

**Trends in Christianity during the Late 20th Century
According to the "News & Comments" of the
*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly***

Arthur Faught
Church History 331A
Professor Korthals
1 May, 2001

*But today there is no day or night;
Today there is no dark or light;
Today there is no black or white...
Only shades of gray.*

In 1967 a pop band recorded those words to music. The above words belong to the chorus of "Shades of Gray." In that song the once famous group, the Monkees, sang about the transition from certainty to confusion in their time. From simple decisions of relationships to numerous considerations of war life issues had become complicated. Standards could not apply to everyone so easily, as people had done a few years in the past. Life was no longer black and white. Truth at best became a shade of gray. One American citizen looked at Vietnam and defended America's position in that war. However, another American citizen looked at the same situation and accused America of slaughter. Although the Monkees wrote music for pleasure and for a paycheck, they had to know their audience. As entertainers they had to grasp the trends, which influenced people's lives. Their song correctly identified the turbulence of the day.

What trends have affected the church? Has the church lost its standard, the gospel, to changes in society? Does the church look at the Bible's teachings and repeat the chorus line: "Only shades of gray"?

The seminary of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) publishes a theological journal. The journal serves "as a testimony of its theological convictions, as a public witness to the saving truths of Holy Scripture, and in the interest of the theological and professional growth of those whom the seminary is training for the public ministry and of those already active in this ministry."¹ This journal, the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly (WLQ)*, contains a section, called "News and Comments." The professors of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) write editorials concerning information and events that affect the church. Although the professors comment on a variety of topics, they do focus on Lutheran church bodies. According to this section of *WLQ* this paper will explore the trends within Christianity during the last twenty-five years.²

What does "gospel" mean?

The life of the church begins at this message, the gospel. The Lord revealed his plan to rescue sinners through a Savior. Because no one lives according to God's will and his standard of holiness, because no one loves God but hates him in the very depths of his heart, God promises to punish such people with physical death and eternal separation from him forever. No one can escape this punishment by his own will or works. Yet, at the same time the Lord does not want anyone to die in his sin and suffer torment for an eternity. Therefore, God in his love toward the world reminded men of the deliverance he would carry out in time, so that peace not enmity would rule in the relationship between the Creator and his creatures. God revealed this promised Savior in history, and his name is Jesus Christ. As Scripture plainly reveals Jesus is both the Son of God and

¹ *Catalog for the 2000-2001 School Year*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, p24

² This covers volumes 72 to 98 of *WLQ*.

was born of the virgin, Mary. And so, Jesus is divine, because he is God. Also, Jesus is a human, but he is not corrupted by sin. The Son of God lived in this world, to obey perfectly the will of God and to die as one guilty of sin. In this way, Jesus atoned for the sins of every human of all time as a substitute. Jesus, then, rose from the dead and is alive, to assure that his life and death paid the debt, which everyone owed before God because of his sin. In Christ a person has complete forgiveness. The gospel proclaims this truth of God's grace toward all people.

However, many have given the gospel a cold shoulder. For some reason or another, the gospel does not fit the agenda. Church bodies turn to other messages and means to build numbers in membership. For instance, some Lutheran church bodies are inclined to say that a baptism with the Holy Spirit is necessary for someone to have certainty of salvation and faith. Dr. Preus of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod addressed this view at an international conference of Lutherans in 1980. Interestingly, when Dr. Preus was introduced, he received "enthusiastic, standing applause." However, after he denied the necessity of a special baptism by the Holy Spirit in his essay, he only received a "lesser, seated applause" at his conclusion.³

Sadly, a person may not even get close to the truth. With the denial of the gospel some have seen Jesus "as a homeless Jew whose homeless followers carried his view of universal reform to distant lands."⁴ Jesus appears only as a man, who lived two millennia ago. Although he may have had some impact on a few countrymen, his followers did the propagating and fashioned the wisdom of the Bible.

However, some denominations have a use for the gospel. The Church Growth Movement has swept across denominational and continental borders, such as Sweden and the United States. This theology continues to gain speed and to destroy the purity and the grace of the gospel. Ultimately, the gospel becomes a banner to better life on earth. Practically, the gospel becomes a marketing tool. Michael Scott Horton wrote in similar fashion. He stated in his book, *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelism*: the Gospel [is] no longer understood as the power of God for salvation, but as the right use of the necessary means to make the sale."⁵ This "success theology" turns the scriptural focus on Christ and his cross to the importance and glory of man.

With great distress confessional Lutherans watch the numerous dialogues between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Roman Catholic Church. The agony multiplies, when leaders of those church bodies make statements of successful negotiations or worse, declarations of fellowship. However, for the ELCA and RCC to declare fellowship in any way, they had to agree on one doctrine, which separated the two bodies from the beginning, justification. Not so surprisingly ELCA found a way to agree with Rome.

³ "Preus Addresses Charismatics." 77:64.

⁴ "Quests for the Historical Jesus." 91:299.

⁵ "Must Evangelism Shape the Evangel?" 90:63.

However, one cannot expect a church body to remain faithful to the gospel, if the same body has avoided and deadened God's law. The law sets the standard. It compares a person to his Lord and demands perfection. If the person cannot meet the requirements of God, the law pronounces death and eternal punishment in hell. Therefore, God uses the law to show a person his sin and desperate need for a Savior. At the present many have worked to cut out this message of the law.

In 1991 the magazine *U.S. News and World Report* gave some revealing statistics.⁶ A poll showed that "more Americans (60%) believed in hell in 1990 than during the relatively pious decade of the 1950's (58%)." These results were especially surprising in the light of the widespread denial of hell in liberal and mainstream Christianity. However, the poll revealed that "although 60% of Americans believe in hell, only 4% believe there is a good chance they could end up there."

In addition to attacking the doctrine of hell, the American Lutheran Church had also moved on to delete the moral law. The Task Force on Abortion of the ALC adopted a statement by a vote of ten to four.⁷ They make no mention of the fifth commandment and of God's will that forbids a person to terminate life. Instead, the task force makes the following statement:

"Lutherans approach the abortion issue, as any other on the basis of their faith assumptions derived from Scripture...Differences of opinion and of interpretation will arise even among those who appeal to the same Bible, out of the same confessional tradition. Whether the decision is to have an abortion or give birth, the pregnant woman deserves the compassionate support of her church community."

Although the church at large is crumbling at her core by standing on a sandy foundation, the Lord still continues to fulfill his purposes through his bride. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel in Word and sacrament, to bring other people into the kingdom of God. Through the means of grace the Lord creates new life in a person's heart and sustains that life until the person receives his eternal reward. The Lord continues to bless mission work.

Outside the U.S. the Lord has opened doors to send missionaries to countries, such as China, Cuba and Russia. This brings great joy and a challenging opportunity to the church, to evangelize in these countries. Not long ago did the atheistic government of communism fall in Russia but continues to reign in China and Cuba. Opportunities to reach out to the Hispanic countries of Brazil and Columbia. In the 1979 issue of the *WLQ* Professor Dobberstein reported that the pastor of an Armenian church in Teheran held services, which many Muslims attended.⁸ "Seven out of ten baptisms are Muslim--a number unheard of previously." A growing population of Muslims within the U.S. gives the church a new home-mission field.

⁶ "Hell's Comeback." 88:300.

⁷ "To Kill or not to Kill." 77:217.

⁸ "Gospel in Iran?" 82:227.

The church is facing some other challenges with regard to mission work. Time and again the problem of a shortage of workers prevents church bodies from sending missionaries into the harvest. Therefore, the church is turning to the practice of indigenization. A group of workers lays the scriptural foundation with the gospel in the foreign country. Then, after the gospel has converted hearts, the missionaries train and give the responsibility and the work of the Great Commission to the nationals. In this way the natives can administer the gospel to their own people within their own culture. This, at the same time, removes the obstacles, which a foreign missionary meets very often.

Dr. Kenneth D. Kaunda, President of the Republic of Zambia, refers to such methodology in the article, "Authentic African Christianity."⁹ Professor Wendland quoted Kaunda's comment: "It becomes a matter of exploring 'what it means to be a Christian in a genuinely African way.'" However, Wendland pointed out in the article, that some of these African church bodies retain their pagan traditions, such as polygamy, along the side of their Christianity.¹⁰ This would not achieve a true indigenous, Christian church.

Who says?!

In one area Satan has been working hard and effectively. In order to destroy the meaning and significance of the gospel for the world, Satan has led an attack on the authority of Scripture itself. Satan has not devised a new strategy but refined it. Remember the words of Satan in the garden: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gn 3:1). In a special way Satan and his forces have repeated this accusation concerning God's Word. First, he has assaulted the inerrancy of Scripture.

Throughout the world of Christianity the words "infallible" and "inerrant" do not receive any warm welcome. In fact, some have tried to avoid their use of such terms. In 1984 a bishop of the Lutheran Church of America moved the Commission for a New Lutheran church to adopt a position on biblical inspiration.¹¹ The committee passed the motion unanimously. The position reads as follows:

These Scriptures are divinely inspired, for God's Spirit spoke through their authors. The same Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures. Given by God, they are sufficient and reliable for bringing us the truth of our salvation. They thereby present the standard for Christian faith and life.

Without the term "infallible" the reader may set the standard of what God's Word means and how it applies to daily life. Without the term "inerrant" church bodies have no standard, except their opinions or traditions, to discuss God's truths with one another.

⁹ "Authentic African Christianity." 85:304.

¹⁰ "Contextualization of Africa." 77:228. The All African Lutheran Consultation allowed polygamists into membership, "since polygamy is a factor in African societies, supported by traditional culture, and recognized by African governments."

¹¹ "Less than Infallible." 81:64.

A few voices continue to fight against this trend. For example, the Southern Baptists have been fighting this battle. They elected a conservative president, Bailey Smith, who would uphold this teaching. However, in a sermon at the convention of his reelection in 1982 President Smith stated that "Southern Baptists need not insist on any allegiance to the Bible beyond what was stated in the 1963 document."¹² Even among those who defend an errorless Scripture are walking into the enemy's trap. Later that same year a Southern Baptist convention in New Orleans allowed seminary teachers to instruct their students, that "Adam and Eve are allegorical figures."¹³

Secondly, Satan has led many to doubt the historicity of Scripture. ^{Some insist} God's Word not only contains historical and doctrinal inaccuracies, but also scholars believe and teach in this century, that people through history have made many editions of and additions to Scripture to fit their own culture and time period. Therefore, the Lord of the church and of history is not the only person to contribute to the Bible. Scholars have introduced the historical-critical method in the interpretation and textual criticism of the Scriptures. The historical-critical method took form in Germany during the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, this rationalistic approach to Scripture continues in the universities and has invaded the doctrine of the church in Germany. In 1979 Bishop Gerhard Rost of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany offered this explanation of the church's view on the inerrancy of God's Word at its third synodical convention at Hermannsburg:¹⁴

Nobody doubts that the Bible as a whole and in all its parts is the Word of God. No one doubts that it is inspired by the Holy Ghost. All acknowledge that the Bible is the sole rule and guide for all teaching and teachers of the church and the only source of understanding and certainty of faith...Controverted on this common foundation is solely the question as to what extent a limited right should be accorded to historical-critical research in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. That the jurisdiction of historical-critical reason is limited by faith is likewise not doubted by anyone.

This methodology of interpretation has polluted American church bodies, as well. ELCA commented on their doctrine concerning biblical inerrancy in an advertisement for a conference entitled "Reclaiming the Bible for the Church." The magazine, *Lutheran Forum*, contained this advertisement in 1994. The first paragraph of the ad sounded the alarm concerning the bias of the historical-critical method: "Historical criticism has not proven to be a neutral methodology." However, in a following paragraph the same ad openly confessed: "There is, of course, no return to a precritical biblical interpretation--biblicist fundamentalism will solve none of our problems. All theologians have benefited from critical inquiries into biblical history, language and literature." Another ELCA congregation recognized the immense danger of rationalistic methodology, but they decided to remain a member of the synod. ELCA seems to swirl in a whirlpool of new traditions of interpretation.

¹² "The Southern Baptist Battle of the Bible." 79:68.

¹³ "Southern Baptist Convention." 79:310.

¹⁴ "Theological Posture of SELK." 77:59

A year later the Roman Catholic Church endorsed the use of such biblical criticism in a document titled "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church."¹⁵ Professor Brug of WLS included some statements from that document. They clearly show that Rome rows in the same boat as the ELCA. "Fundamentalism does not take into account the development of the Gospel tradition but naively confuses the final stage of this tradition (what the evangelists have written) with the initial (the words and deeds of the historical Jesus)." "The Bible does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history."

Erase the Dividing Lines!

One issue of Christian doctrine dominates the pages of the "News and Comments" of the *WLQ* during the last twenty-five years, church fellowship. Christians from Catholic, Protestant and Lutheran church bodies sought to unite their members into one, large relation. Each participant of these various denominations contributed to the breakdown of this doctrine. Two decades ago New England Lutheran and Roman Catholic leaders sent out a joint pastoral letter to the congregations in the area.¹⁶ In this letter the leaders stressed events, in which members of both church bodies could participate "to grow in mutual understanding and fellowship." Although both sides recognized the irreconcilable difference in the Lord's Supper, they pressed on, because "dialogues have resolved so many of the historic differences." Such an example foretells the future erosion of the church.

From its beginning, foundational merger to its declaration of full communion¹⁷ with the Episcopalians last year, the sad history of ELCA's fellowship made the news in almost every journal of every volume of the *WLQ*. One can easily understand this, because ELCA has become the largest Lutheran body in America. In 1988 the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church of America and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church merged into one Lutheran body. Therefore, its dealings with others have an effect on those who confess the name Lutheran, as well.

However, the American Lutherans did not make endeavors of fellowship alone. The Dalai Lama visited the U.S. and attended worship at St. Patrick's Cathedral. There Rabbi Arthur Schnier and leaders from other denominations assisted in the planning and execution of the worship.¹⁸ Within the same year Pope John Paul II visited Patriarch Demetrios I of Constantinople in Turkey, to heal the wounds of nine centuries of separation of the West and the East. In Indonesia the Christian denominations of the Indonesia Council of Churches reached agreement. This council includes Reformed, Pentecostal, Methodist, Lutheran, Mennonite and other Christian bodies may exchange membership with a letter of transfer. "The bodies agree to intercommune, recognize each

¹⁵ "Rome Endorses Higher Criticism." 92:61.

¹⁶ "New England Lutheran and Roman Catholic Leaders Issue Joint Pastoral Letter." 77:66.

¹⁷ Professor John Brenner quoted the definition of "full communion" in his review "ELCA's Ecumenical Moves in 1997" (94:57). Brenner wrote: "According to ELCA's 1991 "Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment" the term full communion 'is rooted in agreement of essentials and allows diversity in nonessentials'."

¹⁸ "The Dalai Lama visits the US and attends worship at St. Patrick's Cathedral." 77:76.

other's baptisms, have complete altar fellowship and extend calls to each other's pastors."¹⁹

Among this dreary view of ill-fated and unscriptural fellowship a light pierced through the sky. April 27 to 29, 1993, eleven confessional Lutheran church bodies declared unity in doctrine and practice in Oberwesel, Germany.²⁰ The eleven members included: Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mexico), Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Finland), Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Puerto Rico), Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany), Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA), Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia, Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Malawi Conference), Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Zambia Conference), Lutheran Confessional Church (Scandinavia), Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (Japan) and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA). This blessed fellowship continues in Christ to the present.

Closer to home, WELS and sister synods avoid unity with Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, because LCMS continues to hold its position on various issues, such as church fellowship. LCMS continues to reveal her misunderstanding of church fellowship in the following words: "Although doctrinal differences keep us apart from altar and pulpit fellowship and joint worship, we continue to do a great deal of work together (with the ELCA) in such areas as world relief and development work." No reconciliation seems nearby between the WELS and LCMS.

Church bodies have kept on blurring another line, marked clearly in Scripture, the roles of man and woman. Many times "News and Comments" mentioned another ordination of a woman in a Protestant church, whether in Europe or in America. The Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church have both conceded to allowing women into positions of authority over men, usually the pastoral office. In other Evangelical circles this issue brings contention, as well.

Although the LCMS has not ordained any women, who would occupy positions of authority over men, they have allowed women to vote in the assembly. Ironically, this action gives women of LCMS the binding authority, which Scripture prohibits. In a study conducted by the Commission of Theology and Church Relations in 1986 the Missouri Synod prohibits a woman to "lord it over" a man in unchristian manner and to serve in the "pastoral office."²¹ Therefore, ^{quoting LCMS} as Professor Dobberstein wrote: "The woman is free to teach men and exercise authority as long as she does not do it in an unchristian manner and does not function in what the LCMS calls the 'pastoral office'."²²

What distinction exists between the priesthood of all believers and the public ministry? Across the board conservative and liberal church bodies have tried to answer this pressing question. To their own disaster many theologians and lay members have

¹⁹ "Radical Ecumenism in Indonesia." 83:305.

²⁰ "The Constituting Convention of the CELC--A Mountaintop Experience." 90:218.

²¹ "Woman Suffrage." 83:302.

²² Ibid., 83:302.

looked to other sources than God's Word, to find the answer. Obviously, who would know better about the order in the church than the Lord of the church himself? Yet, a searching, subordinate study in the Scriptures escapes the attention very often, as the right thing to do. Professor Brug summed the situation up well concerning the debate over church and ministry. In reference to the Southern Baptist Church with an article titled "Are You a Priest?" Brug commented: "Unfortunately, what Holy Scripture teaches about the ministry is not always well understood. When that happens, ministry becomes a kind of battleground over ownership and turf."²³

An attitude of turf control shows itself easily in various ways. The pastor encourages the members of his flock, to witness to others about the love and deeds of Jesus Christ. In this simple witness the members can bring the significance of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection to the world. Some of the members listen and take this encouragement to heart. Once or more a week a group of men and women canvass homes in the vicinity of the church and beyond. Although they report to their pastor about their activities, the pastor becomes irritated and domineering. Instead of supporting and watching over this group, the pastor takes the reigns and changes the methods of this evangelism. In doing this, the pastor stifles the heart burning for gospel proclamation and contradicts his very encouragement. A battle begins. Relationship between pastor and flock is strained.

Basically, how does the shepherd work together with the flock, to carry out the Lord's command, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey everything that he commanded? The Lord did not institute the public ministry to discourage personal evangelism. Compared to any sports team, individual Christians use their spiritual gifts, to serve along the side of the other members and to reach out with the gospel.

However, in the battle of this doctrine, when other lines are blurred, the church suffers civil war. Personal ministry rises at the expense of public ministry. Instead of working together, called workers and laity split and one group may become resentful or lazy. How important it is to have Christ at the head and as the foundation for the church and her activities!

They experience some growth

Whether to the benefit or detriment of the church, certain areas of study, groups and social attitudes have progressed. The WLQ has witnessed and recorded this maturity in its "News and Comments." A brief listing follows.

Technology has expanded our horizons. In the field of archeology professors and volunteer diggers have discovered more treasures from the past. In 1976 archeologists unearthed more than fifteen thousand inscribed tablets from the stratum dating to the era of Sargon the Great of Akkad (2335-2260 B.C.).²⁴ They made this rewarding find at Tell

²³ "Priests and Minsters." 89:146.

²⁴ "Archeological Discovery at Ebla." 73:305.

Mardikh (ancient Ebla) in Syria. The language of the tablets was a western branch of the Semitic family, from which Hebrew comes. Four years later Dr. Archer himself paid a visit to WLS to lecture about this treasure. One benefit among several we have received is "the evidence that many of the conclusions blithely accepted by negative OT criticism are shown to be untenable."²⁵

Science advanced in another territory: the human genes. So far scientists have called genes the human building blocks. However, research continues to find the most basic elements, of which people are made. With the blessings of such a discovery comes the abuse. In a review Professor Siggelkow summed up the new trend of defense concerning homosexuality. "Recent articles in major news magazines have popularized the idea that the practice of homosexuality is not against nature (Ro 1:26-27) but that it is natural because homosexuals are genetically or hormonally predisposed (or programmed) to be homosexuals."²⁶ Science may make more fascinating discoveries about our bodies, God's creation. Yet, the church knows that only the law of God can pierce through the layers and condemn the heart.

Various groups seek revival. Over the past quarter century several groups, both from Christian denominations and from the occult, have increased at a staggering rate. The charismatic flavor has intruded into mainline Christianity.²⁷ In 1980 a Gallup poll conducted for *Christianity Today* produced some numbers astonishing numbers. "Currently more than 29 million Americans identify themselves as either Pentecostal or as charismatics. Roman Catholics comprise 25% of the total, Protestants 66%. Lutheran charismatics make up 6% or 1,740,000 of the 29 million." The article continues: "According to Gallup, two out of every 10 Lutherans in the United States regard themselves as charismatics." However, Professor Joel Gerlach stated the cause for such high numbers with regard to the Lutherans: "Originally the term was used to refer to Christians who regarded speaking in tongues and other extraordinary gifts as a normal part of contemporary Christian experience."

However, the meaning of *charismatic* has changed. "Lutheran charismatic leaders apparently are also beginning to understand the word charismatic as synonymous to renewal." However, the movement continues to gain speed and ground according to its original purpose: renewal accompanied by visible signs.²⁸ In 1983 *Christianity Today* reported that the Assembly of God Church was the "fastest growing American denomination. With a membership of 1.6 million members the Assembly of God ranked 12th in size, behind the American Baptists and ahead of the Churches of Christ."²⁹

Other groups have grown in membership and influence, as well, at the end of the twentieth century. From the family of the occult Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons have won many people into their membership. How many towns are left, in which you do not

²⁵ " Dr. Archer visits WLS for lectures about the findings of Ebla." 77:128.

²⁶ "It's in My Genes." 93:43.

²⁷ "Charismatic Lutherans." 77:221.

²⁸ "Charismatics." 86:307.

²⁹ "Fastest growing American denomination--the Assembly of God." 80:143.

see two people or more dressed in fine clothes and knocking on someone's door? In 1990 *Christianity Today* reported that there were more Muslims than Methodists in America.³⁰ Eastern Orthodoxy steadily rises among Americans. Lastly, in all this mix the New Age Movement reminds the public that it is alive and thriving and will continue to deceive many.³¹ What a tremendous mission field Confessional Lutherans have, to witness to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to their neighbors!

Worship has become the topic of many conversations and conventions over these past few years. Pastors and members discuss the good and the bad of Contemporary Christian Music. Does this style suit the church and her message?³² The changes in language and in society have questioned the wording of the ecumenical creeds of the early church.³³ During this time period the three largest, Lutheran church bodies (ELCA, LCMS and WELS) have introduced new hymnals. Within the WELS a revival of appreciation of and skill in worship has come to the foreground. Two national conferences on worship have been held in Kenosha, WI, for WELS members. In 1996 the first conference had the introduction of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* as a primary goal. The second national conference took place three years later. A third is scheduled for this summer of 2001.

A blanket covers the thoughts and emotions of America. Postmodernism has introduced another set of rules. Grant Osborne wrote an article in the *Evangelical Journal*, which addressed this new movement.³⁴ Professor Brenner summarized Osborne's definition of postmodernism in the following way: "a movement that embraces both pluralism and relativism. It is an outgrowth of a reaction against modernism with its reliance on rational thinking and the reality of the object in scientific inquiry." Although postmodernism has won attention in more recent years, Osborne claimed that this movement has been developing for almost a century.

The internet replaces human contact. The concept of absolute truth is as entertaining as the legend of Beowulf or King Arthur. The study of history causes one to miss the present. Postmodernism poses a unique challenge to the church. However, proclaimers of Christ Crucified and Risen have the promise that God's Word is powerful and living. It will not return to him empty.

Don't slip away!

The church recognizes some warning signs during this period of time. The home has gone into disrepair. Every three to four years the *WLQ* has mentioned statistics from *The State of Church Giving*.³⁵ John and Sylvia Ronsvalle conduct this study, to observe the trends in American's giving for church purposes. They gather information from twenty-nine different church denominations. The latest mention in 1992 describes the

³⁰ "The Heathen in Their Blindness." 91:148.

³¹ "The New Age Movement and the year 2000." 92:302.

³² "The great debate over CCM." 84:78. Cf. 84:309 for a Lutheran review of CCM.

³³ "In defense of the Nicene Creed." 90:55.

³⁴ "Postmodernism: An Evangelical Response." 95:137.

³⁵ Cf. 85:153; 89:147; 92:143.

downslide of monetary offerings in churches. Has the country become more materialistic? Has unwise spending prohibited the full potential of giving? Or, simply put, has stewardship in all areas of life lost its priority?

No one dares to think that the pastor only works on Sunday by preaching a sermon and teaching a Bible class. More and more counseling fills up the called worker's schedule. The breakdown of the family has a major role in this recent trend. In 1989 Christianity Today supplied some statistics about the percentage of women with children who work outside of the home.³⁶ The magazine reported that "50% of American women with children under the age of six years are employed outside the home." Other factors contribute to the meltdown of the family. Fathers do not take responsibility to lead their families and do not take time to be involved with them. The members of the family do not communicate with one another. Children get older without sound training. Parents lose touch, while they focus on other jobs or pleasures.

In various ways the church has responded by assuming the roles and responsibilities of the parents. More churches offer day care, for instance. However, the church has begun to realize, again, that a congregation cannot replace the home or the influence parents have on their children.

The United States should count it blessings, when its citizens remember the founding fathers of this government. The formulators of Article 1 of the *Bill of Rights* separated church and state. Although majority of the fathers were not Christian and, therefore, most likely did not decide from Scripture this course, they made the right choice to separate the two institutions. We read Article 1: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."³⁷

Church and state do have common interests, though, in which both institutions of God are involved. The U.S. government and the church want to provide and protect education. The state wants its citizens to obey the laws of the land and moral laws, based on reason. The church wants to provide the spiritual education for the salvation and sanctification of its members, based on Holy Scripture. These two institutions, also, cooperate in the realm of marriage. Society recognizes the value of the family. Christians recognize and thank the Lord for this gift of companionship and the possibility of training children to walk in Christ.

The *WLQ* has noted many instances, in which the separation of church and state has blurred in some people's eyes. At other times one institution has crossed over the line. Consider prayer in public schools. Dr. Augsburg, a pastor of the Bible Baptist Church, Romeoville, Illinois, rightly condemned the use and promotion of prayer in the public school system.³⁸ He commented in his article, "The Issue Isn't All That Simple!", in the *Baptist Bulletin* (January 1984): "Send your children to school with a prayer upon their lips and in their hearts. Do not offer them the substitute of uncertain sounds in a

³⁶ "Working Mothers." 86:151.

³⁷ "U.S. Constitution," from Barcharts, Inc., 1999

³⁸ "Prayer in the Public Schools." 81:147.

mixed assembly." Such a topic has become a billboard for the groups of liberation theology. However, the church has then crossed over the state's line.

However, the government does not remain innocent of going beyond its area of work. The military chaplaincy provides an excellent example. The government should be cautious in providing means for religious groups to worship. As many hospitals do, the military can supply an area, in which groups can gather in fellowship. The scheduling could perhaps be done by a "third party," not involved with the organizing and performing of ministry. However, the following example demonstrates the problems that easily arise, when state mixes with the church:

During 1988 Lutheran military chaplains received considerable publicity because the chief chaplains of all four branches of the military services were Lutherans, members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These four men oversee the pastoral work of over 13,000 chaplains and assistants from more than 130 faith groups, ranging from Lutheran to Muslim and Buddhist. These chaplains serve many others beyond their own faith groups as they provide for the free exercise of religion for all personnel. Their motto is "cooperation without compromise."

There are other areas, in which church and state will have to act cautiously, in order to remain separate, though both concerned in certain topics. Such topics include: financial aid to religious organizations,³⁹ counseling, and reporting abuse (whether sexual or against children).⁴⁰

Conclusion

In 1986 the world's population reached five billion.⁴¹ Only this past winter, five years later, the world's population has reached six billion. The field to work with the tools of the Holy Spirit is quite large. The opportunities for the church to share the reason for the hope that she has in Christ number as the sands on the seashore. With that very image God promised Abraham, the father of nations, numerous descendants.

Sadly, though, the trends in Christianity during the late twentieth century cause a minority faithful to Scripture to grieve. How Satan and evil men contrive, to puff up their chests in pride and to cause the church to stumble in defeat! Jesus' words to his followers on the Sermon on the Mount apply to believers today as a warning:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Mt 5:13-16).

³⁹ "The Next Battleground." 86:75.

⁴⁰ "Church State News." 88:233; "Child abuse liability." 92:57.

⁴¹ "Two quotations." 83:308.