

**"Meditate  
upon these things;  
give thyself  
wholly to them;  
that thy profiting  
may appear unto all"**

**1 Timothy 4:15**

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## THE LUTHERAN RESPONSE TO HUMANISM

The Apostle Paul asks the questions, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14) As I approached the assigned topic, those questions suggested another to me, "And how shall he respond who does not know the issue involved?" That may not seem to be a particularly astute observation. But as I searched through the available material to learn more about humanism, why it needed a response, and what that response must be, it became apparent that there had been much muddying of the waters. Neither side has been particularly careful to understand the issues involved. The result is that there had been sweeping generalizations, charges which are not well documented, misunderstandings and misleading statements. They have made it difficult to understand what really is involved.

It is essential that we understand what is before us. Therefore we have to know what is meant by the terms that we use. We begin with the word "Lutheran." As it is used in the title of this paper, it refers to the historic principle of basing all values upon the inerrant Word of God. Therefore the response that we give to humanism or anything else is that which is dictated by the firm desire to remain faithful to that Word. We stress this point since much (most) of that which passes for Lutheranism today clearly does not share this concern. For example, Pastor J. Kincaid Smith, a former LCA pastor, in speaking to a group of concerned Lutherans in Saginaw, Michigan, told them concerning his faith and that of his seminary classmates when they graduated: "The view of Christianity I came away with . . . was in the final analysis a deistic Humanism, and maybe not even deistic" (J. Kincaid Smith, "The Confession of a Former Liberal LCA Pastor," *Christian News* 29 Apr. 1985: 3). Lutherans who have themselves adopted humanistic beliefs would hardly be able to offer a proper response.

The other term which we must understand with some precision is "humanism." That is a bit more difficult. The reason is that humanism at times seems to resemble a chameleon--it tends to change its appearance when the situation changes. Perhaps this is due to the circumstance that there is no one official spokesman or authority to present and maintain an official position. The result is that one humanist may say one thing, another may give the impression that such may not be the case. Trying to respond to some humanist issues is a bit like trying to drown out a gopher. You pour water down one hole only to have the gopher pop out of another. But there are basic ideas which are held by all humanists. Many are so offensive to true Lutherans, to Christians in general, that we have more than enough reason to respond without being sidetracked by uncertain issues.

There is more than one kind of humanism. There is Renaissance Humanism. It has been defined in this way: "If we are considering the history of culture, the term usually refers to the European Renaissance or awakening, which started in Italy during the fourteenth century and later spread to the rest of the continent and to England. Renaissance Humanism was first and foremost a revolt against the other-worldliness of mediaeval Christianity, a turning away from preoccupation with personal immortality to making the best of life in this world" (Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism* [New York: Ungar, c1982] 19-20).

This cultural type of humanism had a secular origin. But it is the humanism that sprang up within the church with which we are chiefly concerned. Its roots are ancient. It has been traced as far back as Arius who claimed that Jesus was not true God. Though Arianism was outlawed as heresy, it never died out completely. At the time of the Reformation a Spaniard named Servetus championed Arianism. He declared: "Your Trinity is a product of subtilty and madness. The Gospel knows nothing of it. . . . God is one and indivisible." Servetus escaped the Catholic Inquisition but died in Geneva by the order of John Calvin. His ideas lived on in the Unitarian movement.

The Unitarians insisted on the oneness of God and the essential humanity of Jesus. Unitarianism became a powerful influence in Poland under Faustus Socinus at the end of the 16th century. It spread to England in the 17th century and to America in the 18th century. At first the Unitarians did not favor a separate denomination. But in 1825 they broke away from the Congregationalists and formed their own organization.

It is interesting to note that the philosophy of the Unitarians was non-humanist. But they were liberals in theology and they emphasized the right of religious freedom, welcoming into their fellowship even those who questioned the existence of a personal God. In such a climate there is only one way for belief to go. That is away from the truth. Approximately a hundred years after the founding of Unitarianism, the "more advanced members" of this sect started the movement known as religious humanism. In 1933 a document was drawn up, the *Humanist Manifesto*, which stated the basic ideas of these humanists.

One of the original signers of this document was a Rev. John H. Dietrich. (Another was R. Lester Mondale, Fritz's elder half brother.) Dietrich explains, "The real reason why Unitarianism was the natural soil for the growth of Humanism is the fact that Unitarianism was a revolt against orthodox Christianity in the interest of the worth and dignity of human nature and the interest of human life" (Lamont 53-54). We would be quite accurate in rewording the last part to "in the interest of the old Adam and the interest of enjoying the pleasures of this life."

Corliss Lamont, a big man in the humanist movement, defines naturalistic humanism as "a world-view in which Nature is everything, in which there is no supernatural and in which man is an integral part of Nature and not separated from it by any sharp cleavage or discontinuity" (22).

Lamont divides this naturalistic humanism into two parts. The one is religious or secular humanism. That might seem to be a contradiction, calling it both secular and religious at the same time. We must go to the humanist definition of religion for clarification. We

find the statement, "Religions have always been means for realizing the highest values of life" (*Humanist Manifesto I*). It is this religious-secular humanism that has sprung from the Unitarian sect.

The U. S. Supreme Court took official cognizance of religious humanism in the case of *Torcaso vs. the State of Maryland* in 1961. Justice Black wrote: "Among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism and others" (Lamont 24). It would seem then that religious and secular humanism are the same and are officially considered a religion.

Another kind of humanism discerned by Lamont is Marxism. We quote: "Finally, we find in the category of naturalistic Humanists the followers of Karl Marx, who call themselves variously Marxists, Communists, or Socialists. On economic, political, and social issues the Marxist Humanists are of course much to the left of the other types of Humanists I have described. . . . They are, however, unquestionably humanistic in their major tenets of rejecting the supernatural and all religious authority, of setting up the welfare of mankind in this life as the supreme goal, and of relying on science and its techniques" (26-27).

The major tenets of secular humanism are expressed in the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933. A second document, *Humanist Manifesto II*, was produced in 1973. Rather than spend much time on these documents, we shall briefly summarize the contents of *Humanist Manifesto I* to give you the gist of what the humanists stand for.

Humanists insist upon an evolutionary beginning for the universe and man. Dualism in man is denied--no separate mind and body. They probably mean to deny the existence of the soul. Religion has evolved through man's interaction with his environment. The nature of the universe as seen through modern science makes the supernatural unacceptable. Belief in God is out of date. Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained. The complete realization of the human per-

sonality is the chief purpose in life. Religious emotions are expressed in one's own and other's well-being. There will be no religious emotions or attitudes of the kind formerly connected with belief in the supernatural. Religion must work for joy in living. All associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established. The values of the humanists are quite well summarized in a sentence near the end of *Humanist Manifesto I*: "Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind."

The American Humanist Association is the big promoter of this secular religion. The official organ of its members is *The Humanist* magazine. To give you the flavor of their ideas, we present several random quotations from its pages. Truth, they affirm, does not remain constant. "It is quite possible that, as new evidence accrues, our present scientific knowledge of Ultimate Reality [possibly the universe as a substitute for God] will be drastically revised. Our notions may some day prove to be misleading or inadequate or even false. For the religious Universalist, this possibility is no problem" (Deane Starr, "The Crying Need for a Believable Theology," *The Humanist* July/Aug. 1984: 16).

There is no hereafter for the humanist. "Humanism is a way of life that involves joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this one and only life. . . . We have no belief in an afterlife--no resurrection, no immortality, no reincarnation, no heaven, no hell, nor anything in between. . . . We believe that this life is all that we have. . . . Because we have no belief in an afterlife, our concern is for value-oriented living in the present. . . ." (Gerald A. Larue, "The Way of Ethical Humanism," *The Humanist* Sept./Oct. 1984: 20-23).

The Bible is blamed for its misuse by men. "The Bible is not merely another book, an outmoded and archaic book, or even an extremely influential book; it has been and remains an incredibly dangerous book. It and the various Christian churches which are parasitic upon it have been directly responsible for most of the

wars, persecutions, and outrages which humankind has perpetrated upon itself over the past two thousand years" (John J. Dunphy, "A Religion for a New Age," *The Humanist* Jan./Feb. 1983: 25).

This same writer expresses a missionary zeal for converting others to his godless beliefs. "I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being. These teachers must embody the same selfless dedication as the most rabid fundamentalist preachers, for they will be ministers of another sort, utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey humanist values in whatever subject they teach, regardless of the educational level--preschool day care or large state university. The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new--the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of humanism, resplendent in its promise of a world in which the never-realized Christian ideal of 'love thy neighbor' will finally be achieved" (26).

With such determination, at least on the part of some humanists, what have been the results? What dangers to Christians and Christian teaching have arisen? A Baptist minister, the Rev. Bill Bennett of Fort Smith, Arkansas, has spoken out against humanism. We quote from an article based on his work to give an idea of the extent of humanistic influence in different areas of American life. (The following quotations from the Rev. Bennett's sermons are contained in "Secular Humanism: America's Most Dangerous Religion," *The Humanist* Mar./Apr. 1982: 42-45, 53. *The Humanist* included this article as "an example of the continuing tirades against humanism" [3].)

*The Church.* "Alas, it has infiltrated our churches too much for me even to tell you today. Nelson Bell, the father-in-law of Billy Graham, wrote an article that has been published far and wide, 'The Great Counter-



feit.' What is 'The Great Counterfeit'? He says that it is the substitution of humanism for the Bible and for the gospel in hundreds and thousands of churches in America. . . . Secular humanism has invaded the church greatly!"

As an example of this invasion we have the testimony of the former LCA pastor cited above, J. Kincaid Smith. He tells, "When I graduated in 1973, to the best of my knowledge, none of my classmates, nor I, believed in *any* of the miraculous elements in the bible, in anything super-natural . . ." (3). What filled the vacuum? Smith continues: "The real nature of this 'New Thinking' is reflected in the saying of another prof. at Hamma, Roger Cooper. He was fond of saying that: 'Jesus Christ came in order to make straight the way for Carl Rogers.' Carl Rogers is a contemporary Humanist Psychologist. Cooper meant that, the view of Christianity I came away with what was, in the final analysis a deistic Humanism, and maybe not even deistic [sic]" (3). Since this viewpoint has infiltrated ALC, LCA, and AELC circles, it explains much of what is happening in those church bodies today.

*Education.* We return to Bennett's observations. "But it seems that the chief inroad into our society has been through public education. . . . Through the teacher trained in secular humanism and through the textbooks being written by secular humanists, this philosophy has crept into America until it does or will soon dominate the entire public school system of America--unless middle America wakes up to what is happening."

*Abortion.* Bennett uses abortion as an example of the influence of humanism. "The support for abortion comes philosophically from the teaching of secular humanism. What is abortion? Abortion is the taking of a life--killing, in most cases, murder--to cover the sin of sexual immorality. . . . We have a generation today that has bought the humanistic philosophy and says that we can commit adultery if we want to . . ."

You have now been given some idea of what secular humanism is and the strong influence that it is exerting upon our country, its citizens, and our people. That influence is to turn people away from belief in God and to focus upon enjoying this life. It is a philosophy of damnation and certainly falls within the scope of the Scriptural warning, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

What will be our response, the true Lutheran response to this dangerous, worldly philosophy? It is the same response that we would give to any of the worldly philosophies that the devil has instigated. It is to preach the truth, God's Word, in its purity. In it we have power of which secular humanism has no knowledge--indeed can have none. We have the Holy Spirit working through that Word. He will bring the elect to faith and preserve them in it in spite of all that the humanists can do to lead them away. The humanists certainly are the allies of the devil. Therefore what Luther taught us to sing about the defeat of the devil holds for the humanists as well, "One little word can fell him" (*Lutheran Hymnal* 262: 3).

Armed with that "little Word"--and certainly the Bible is little in comparison to the volumes turned out to promote and defend the teachings of humanism--the believer is well equipped to repel humanism. Perhaps the most important part of the battle is to detect the enemy. People who are well grounded in the teachings of Scripture will be able to compare those teachings with the teachings of humanism. The error should be easily discerned because the basic teachings of Scripture are clearly and boldly rejected by the humanists.

Error, however, does not insist that the whole meal be eaten at once. Just a little nibbling at the hors d'oeuvres or a sample of the dessert is quite agreeable. Errorists know that if people can be tempted to try a bit of what they offer, there is a good chance that many will be led to partake of the main course also. In the case of humanism, that course is pure poison to the Christian. What would be an example of nibbling at the

humanist meal? Accepting some type of evolution as the means by which the universe came into being. And how many have had their faith eroded by just such a start in accepting error. Knowing well the Word of God--having it dwell richly within one--works to prevent such an erosion of faith, works through the rejecting of the "little" errors also.

Part of bringing that Word to the people is warning them of the dangers that they face--also the dangers of humanism. Scripture itself is twisted and abused by the humanists. It is well that we take care that we do not make their efforts easier and more effective by our own errors. In reading some of their attacks upon the Scriptures, we noted that they take every advantage of the misapplication of Scripture and of overstatements against humanism.

An example of the misapplication of Scripture is the Catholic claim for the pope's authority based upon Matthew 16:18-19. Another misapplication was the use of Genesis 9:18-27 to approve enslaving blacks. The church is blamed also for misguided wars used to force Christianity upon people and to eradicate heresy. The fact that the criticism is unfair is not considered. All Christianity is blamed for every mistake of the most ignorant people who travel under the Christian label.

An example of overstatement would be this statement by Mel and Norma Gabler of Longview, Texas: "'Humanism' centers on 'self' because it recognizes no higher being to which man is responsible. Thus there is much emphasis in public education on each child having a 'positive self-concept.' The child must see a good picture of himself. This eliminates coming to Christ for forgiveness of sin. It eliminates the Christian attributes of meekness and humility. Where does self-esteem and arrogance begin?" (Cited by David Bollier, "The Witch Hunt against 'Secular Humanism,'" *The Humanist* Sept./Oct. 1984: 13)

The Gablers give the impression that seeing anything good in himself is an impenetrable barrier between the individual and Christ. True, if that good is something by which the person expects to merit salvation, that is a barrier. But it is also true that the person

who does not have a certain amount of self-esteem is a miserable creature. He is usually of little value to himself, to others, or in the service of God. My wife teaches emotionally disturbed children. A number of them are in her class chiefly because they have such a bad image of themselves that they feel it is useless to try to do anything. One boy had to stay with grandparents for a week while his mother was gone. It took a month before the boy could be convinced that he was not stupid as his grandfather had repeatedly told him he was. The right self-esteem is necessary. Arrogance is an entirely different matter. By lumping both together as undesirable, the Gablers overstate the matter. This causes people to doubt also their statements which are entirely correct. The same can happen to us if we are careless about the facts.

We should be alert for examples of humanist errors. From time to time there are statements made by people in the national spotlight which have a bearing on error. For example, when the American Humanist Association was meeting in 1978 President Carter sent a telegram commending them "for greatly enhancing our way of life." The writer who reports this adds that he may well not have known what he was doing. But such an item would provide an opportunity for a note in the church bulletin about humanism.

Of more interest to our people would be statements made in our state or local area. When teachers get public exposure for their humanist errors, it gives us a good opportunity to apply God's Word to show the error and instruct our people. Sometimes the error surfaces in statements by teachers in the public school in their classes or at PTA meetings. Recently there was a letter to the editor in a local newspaper. The writer insisted that evolution should be considered a fact--a prime humanist claim. A subsequent reply calmly pointed out that it was only a scientifically unsupportable theory. There certainly are many opportunities presented for us to point out the errors of humanism whether we link them to humanism or not.

While there may be material from time to time from extra-biblical sources which would tend to refute human-

ist ideas, we may be well advised not to put much stock in them. For example, "science" is the rallying point for humanism. Humanists claim that "science" rules out the supernatural. Actually, true science simply cannot detect the supernatural; it cannot prove that it does not exist. Yet many "scientists" have rejected outright any belief in the supernatural. But the tide seems to be turning. The Rev. J. Kincaid Smith, quoted earlier, states that more scientists are beginning to allow for the supernatural as an answer to unanswerable questions. However, there is no big swing to faith in God. Rather the move is toward the occult.

The Lutheran response to humanism must ever be the teaching of the Word in its truth and purity. We make our stand upon that Word. We can do it with confidence. For our Lord Himself tells us that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). May God keep pastors and Christian teachers alert to humanism and its dangers so that we may keep our people informed and well armed with the Word of God so that they may repel the temptations of humanist error.

*Keith Olmanson*

## THE REVELATION TO ST. JOHN, CHAPTERS 1-3

### AN OVERVIEW

The title of the last book of the Bible is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . . to His servant John." It is the revelation "which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place." This Jesus Christ is both the Receiver and the Giver of the following twenty-two chapters, and this concept is not new. He had said: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). "I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49). He chooses to transmit His revelation "by His angel to His servant John." He in turn is to "write it in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia," where "the words of this prophecy" are to be read (most probably in the worship services), heard in faith, and kept; and "blessed is he who reads and those who hear . . . and keep" them. By these words the Author would give hope and strength and assurance to those who were being troubled by false teachers, slandered by the Jews, and persecuted by their enemies.

The Apostle John greets his readers in western Asia Minor (and beyond, of course) in a manner similar to the salutations of St. Paul, invoking the grace and peace of the omnipresent God, the Spirit, and the exalted Christ at His right hand, who has proven Himself to be "the faithful witness." For, although the incarnate Son of God suffered an ignominious death at the hands of scoffers for the sake of scorners, yet He lives and reigns "over the kings of the earth."

All "glory and dominion forever and ever" belong to the Christ whose love and blood washed away mankind's sins and presented to God a new Israel, "a chosen gener-

ation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Pet. 2:9). These can be comforted even while patiently enduring whatever they must suffer for His name's sake, for He shall not forsake those who await His "coming with clouds" as the Son of Man to judge and reign. They can be assured of ultimate victory because their affairs are in the hands of the Almighty, the Beginning and the End, who is in perfect control of all things. Not so those "who pierced Him" when they behold His final epiphany; they will join "all the tribes of the earth" who "mourn because of Him. Even so. Amen."

The commission to write was given to John only after the exalted Christ had appeared to him in glowing, divine majesty that overwhelmed him to the point of death. It all happened "on the island that is called Patmos" off the southwest coast of Asia Minor. The island was used by Roman emperors for exiling undesirables, particularly such as refused to participate in the current emperor-worship craze. Most expositors agree that John was on Patmos "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" near the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), who seems to be the first who really made an issue of emperor worship, making the payment of divine honors to the emperor the test of loyalty. John and the other Christians had to refuse, of course; and their refusal made them subject to death or exile. John Schaller, by the way, was "fairly sure that this book was written about the year 68," at the end of Nero's reign (*The Book of Books* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1924] 247). He believed that "the destruction of Jerusalem still lay in the future when John wrote" (247; cf. Rev. 11:1,2,8,13).

In the isle of Patmos on a certain Lord's Day John was "in the Spirit." That phrase is used again in 4:2 and in Matthew 22:43, where Christ convicts the Pharisees by reporting that David "in the Spirit" called the Son of David his Lord. Is this then not a term used for inspiration? And doesn't this interpretation agree with the exhortation in each of the letters to "hear what the

## Spirit says to the churches"?

In this state John heard a loud voice commissioning him: "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches . . ." (Rev. 1:11). These cities all lay not too distant from Ephesus and in them all emperor worship was encouraged. In the letters that follow, "the angel of the church" in each of the cities is the one addressed, but the message of the letter is not meant for him alone. The words are meant for all in the congregation, as well as for all those in the congregations of the region.

When John turned about, he faced a glorious, majestic spectacle: seven golden lampstands and in their midst "One like the Son of Man," clothed in white like His head and hair, with eyes like fire, feet like fine brass, and a voice like many waters. His face was like the sun; out of His mouth there went a sharp, two-edged sword and in His right hand He held seven stars. The terminology reminds us of the language used in Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7 and 10 to stress the deity of Christ and the majesty of God. His appearance describes His person. He wears the robe of a prophet and the girdle of a king. Whiteness indicates purity before which none can stand. His eyes are searching and penetrating, testing the heart and reins. His tread is firm and inescapable, bringing terror to His enemies. His voice is overwhelming, dashing to pieces all who set themselves against Him. The sight of all this majesty is just too much for the apostle; he is "scared to death."

The words of the Speaker are meant to allay all John's fears. The reason is given: He who gave His life in love as a service to mankind lives forevermore, even as He has always been from everlasting, to release mankind from the power of death and hell, over which He has total authority.

The Speaker soon identifies the meaning of the seven stars and seven lampstands: the seven angels of the seven churches He mentioned earlier. Since the



seven churches were physical entities existing at the time, functioning as lights in the world, we take Christ's standing in their midst as an assurance that He is Lord, not in heaven only, but also on earth, in the midst of His Church; that He is ever actively with us, promoting His interests, prospering our endeavors and guarding our faith. Whether the "angels" are to signify holy spirits in the presence of God or human bishops or pastors is hard to determine. If the former, then they, like the lampstands, could signify the Church as it is in the eyes of God and shall be eternally. In any case, each of the seven angels is the representative of his respective church, and what is said to him concerns the whole congregation. The close connection between angel and lampstand is seen very clearly in 2:5: "I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent."

"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this" (Rev. 1:19). By some this verse has been called an outline or the structure of the whole; by others, a summary. Still others seem not to know what to make of it. A few quotations should exemplify.

Martin Franzmann explains the verse in this way: "*What is* refers to the contents of chs. 2-3; *what is to take place hereafter* [RSV], to the succeeding visions" (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary* [St. Louis: Concordia, c1979] 289).<sup>2</sup>

The phrase "after this" is found also in 4:1. Paul F. Nolting comments on the phrase in that chapter and refers to it here. "Premillennialists and Dispensationalists claim that there is a time gap of no less than nineteen hundred years between chapters three and four of Revelation. They understand that John saw in chronological visions things that would happen chronologically. The divinely inspired structure or outline of the book of Revelation is allegedly given in chapter one, verse nineteen: 'Write the things which thou hast seen (chapter one), and the things which are (chapters

two and three), and the things which shall be hereafter (chapters four through twenty-two).' . . . The events portrayed in the visions recorded in chapter four and following are not supposed to occur until after the so-called 'rapture' of the church. Once that has happened there is then to follow chronologically the series of events pictured in the visions from chapter four to nineteen--in a time period of seven years. We are confidently told that this is the divinely inspired outline of the book. To this we must say 'NO!'"

"The things that thou didst see," writes Lenski, "must be those referred to by . . . the vision of v. 10 to 20. We cannot understand how this clause . . . can refer to all the visions. . . . What John had already seen is not 'both the things that are and the things that are about to occur.' These are additional things. . . . 'After these' cannot be referred back to mean, 'after the things thou didst see.' 'After these' joins 'are' and 'about to occur.' The present things and the future things are connected. . . . In true prophetic fashion the great visions now to be granted John present all that is to follow from the present onward. . . . So we do not accept the idea that the Lord here presents the program of Revelation, the division of the book into three parts: first part, 'the things thou didst see' (1:9-20); second part, 'the things that are' (chapters 2 and 3); third part, 'the things about to occur' (the rest of the book). Nor are there just two parts: chapter 1, introduction; chapters 2 and 3, part one; chapters 4-22, part two. . . . What Jesus tells John to write *summarizes* and does not present a division" (R. H. C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, c1943] 78-80).

Schaller says that commentators disagree even as to the general intention of the Revelation. "Some believe that everything written in the Apocalypse refers merely to the period immediately following the visions; but this is untenable since John speaks too plainly of the Day of Judgment. Others, falling into the opposite extreme, would have us believe that no reference what-

ever is made to apostolic days; but this is surely wrong, because chap. 17,9f. clearly refers to the Roman emperors of that period. Hence it appears advisable to adopt the suggestion of those commentators who say that the prophet paints into one grand picture the nearer and the farther future, setting side by side events which may be separated by great stretches of time. . . . It need not disquiet us that no explanation of Revelation so far offered enjoys the approval of all readers; every commentator will choose his point of view without being able to offer convincing proof that he is right" (249).

This suggestion seems to agree with Franzmann's statements regarding the contents of the Revelation: "Important for the understanding of the whole is the observation that each of the units [the seven visions] (with the possible exception of the first) spans the whole period between the present and the return of the Lord Jesus, so that we have a set of parallel presentations of the same basic fact and truth, cumulative in effect as each presentation brings in a new aspect of the same basic theme. There is progression in the sense that the end of all things is portrayed with increasing fullness as the visions progress (return of the Lord, last judgment, the new world of God)" (Martin H. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1961] 274).

While we are not nearly as interested in determining the structure of this book as we are in its message to us, for the defense of the truth it is well for us to note with Nolting the manipulations some have employed to bring the Holy Scriptures into conformity with their doctrine. From this preserve us, heavenly Father!

*Elton Hallauer*

## EXEGESIS OF REVELATION 2:1-7

### PURPOSE OF THE SEVEN LETTERS

How do the seven letters fit into the entire book of Revelation? Consider this: the revelation was given to show "things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1). In chapter 4:1, the revelation picks up on this theme again. This leaves the impression that what lies between 1:1 and 4:1 falls into the category of preparatory material. It is as if the Lord says, "I am going to show you some things which will quickly come to pass, but first I want to say this . . ." And, after having dictated the seven letters, He says, "Now let us get on with the things which must come to pass."

I propose that the seven letters are indeed preparatory in nature. Before the readers could consider those things which would come upon the Church, they first had to consider their present status and amend what needed to be amended. It is valueless to cast your eyes upon the future when you have not taken care of the present. Therefore each reader ought to ponder the seven letters and ask himself, "Where do I fit in here? What beams must I remove from my eye, so that I might see clearly?"

It is fitting for each reader to approach these letters in this manner, for Christ states after each letter that each one is meant for "the churches," not just the church addressed. Likewise, He says that anyone who has an ear should hear.

Also to be considered is the fact that the seven churches are represented by seven lampstands. One cannot ignore the allusion to the seven-stemmed lampstand of Israel (Exod. 25:31-40). Thus the seven lampstands can be understood to embrace the entire New Testament Israel. Therefore the whole Church of Christ can study these letters and apply them personally.

One might argue at this point that 12 is the number of the Church in Revelation. I do not dispute this. Perhaps the Lord uses the symbol of the seven lampstands here because of His purpose to portray the Church as the light of the world. Lampstands give off light; seven is the number of completeness; together they give off the complete or perfect light, the light of the Gospel. In order to take this symbolism and have it extend to the New Testament Church, the obvious allusion to the seven-stemmed lampstand of Israel is made.

Before we leave this symbol, we should note that in Old Testament Israel the lampstand was one with seven branches, while here we have seven separate lampstands. I cannot state with certainty the reason for this. Perhaps it is only to show that the tie which bound the Old Testament Israel together and made them exclusively God's people is now broken.

## GENERAL FORMAT

Each of the seven letters follows the same general format:

1. The addressee is named.
2. John is commanded to write Jesus' message.
3. Jesus announces that He knows (οἶδα) the condition of the congregation addressed.
  - a. If the condition was good, He exhorted them to be steadfast.
  - b. If the condition was bad, He exhorted them to repent.
4. Jesus announces what will happen, especially when He comes.
5. He gives gracious promises to those who overcome.
6. He exhorts all to hearken to the message.

## THE FIRST LETTER: TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

### BACKGROUND

The congregation in Ephesus was one richly blessed by the Lord. Through the preaching of the Apostle Paul the Lord had gathered together a large number of people.

However, where the Lord shows His love, Satan is compelled by inner hatred for God to display his opposition. So it is that Paul found himself fighting with "beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32). (This probably refers to human beings rather than animals.)

The first conflict was with the synagogue (Acts 19:8-10). After three months of testifying in the synagogue (an unusually long period of time), the opposition finally grew bold and blasphemed the "Way." However, as usual, this served for the spreading of the Gospel.

The second conflict was with magic (Acts 19:11-20). Ephesus was noted for its preoccupation with magic. Therefore many misunderstood when God gave Paul some special miracles to perform. Some Jewish exorcists thought that the names of Jesus and Paul were some kind of magical formula and the simple incantation of them would achieve some wonder. However, Christ quickly made it clear that working miracles in His name was not just a matter of uttering some prescribed phrase but involved faith in His person and work. The people learned the vast difference between magic and religion, and they burned books on magic worth 50,000 pieces of silver. The word of magic was shown to be powerless beside the Word of God.

The third conflict was the most dangerous (Acts 19:23-41). It occurred when true religion came head to head with false religion. The false religion of Ephesus was the state-sponsored worship of Diana. The main focus of the conflict was the profit being made by the silversmiths, who cast statues of Diana. Paul displayed

these statues as the impotent work of men's hands. Led by Demetrius, the silversmiths stirred up the whole city against Paul and his companions, although most of them didn't know why they were rioting. However, God used the town clerk to show that this uproar had no legal standing. Demetrius and his guild were given the opportunity to register a legal complaint, but they had none. Again the Gospel was not stopped but proceeded and grew.

Satan had tried to put hindrances in the pathway of the Gospel, but he was not successful. The Lord had a large flock to gather, and He would not be stopped by Jew, Gentile, nor demon. Though there were many adversaries, the door had been opened to Paul and none could close it (1 Cor. 16:9).

However, Satan does not give up. There were more conflicts for Ephesus. Later, during a stopover on his way to Jerusalem, Paul warned the elders that "grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock," and that members of the Ephesian church would be "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

The words of the Lord in Revelation 2 indicate that the grievous wolves (false apostles, v. 2) and the traitors (probably the Nicolaitanes, v. 6) had already come. The Ephesian church had done battle with them and had come out victorious.

Sadly, as is often the case after prolonged struggles with falsehood, they lost the spirit with which they had entered into battle. No longer was their struggle prompted by love. Instead, it probably became mechanical and legalistic.

*John K. Pfeiffer*

(To Be Continued)

## SERMON STUDY ON ZECHARIAH 12:8-10

In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them. It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (NKJV)

For 16 years God's house had remained in ruins while the Jews had constructed beautifully paneled and decorated houses for themselves. The people had grown accustomed to the situation, complacent toward advancing God's Kingdom, comfortable with putting their own interests before God's. Haggai and Zechariah were sent to change the hearts of this people. "Go up and build" (Hag. 1).

One of the external situations that led to the reformation at Luther's time was also the constructing of a temple, namely, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Catholic hierarchy felt that it was its God-given calling to build the most glamorous and beautiful cathedral in the world. In order to do that they were willing to sell the archbishopric of Mainz to the highest bidder; they were willing to bribe people with indulgences, declarations that any sin was forgiven by purchasing these pieces of paper. As true prophets, Haggai's and Zechariah's primary goal was not to get a beautiful basilica built but to turn hearts to Jesus. His grace alone could rekindle the right kind of zeal to build the



house of God. Zechariah is properly called the prophet of passion week. With 11 specific prophecies about the Messiah, his prophecy has more than any Old Testament book but Isaiah. These revelations of Him who is the Kingdom of God in all His works and ways are more specific than any Old Testament book.

When Zechariah describes the oneness of the Christ with Jehovah, the unity of the kingly and priestly office in Christ, His entrance into Jerusalem on a colt the foal of an ass, His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, and the death of this Shepherd of the flock, it should be no great surprise also to hear him in our text preach repentance at the very foot of the cross.

"They will look *on Me*," our text says. But the subject is none other than Jehovah (v. 8). It is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8) who will be cruelly murdered. The Messiah identifies Himself in unity here with the "I am" God and yet maintains His own personal distinction, for our text continues with Jehovah saying, "They will beat their breasts *for Him*"--just as the incarnate Messiah distinguished and identified Himself with the Father in John 10:30: "I and My Father are one." The death of the Shepherd, whom God sent to His sheep, was hinted at earlier in this book when this Shepherd was dismissed by His own sheep for 30 pieces of silver, the price paid for a killed slave (Zech. 11). But now we stand right at the foot of the cross to look on Him being pierced by the spear (John 19:34-37). The people of Zechariah's day join us in pondering the glorious mysteries of this passion: "the water and the blood from His riven side which flowed" (*Lutheran Hymnal* 376: 1); "Upon the cross extended, / See, world, thy Lord suspended" (171: 1); "God is committed" (143: 5). But more, they too were to see that it is "God's own sacrifice complete" (159: 3). For it is Jehovah Himself who in the next chapter brings down the stroke of death, the stroke of justice on sin: "'Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion,'" says the LORD of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (13:7).

This grace of God touched hearts in the days of Zechariah. They were so moved by the sight of their Christ being pierced for them that they now stood up to the threat of both Samaritan and emperor, to deceit from within and attacks from without, in order to build the house of God.

Though the Pope's temple, St. Peter's, presented Christ in the best artistic frescoes of the day, yet looking on Him whom we have pierced was not the focus of this temple in Rome. Its foundation was the selling of human souls into spiritual death. Its walls were the replacing of Christ's blood with gold and silver. . Its ceiling was setting papal pardons above the pardon of God. Luther, the Zechariah of his day, went to the castle door to focus hearts on Jesus the Christ pierced for all the sins of the world.

But the Jews of Jesus' day had inherited the rich Passion history of Christ. They had the exact blue-prints of the suffering King and dying Priest. How could they still go ahead and take Him by lawless hands, crucify Him, and put Him to death (Acts 2:23)? Our text says: "the house of David . . . will look on Me." His own were given every opportunity to look on Him, but they would not; they would not receive Him as their Savior (John 1:11). When Jesus warned them that they would kill the Father's Son, they only sought to lay hands on Him (Matt. 21:46) and tore their clothes (Matt. 26:65). They shed no tears at the cross but rejoiced. They, like Leo X in Luther's day, were using the cross of Christ for their self-interest. The grace of God can be fatally rejected, even by those who claim to hold it. Only God's grace produces sorrow at the foot of this cross. Man's fatal nature is to think that he can possess God's grace in the waterskin of his inheritance, that he deserves God's grace by the privilege of his own personal status or worth. But such unbelief sees no desperate need for Christ's death. It does not grieve at how "I pierced Christ." It cannot hold to grace. Such unbelief does not see any deadly wrong perpetrated by itself. It maybe pities Him. Perhaps it recognizes

with shame the travesty of human justice. But there is no beating on the breast in personal guilt. For such unbelief is blind to how by unholy living it crucifies God's Son anew (*Lutheran Hymnal* 140: 4). It does not mourn, "I crucified the King of glory." It cannot hold to grace. How then were the words of our text fulfilled?

This grievous sorrowing for the Christ we pierced is, our text demonstrates, the sole result of the Spirit being poured out. The Spirit who produces faith, by grace; the Spirit who produces prayer, the true prayer that clings to grace--this Spirit will be poured out by Jehovah on the house of David, the holy Christian Church (Acts 15:13-21). It started already on Good Friday. Did not the one thief have respect for Him, "This Man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41)? Did not the centurion mourn for Him, "Certainly this was a righteous Man," and the crowd seeing what had been done "beat their breasts" (Luke 23:47,48)? We live in the pentecostal age; the Holy Spirit has been poured out to focus our hearts on Christ crucified for us. For, 50 days later when Peter concluded, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ," it was the Spirit of grace that "cut them to the heart" (Acts 2:36,37). When later in the temple Peter announced, "You denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life," it was the Spirit of grace and supplication who turned their hearts (Acts 3:14-4:4).

But sorrowing at the foot of the cross is not enough. Jehovah says, "Look on Me" with confidence. The Lord once promised that everyone who "looked" (same Hebrew word, Num. 21:9) upon the brass serpent hanging upon the pole would not die but live. And, yes, everyone who set his confidence in that word and promise of God did live. Just so, the one who sets his trust in this One whom we have pierced will live (John 3:16).

For many, many years Luther sorrowed at that foot of the cross without finding it possible to trust that

his sins were forgiven. Luther was so desperate about how he had pierced Christ with his rebellion--how the deadly wrongs he had done crucified Christ--that he could not believe that he could be forgiven and accepted by God. He was plagued by a misunderstanding of the words "righteousness of faith" (Rom. 1:17). How could he produce such righteousness when his very heart rebelled? How could Christ ever forgive him when he failed to live righteously again and again? And what about us?

It was the Spirit of grace and supplication that brought Luther to understand and trust that the Christ whom he had pierced had bestowed His own righteousness on him. Who of us would think of such a thing? Who of us would dare to suggest that we set our trust in the very One whom we have cruelly pierced? The work of God's Spirit of grace brings this transforming confidence that looks on Him whom we have pierced. God's grace alone can lead us to trust the very One whom we have pierced for full forgiveness and righteousness.

And there is more unbelievable grace! Our text declares that in the day of the Spirit's outpouring, the today of the New Testament (cf. Joel 2:28 with Acts 2:17), the smallest, the weakest one who looks on Christ will be a royal king and a holy priest. The most feeble will be like David conquering Goliath. In the strength of the Lord's grace no sin can stand against you. The house of David will be like God, clothed in His righteousness and power. Day by day the Angel of the Lord goes before you as He went before Israel (Exod. 13:21f., 33:1-17; Num. 10:35f.). Out of the mouth of babies praying "Abba Father" comes the strength to scatter every enemy, even Satan and death (Ps. 2). Who could believe—who could even think that there was such power in simply looking on Him whom they have pierced? The Spirit of grace leads us so to trust Christ that the least of us is greater even than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28). If God "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

Even as many in the wilderness refused to do something so foolish as to look to a brass snake to heal them, so also many do not look with confident trust on the One whom they have pierced. But it remains a divine paradox that even they will look on Him whom they have pierced. For the Scripture declares: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). Unbelief cannot escape its piercing crime--not by Judas' way, not by all the indulgences in the world, not at all!

This Word, "They will look on Me whom they have pierced," touches us with a grace that is not to be resisted. It is a Word that intoxicates us with visions of glory. It is a Word that soberly moves us, if we believe, in very concrete brick and mortar action--now! Go up, says the LORD, and build My house. Amen.

### SUGGESTED HYMNS AND OUTLINE

Hymns: 226, 234, 262, 140, 149, 166, 153, 179, 52

Theme and parts:

#### REPENTANCE AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

- I. God's grace produces sorrow over Him whom we have pierced.
- II. God's grace produces trust in Him whom we have pierced.

*John Ude*

## A NEW PERICOPIC SYSTEM

### (Continuation)

John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness of Judea, crying: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2) Six months later Jesus appeared in Galilee, proclaiming the same message (Matt. 4:17). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus testified that the Kingdom of heaven belonged to the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3) and to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt. 5:10). Being called least in the Kingdom of heaven or great depends upon teaching either the breaking or the keeping of "these commandments" (Matt. 5:19). The prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven is a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Disciples are urged to seek first the Kingdom of God and are assured that everything else will be added (Matt. 6:33). Disciples are also warned that piously but insincerely crying, "Lord, Lord," will not guarantee entrance into the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21). Jesus taught that the least citizen of the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptizer (Matt. 11:11). He asserted that His casting out of demons by the power of the Spirit was evidence that the Kingdom of God had come (Matt. 12:28). Jesus assured His audience that some of them would live to "see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). He made the amazing statement that it was harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:24). He warned the Jews that the Kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to a fruitful nation (Matt. 21:43). But He added the promise that the Gospel of the Kingdom would sound forth in all the world as a witness before the Kingdom would be taken from the nation of the Jews (Matt. 24:14).

From this cursory review of but one of the Gospels it is evident that the Kingdom was the message. The Kingdom was proclaimed as near and having come. The Kingdom was a real and present reality, not an eschato-

logical hope. It was given unto the disciples to know the mysteries of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:11). To reveal those mysteries Jesus began to speak in parables, saying again and again, "The Kingdom of heaven is like . . ." These parables of the Kingdom have been chosen as the basis for meditations on the first six Sundays after Pentecost.

Usually parables are treated individually in sermons, quite divorced from the whole body of parables. Most are rarely considered; some more frequently, as the parable of the sower, which serves as the regular Gospel reading for Sexagesima Sunday. But rarely are the parables studied systematically in a sermon series, thereby revealing the progressive development of our Lord's teaching. The parables fall into three major groups, taught at the beginning, then as the end of His ministry was approaching, and finally as the curtain was about to be lowered on our Lord's ministry. The geographic setting for each group was different, first the serenity of the Lake in Galilee, then on the road to Jerusalem in Perea beyond the Jordan, and finally in the heart of Judea, in Jerusalem that killed the prophets. Matthew records all of the first group of eight, except one by Mark, with Mark and Luke also recording two others. The second group of fifteen is chiefly recorded by Luke, with Matthew recording but one and repeating another. The final group of eight is again recorded chiefly by Matthew, with Luke recording one, and both Mark and Luke repeating two.

There is a progressive development in the tone and intensity of the instruction. The first group is characterized by general instruction concerning the Kingdom, from its planting or founding to its harvest or consummation. The atmosphere is relaxed; the opposition is still unorganized. In the second group the teaching reveals a parenetic note; it is admonitory or hortatory, but thoroughly evangelic. There is a pressing for a decision, as the disciples are taught just what it means to be citizens of the Kingdom. This group parallels the Sermon on the Mount. The tone changes with the third

group, for the teaching becomes judicial. The threat of judgment upon the individual and the nation becomes more and more explicit and pronounced. The spiritual background of the teaching in parables becomes more evident. The parables began with an unreceptiveness and spiritual dullness on the part of the general hearers, which developed into self-hardening, as foretold by Isaiah (ch. 6). On the part of the religious establishment, initial opposition which explained the miracles as joint enterprises with Beelzebub developed into the blasphemy that Jesus was the incarnation of Satan rather than the Son working in the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:20-30), which opposition culminated in judicial murder.

A summary listing of the parables in their three groups is herewith given:

### THE THREE SERIES OF PARABLES

#### I. THE KINGDOM: FROM PLANTING TO HARVEST or FOUNDED TO CONSUMMATION!

Place: Galilee--The Sea

Time: Early Galilean Ministry

Recorder: Chiefly Matthew

Nature: Instructional

1. The Sower - Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 14-20; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15
2. The Growing Seed - Mark 4:26-29
3. The Wheat and the Tares - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
4. The Mustard Seed - Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19
5. The Leaven - Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21
6. The Hidden Treasure - Matthew 13:44
7. The Pearl of Great Price - Matthew 13:45-46
8. The Dragnet - Matthew 13:47-52

#### II. THE KINGDOM: THE CHARACTERISTIC OF ITS CITIZENS!

Place: Perea

Time: Late--Perean Ministry

Recorder: Chiefly Luke

Nature: Parenetic



1. The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:30-37
2. A Friend Comes at Midnight - Luke 11:5-8
3. The Rich Fool - Luke 12:16-21
4. The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant - Luke 12:35-40
5. The Barren Fig Tree - Luke 13:6-9
6. The Wise Steward - Luke 12:42-48
7. The Great Supper - Luke 14:15-24
8. The Lost Sheep - Luke 15:3-7; Matthew 18:12-14
9. The Lost Coin - Luke 15:8-10
10. The Lost Sons - Luke 15:11-32
11. The Unrighteous Steward - Luke 16:1-9
12. The Unrighteous Owner (The Rich Man and Lazarus) - Luke 16:19-31
13. The Unrighteous Judge (The Persistent Widow) - Luke 18:1-8
14. The Self-righteous Pharisee (The Pharisee and Tax Collector) - Luke 18:9-14
15. The Self-righteous Servant (The Unmerciful Servant) - Matthew 18:23-35

### III. THE KINGDOM: ITS PASSING FROM THE JEWS TO THE GENTILES!

Place: Judea--Jerusalem

Time: Conclusion of His Ministry

Recorder: Chiefly Matthew

Nature: Judicial

1. The Workers in the Vineyard - Matthew 20:1-16
2. The Two Sons - Matthew 21:28-32
3. The Wicked Vinedressers - Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18
4. The Wedding Feast - Matthew 22:2-14
5. The Fig Tree - Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33
6. The Wise and Foolish Virgins - Matthew 25:1-13
7. The Talents - Matthew 25:14-30
8. The Minas - Luke 19:11-27

Usually a single parable is considered sufficient material for a text for one sermon. When the parables are treated in this way, the interrelationship of the

parables and the development of parabolic teaching is obscured or simply ignored. Preaching a series of parables in one sermon—for example, the seven in Matthew 13 plus the parable of the seed or Word—calls for an adjustment in the presentation of the material. Most of us have been accustomed from youth to pastors mounting the pulpit, reading the text, presenting the introduction, then announcing the theme and often the parts, proceeding with the development of them, and concluding with the application. But preaching on a series of parables in one sermon does not lend itself to this traditional methodology. The writer has experimented by beginning with a brief introduction, reading one parable, then discussing it and ending up with a summary that would ordinarily be considered the theme, and then proceeding on to the next parable and repeating the process. If one preaches on an entire chapter of parables, the mere reading of the parables extends the length of the service, threatening the traditional one-hour limit. It may be necessary to omit the regular Gospel and Epistle readings, also the Old Testament reading. Such changes in the form of the service and sermon may jar and perhaps disturb the traditional hearer, but the blessings may well outweigh any resistance to change.

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First after Pentecost. The entire first group of parables, spoken by the Sea of Galilee, is the text. The Lord gave a comprehensive overview of His Kingdom from its founding to its consummation. He used the imagery of the current agriculture--the sower, the seed, the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed. Each reveals a different facet of the Kingdom. As the mustard seed shows the extensive growth of the Kingdom, so the leaven reveals its intensive growth. There are those who, governed by a dogmatic eschatological structure of future events, insist that leaven is used in Scripture only as a symbol of evil. All such dogmatic assertions are questionable. The very context, in this instance, reveals the improbability of such an assertion, for such

a negative thrust would conflict with the complementary parable of the mustard seed. Scripture does use the same symbol for both good and evil. That leaven has the connotation of evil is evident from scriptural usage, but why not a good connotation? The symbol of a lion is used both for the Messiah and the devil. The Messiah is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5), and "the devil walks about like a roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8). In Daniel 2 the Kingdom of God is pictured as a mountain; in Jeremiah 51 one of the anti-Kingdom-of-God kingdoms of this earth (Babylon) is pictured as a mountain (v. 25). The value of the Kingdom is presented from economic realities of the time, a hidden treasure and a valuable pearl. The consummation is pictured by a fishing scene in which the good and bad fish are separated, paralleling the separating of the wheat and tares in the harvest. The whole presents a kaleidoscopic view of the history of the Kingdom.

Second after Pentecost. This is the first of three Sundays dedicated to the second series of parables in which our Lord revealed how citizens of the Kingdom should live. There is a definite parallel here with the Sermon on the Mount. The citizen of the Kingdom should respond in love to a neighbor's need, pray persistently, be on his guard against covetousness, be ever watchful for the coming of the King, realize that he should be bearing fruit, a manifestation of which is his efforts in spreading the Kingdom, which, in turn, calls for increased leavening. Two parables of the first group, that of the mustard seed and leaven, are repeated in a context that gives them a more pointed application.

Third after Pentecost. The theme remains the same--how citizens of the Kingdom should live. The emphasis centers on personal decision and personal concern for the welfare of others. The invitation to the Great Supper dare not be spurned but must be accepted. The one who eats and drinks at the banquet of salvation must be concerned with the lost brother, who may be lost in the world or in the outward organization of the church. Both those lost in the world and in the church

are to be assured that the Father stands ready to receive sinners. The last parable is traditionally called "The Lost Son" or "The Prodigal Son," as though the older son were some paragon of virtue. He was also lost. The parable repeats and develops the thought of "The Lost Sheep" and "The Lost Coin."

Fourth after Pentecost. The general theme remains the same. The emphasis is on how citizens of the Kingdom should live, but the key word is "righteousness." The citizen of the Kingdom is to use the "mammon of unrighteousness" righteously. The contrast comes in the following parable of Lazarus and the rich man who failed to use mammon righteously. The world is filled with unrighteousness; that is counterbalanced by the prayers of citizens of the Kingdom for vengeance. The final two parables warn against that self-righteousness which rejects divine mercy and knows no mercy for the brother. The citizen of the Kingdom lives righteously, ever pleading for divine mercy while simultaneously exercising mercy.

Fifth after Pentecost. Two Sundays are spent on the final series of parables in which judgment looms over both individual and the nation. The first group of four emphasizes "grace." The citizens labor in faith, without being transfixed by reward. The correlate of grace is repentance. The first two parables lay the warning of judgment upon the individual; the latter two upon the nation as a whole. The special status of Israel as God's chosen people was in jeopardy. It could be lost, as it indeed was lost to the Gentiles. The lesson for the day is Moses' warning, centuries before, that just such a judgment would fall upon the nation.

Sixth after Pentecost. The first series of parables brought the Kingdom down to its consummation with the harvest scene and the separating of the good and bad fish. The final parables warn both nation and individual to be prepared. The parable of the fig tree is part of the Olivet Address. Both Mark and Luke, besides Matthew, include it in their report of that final, great

eschatological address. The parable pictures spring with summer nigh. That is the season of growth and development. The harvest pictures the end. Judgment was about to fall upon Israel; it would lose its favored position. That would coincide with the bursting forth of the Kingdom among the Gentile nations. The destruction of the desolate temple removed the barrier for the spread of the Gospel of the Kingdom. The next two parables warn the individual to be prepared for the unknown hour by living and working in grace. The final parable of the minas has both a national and a personal application. Judgment is threatened upon Israel, but individuals can always escape. They are to be prepared for the coming of the King by working with the mina entrusted to them. Be prepared! The lection presents that portion of the Olivet Address when our Lord spoke of the coming Day--the consummation of His Kingdom.

#### THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY SERIES: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

##### 28. First Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 13 and Mark 4:26-29

THE KINGDOM--Its History from Sowing to Harvest!

- I. The King is the Sower; His Seed is the Gospel of the Kingdom.
- II. The Seed--the Gospel of the Kingdom--is living, life-giving.
- III. The King sows only good seed--sons of the Kingdom; the enemy--Satan--sows his own sons.
- IV. The Kingdom grows extensively as a mustard seed.
- V. The Kingdom grows intensively as leaven.
- VI. The Kingdom may come unsought, but costs all to possess.
- VII. The Kingdom may come after search, but still costs all to possess.
- VIII. The Gospel of the Kingdom is the dragnet that gathers both good and bad; the day of separation is coming!

## 29. Second Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Portions of Luke 10-13

### THE KINGDOM--How Its Citizens Should Live!

- I. Spontaneously responding to the neighbor's need in love. (The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37)
- II. Persistently praying to the heavenly Father for special needs. (A Friend Comes at Midnight, Luke 11:5-13)
- III. Constantly being on guard against the folly and sin of covetousness. (The Rich Fool, Luke 12:13-21)
- IV. Unfailingly watchful and waiting for the Son of Man. (The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant, Luke 12:35-40)
- V. Unceasingly bearing fruit lest they be cut down. (The Barren Fig Tree, Luke 13:6-9)
- VI. Tirelessly spreading the message of the Kingdom. (The Mustard Seed, Luke 13:18-19)
- VII. Humbly beseeching the Spirit for increased leavening. (The Leaven, Luke 13:20-21)

## 30. Third Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Portions of Luke 14-15

### THE KINGDOM--How Its Citizens Should Live!

- I. Ever eager to accept the invitation to partake of the supper of salvation. (The Great Supper, Luke 14:15-24)
- II. Ever ready to expend whatever effort is necessary to find the lost sheep. (The Lost Sheep, Luke 15:1-7)
- III. Ever concerned about one lost in the organization. (The Lost Coin, Luke 15:8-10)
- IV. Ever amazed by the love of the Father who receives sinners. (The Lost Sons, Luke 15:11-32)

## 31. Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Portions of Luke 16 and 18; Matthew 18

THE KINGDOM--How Its Citizens Should Practice Righteousness!

- I. Exercise shrewdness to use the mammon of unrighteousness righteously to make friends to receive you into everlasting habitations. (The Unjust Steward, Luke 16:1-9)
- II. Exercise love by using what has been given righteously in showing mercy. (The Unjust Owner--The Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31)
- III. Exercise persistence in prayer for the Lord's coming to avenge all unrighteousness. (The Unrighteous Judge, Luke 18:1-8)
- IV. Exercise humility before your God, for self-righteousness is unrighteous in the sight of God. (The Self-righteous Pharisee and the Publican, Luke 18:9-14)
- V. Exercise righteousness by forgiving, for self-righteousness forfeits divine forgiveness by its mercilessness. (The Unmerciful Servant, Matthew 18:21-35)

## 32. Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Portions of Matthew 20-22

THE KINGDOM--The King Offers Grace: Judgment upon Those Who Reject It; Salvation for Those Who Live in It.

- I. Grace calls for labor without calculating the reward. (The Workers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16)
- II. Grace presupposes repentance; self-righteousness rejects grace. (The Two Sons, Matthew 21:28-32)
- III. Grace, spurned by the rebellious Jews, passed on to the Gentiles. (The Wicked Vinedressers, Matthew 21:33-46)
- IV. Grace offered the Kingdom to the Jews who rejected it; it was given to the

Gentiles. Grace offers the individual righteousness which, if rejected, merits punishment. (The Wedding Feast, Matthew 22:1-14)

The Lection - Deuteronomy 28:58-68

### 33. Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Portions of Matthew 24-25; Luke 19

THE KINGDOM--The King Is Coming! Be Prepared!

- I. When judgment fell on the nation of Israel, the Kingdom was near! But the disciples were unprepared for its bursting forth. (The Fig Tree, Matthew 24:32-33)
- II. Be prepared for the unknown hour of the Bridegroom's coming by living in His grace. (The Wise and Foolish Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13)
- III. Be prepared for the unknown day of accounting by working for the Lord with the talents entrusted to you. (The Talents, Matthew 25:14-30)
- IV. Be warned by the judgment upon Israel; be prepared by using the mina of the Word to gain more for the King. (The Mina, Luke 19:11-27)

The Lection - Matthew 24:36-51

*Paul F. Nolting*

(To Be Continued)



## PUBLICATION NOTICE

Readers of our *Journal* may be interested to know that a publishing house in Germany is planning to reprint all 23 volumes of the St. Louis Walch edition of Luther's works. This edition, which was originally published by Concordia Publishing House, has been out of print for a number of years. The brochure which we have received states: "It is a complete edition of Luther's Works, including his sermons, letters and tabletalks. A supplementary volume with recently discovered writings of Luther is also planned for the proposed reprint 1986 in Germany. . . . It's all in German; the Latin works have been translated very literally. Thus it serves both the scholar and the interested pastor or layman, as long as they understand German. . . . It is a renowned edition which is quoted in scholarly papers and books."

The reprinting is being undertaken by the publisher Heinrich Harms, who has received the copyright for the reprint from CPH. However, before he can proceed he needs at least 300 subscribers for the reprint. (By the middle of January he had already received 200 subscriptions.) Those who subscribe by April 1 will receive the entire set for about \$750. After April 1 the price will be about \$850. The set will be delivered in several installments during the next two years.

Those who desire further information or who wish to subscribe should write to the following address:

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We regret that the publication schedule of the *Journal* has made it impossible to get the news of this reprint to you sooner. We would suggest that anyone who is interested in subscribing express this fact and request the lower subscription price of \$750.



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