lit basilica. "He blinked. What a blessing." Nadia Banoura is one of thousands of Christians to visit the centuries-old icon since Greek Orthodox priests said they saw Jesus blink six weeks ago and declared it a miracle. "It's a message for people to come back to God and religion," said Father Anastasios, the senior Greek Orthodox clergyman in Bethlehem. Coming during the Christmas season, the discovery could help Bethlehem's nativity business, which has been pummeled by years of political strife, including the Palestinians' 1987-1993 revolt against Israeli occupation ... A steady stream of Palestinian Christians -- and even some Muslims -- filed past the icon. Some said they could see Jesus blink; others suggested bad lighting and peeling paint created optical illusions ... (Democrat-Herald, Nov. 28, 1996)

How degrading! There are about 35 <u>recorded</u> (see also Luke 6:17-19; John 21:25) miracles in the Gospels in which the Lord Jesus made use of His divine power during His public ministry. There were bodily cures (Matt. 8:2-17; John 9, etc.). There were those miracles in which Jesus revealed His power over the forces of nature (John 2:1-11; Matt. 8:23-27, etc.). We observe the Savior healing those who were possessed of devils (Matt. 8:28-34, etc.), and then we see Him raising the dead (Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-15; John 11:1-44). By such manifestations of His almighty power He revealed that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures (Isaiah 35:5,6). When we read and ponder these extraordinary miracles, how utterly disgusting to read the above news item concerning the icon! The reason for such notoriety is probably indicated in the words, "could help Bethlehem's nativity business." **What draws us Christians at this Christmas Season is not some cheap ridiculous sensationalism, but the precious Word of Truth in which the holy messenger of God announces, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10,11). Just think! Here is the miracle of miracles: "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). Yes, "God was manifest in the flesh!" (I Tim. 3:16). He who is true God with the Father and the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19) assumed a true human nature within the womb of the Virgin Mary and became true Man that He might place Himself under the Law and suffer and die as our Substitute. And being true God and true Man in one undivided Person He was able to fulfil the Law perfectly in our stead and by His substitutional suffering and death earn for us the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, John 3:16. This is "the reason for the season!"

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