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What does
He do?*

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TO THE READER

Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell in men, giving them a new birth into the kingdom of God. And come the Spirit did, in a most miraculous way, among 120 believers gathered on that first Day of Pentecost.

In June, we focus on Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

But who is this Spirit, and what does He do? Of the three Persons of the Trinity, He seems the hardest to

grasp, to explain, even to illustrate (rather than using the conventional dove or flame on the cover, we chose simple calligraphy).

Answering these questions as to the “who” and “what” of the Holy Spirit is the aim of this month’s cover article, by Dr. Leopoldo Sánchez. May this and related stories give you greater insight into how the Spirit works distinctly from, and together with, the Father and the Son, and how He helps us in our daily faith lives.

*David L. Strand, Executive Director
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'The DaVinci Distortion'

The best lies always have just a little truth in them to make them believable, which prompts me to ask: Mr. Dan Brown, why don't you just come out and tell us which side you're on?

Is your *DaVinci Code* really meant to get at Christianity, or is it just a story, and everyone should let it go at that? The problem is your refusal to answer that question, because no matter which answer you give, you'll alienate half of your readership.



'Mr. Dan Brown, why don't you just come out and tell us which side you're on?'

Mark Einspahr
Gardnerville, N.Y.

For all the seemingly intelligent people, Christians included, who think this book is wholly or even partially for real, consider this: Libraries are good at classifying books, and you will find this one in the *fiction*, not the *biography*, section.

Mr. Brown is a good writer, and he knows just enough about Christianity and specifically Roman Catholicism to make him dangerous. Thank you, Dr. Paul Maier ("The DaVinci Distortion," April '06), for your excellent help in putting this book in perspective.

Mark Einspahr
Gardnerville, N.Y.

In the last sentence of his article, Dr. Maier says *The DaVinci Code* "can even be a rare opportunity for Christian witness." Personally, I've been able to discuss my Lutheran faith very openly with Catholic friends, Jewish neighbors, and atheist co-workers in the

context of *The DaVinci Code*.

These conversations, in fact, have bolstered my own faith.

Unfortunately, this wonderful by-product of Brown's book is lost in a reactionary backlash when terms like "attack on Christianity," "assault," and "literary fraud" are applied to the book—especially when that book is presented as a work of fiction.

The argument that certain people take *The DaVinci Code* as fact is troubling. I doubt many young readers of Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* believe that Charles

the Muslim community about whether the doctrine of abrogation actually exists, and, if it does, which passages in the Koran are to be abrogated. Some branches of Islam teach that only the Bible has been abrogated by the Koran. Muslims also disagree as to whether *jihad* is a physical military battle against evil or an inner spiritual battle.

I certainly am not advocating Islam, but before we criticize Muslims, we would do well to understand them and the diversity that exists within their faith.

Dr. John Tape
St. Louis

Arbiters of taste

Thank you for "The Ugly and the Beautiful" by Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto (April '06). I wonder how much responsibility the church has for the world's adoration of perversion. I wonder how perverse parts of the church itself are becoming by turning God's Word on its head for the sake of seeming relevant to our culture.

Chuck Eckert
Collinsville, Ill.

Dr. Siemon-Netto casts too wide of a net. He uses such extreme examples of ugliness as a man covered with body-piercings and skull-and-crossbones tattoos. Has he looked at some of our young people who radiate God's beauty and yet also are taking part in the tattoo fad? There are hundreds of lovely young Christians worshipping on a regular basis who have simple tattoos somewhere on their person. No demons or chains, mind you, but maybe a rose—a simple design that they considered beautiful at the moment.

Dr. Siemon-Netto strayed far into the subjective on all points at the end of his article. We are to minister to all, and I cannot imagine how many people he offended

Lindbergh was elected President in 1940. But if they did ask about the election of 1940 and that era in world history, I would hope it would spark a conversation and lead to further study. This is different from James Frey, author of *A Million Little Pieces*, who pawned off a fictional story as a memoir.

Keeping *The DaVinci Code* in the public discourse can serve a useful purpose for Christian witness. I don't view the book as an "assault"; I view it as an opportunity.

Brent Crane
Corolla, N.C.

Too broad of a brush

I thank Dr. Alvin Schmidt for his thoughtful article, "Islam: Keeping the Facts Straight" (May '06). However, the article presents Islam as if it were a monolithic religion in which all the members believed the same thing. This is not the case.

There is much disagreement in

by putting forth his own “taste” as the correct form of beauty and art.

*Pat Enomoto
Kansas City, Mo.*

‘Old Glory’ in church

I see where a letter-writer didn’t like the answer to the March “Q & A” regarding the propriety of placing the American flag in the chancel. To him I would say this: We must remember that we are in church to worship the Lord, not to worship the flag or our country, great as they are. To insist otherwise is to come perilously close to idolatry.

*Myron Molnau
Moscow, Idaho*

I can’t believe this is even an issue. I am a Christian. I’m also an American. I worship God, and I honor our flag. We are at war, for heaven’s sake! Have we forgotten 9-11? Do we remember World War II? Hitler removed the German flag from churches in his country and replaced it with the Nazi flag. My dad fought for America in that war. He fought for liberty, justice, and every other good thing for which our flag stands. Fortunately for him, he came home, unlike so many others. For the sakes of all those who have sacrificed for our country, along with everything else we hold dear about our land, we never should hesitate to show the highest respect for our flag.

Having “Old Glory” in our churches is fitting and proper. What better place to worship God and honor our country’s flag than in church? I thank God every day that I’m an American.

*Charlotte Corn
Wellston, Okla.*

***Please send letters to
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63122-7295; or e-mail to
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Who
is the
Holy Spirit?
What does
He do?

by Leopoldo A. Sánchez

These questions have led some Christians to an unhealthy emphasis on the third Person of the Trinity, and others to virtually neglect Him.

A trinitarian approach to the Holy Spirit that respects the centrality of Christ in the history of salvation avoids the dangers of these theological extremes—“Spirit only” and “Spirit void”— that often lead respectively to wild emotionalism and arid intellectualism.

To avoid the “Spirit only” approach, the Spirit and the Son must be seen as inseparable, working together in a joint mission to bring sinners into communion with the Father. The Spirit is not alien to the Son, and the Son is not alien to the Spirit. Where one is, the other one is right there.

To express this relationship in the Father’s plan of salvation, we say that Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the bearer and giver of the Spirit. Or we may say that the Spirit of the Father rests on and is sent by the Son for us.

To escape a “Spirit void” approach, the Spirit whom Christ bears must also be seen as the Spirit whom Christ gives to us, or as the Spirit of Christ in us. We must see what the Church that lives in the Spirit of Christ looks like.

Inseparable Companions

The Gospel writers portray Jesus as the bearer of the Holy Spirit, the one filled with the Spirit of God, the One on whom the Spirit rests.

Because the Holy Spirit rests permanently on Christ, He accompanies Christ at all times. Like inseparable companions, the Son and the Holy Spirit enter history together and work together to bring about the Father’s plan of salvation for the human race. The Holy Spirit appears in the story of salvation from the very first moment of the Son’s human life. The Gospels attribute the conception and holiness of the virgin’s child to the Holy Spirit.

At the Jordan, the Father anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit for His redemptive mission as Yahweh’s suffering and exalted Servant. Anointed with the Holy Spirit, Jesus establishes His Father’s gracious kingdom among us by delivering us from Satan’s bondage, proclaiming good news, giving His life unto death for us, and opening the way to eternal life through His resurrection from the dead.

The Spirit is involved in all these events.

The Spirit is with Christ in His struggle against the devil and his demons who oppress God’s creatures. Immediately after the anointing at the Jordan, Jesus is

The Spirit and the Son must be seen as inseparable, working together in a joint mission to bring sinners into communion with the Father.

led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He heals and casts out demons by the Spirit of God. By resisting Satan and driving out demons, Jesus establishes the Father’s kingdom among us. And where God rules through Christ by His Spirit, the evil one and his evil spirits can no longer rule. The Spirit accompanies Jesus to the cross and is united with Him in His resurrection.

Spirit-breathed Word

The Spirit is united inseparably to Christ’s words. Jesus is anointed with the Spirit of the Lord to proclaim the Gospel. As the fulfillment of all the prophets, Christ speaks in the Spirit, calling people to repentance and forgiving their sins.

There is, of course, a key difference between Christ and the Spirit-led prophets. The prophets spoke of the sufferings and glory of the Christ who was to come. But the words of Christ point to Himself. As St. John puts it, the incarnate Son speaks Spirit-breathed words that lead to faith and eternal life in Him because God the Father has given Him the Spirit without measure.

At the Jordan, Jesus is anointed with the Spirit as the suffering Servant, the rejected one who takes our sins upon Himself. As the Servant, Jesus gives His life as a ransom for many. He describes His suffering unto death as a baptism.

Jesus’ baptism in the water of the Jordan leads to His baptism in blood at Golgotha. Through the eternal Spirit, Jesus offers His sinless life to the Father on the cross to cleanse us from our sins and render us fit to worship God.

But the suffering Servant is also highly exalted. The Father establishes Jesus as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by raising Him from the dead. In the Spirit, the Son dies and is raised to new life.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

On Pentecost Day, St. Peter preaches, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

The hearers are contrite and ask, “What shall we do?”

The apostle responds: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children.”

Pentecostals and Lutherans understand Peter’s words differently. Pentecostals see an order of salvation in Peter’s response. First, people are to repent. Such repentance or conversion occurs when one accepts Christ as Lord and Savior and renounces sin.

Second, they are to be baptized. Here, water baptism symbolizes one’s confession of sins and lifetime commitment to Jesus.

Finally, they are to receive the gift of the Spirit, which Pentecostals call the baptism in, or with, the Holy Spirit.

The key in the order is not the number of stages, but the idea that baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs *after* the new birth or conversion. Because the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and spoke of God’s works in other tongues, most Pentecostals assert that this fullness of the Spirit for witness with the ability to speak in tongues is available today to those believers who desire it and yield to the Spirit.

Lutherans see repentance, water Baptism, and the gift of the Spirit as one reality, “one Baptism” in water for the forgiveness of sins that offers the fullness of the one Spirit.

On Pentecost, the exalted Jesus receives the promise of the Spirit from the Father and pours Him forth to empower the Church in her preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations. In Scripture, such preaching is intended to lead to Baptism and is inseparably united with it.

And so, through the word spoken by Peter, God brought many to repentance, led about 3,000 of them to Baptism for forgiveness, and gifted them with the fullness (not only part) of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is not our work. It is neither a symbol of our commitment to Jesus nor conditional upon our yielding to the Spirit. Baptism is God’s work, sure promise, and means of grace for us. Baptism is God’s gracious “little Pentecost” with a lasting significance, which Luther (following Paul) referred to as a daily return to one’s baptism where the old man in us is drowned (convicted of sin) and a new man is raised to new life (forgiven).

Through the convicting and comforting Word, the Spirit sent to us in Baptism continues to make us faithful witnesses of Jesus according to the vocations and gifts He chooses to give us.

— L.A.S.

Our “little Pentecost”

There is an unbreakable link between Christ bearing the Spirit and giving the Spirit. The Gospel writers are of one accord in teaching that the Son on whom the Spirit descends and remains is the One who baptizes with the Spirit. Indeed, the incarnate Son bears the Holy Spirit for Himself from conception.

But that indwelling of the Holy Spirit from conception is unique to Christ. It is not transferable to the rest of humanity. From the days of Adam, we are born in sin and we are without the Holy Spirit.

How then are we to receive the Spirit whom Christ bears?

After Christ’s coming in the flesh, His anointing unto death becomes a condition in the Father’s plan of salvation for the universal giving of the Spirit on Pentecost. In other words, Jesus is anointed with the Spirit at His baptism so that we too might receive, upon completion of His redemptive mission, His Spirit or anointing in our Baptism.

From Pentecost onward, every Baptism becomes a “little Pentecost,” a means of grace through which the exalted Jesus forgives our sins and sends the gift of the Spirit from the Father to dwell in us (see “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”). When we are baptized into Christ, God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts and makes us His sons and daughters and heirs of His promises in Christ. Pentecost is the fulfillment of Jordan. The one baptized at Jordan becomes the one who baptizes from Pentecost onwards.

So Christian Baptism is also a “little Jordan”—the event in which the Father anoints us with the Spirit of His Son, calls us His beloved children, and sends us on a mission to be faithful witnesses of Christ according to our stations in life.

For St. John, the giving of the Holy Spirit does not occur until Christ’s glorification, which includes His death and resurrection. The point is not to say that the Spirit had never been active before the coming of Christ, but to link the glorification of Christ to His giving of the Spirit to the disciples for the purpose of sending them out into the world to forgive the sins of the penitent and retain the sins of the impenitent.

But how can these disciples absolve people of their sins unless the risen Jesus had died for their sins? There is no giving of the Spirit to forgive sins apart from the death of Jesus. When St. John states that Christ handed over His Spirit (*pneuma*) on the cross, he seems to allude, in a symbolic way, to this unbreakable bond between Christ’s death for our sins and His breathing of the Spirit (*pneuma*) upon the disciples to forgive sins. Christ’s sending of the Spirit from the Father is, in this sense, the fruit of the cross.

Our lives in the Spirit

In light of Christ's life in the Spirit, we can now ask what our daily life in the Spirit looks like. It is a Christoform life, one shaped after Christ's life. For the same Spirit whom Christ bears, Christ has also given to us.

The Spirit anoints us for a life of struggle against Satan. The resting of the Holy Spirit on Christ did not make Him immune to the devil's attacks. The same is true for us. Like Jesus, the Church is led by the Spirit

Jesus is anointed with the Spirit at His baptism so that we, too, might receive ... His Spirit or anointing in our baptism.

into the wilderness to face the devil's temptations. We all have deserts in our lives where we are most likely to fall.

As one who was tempted in every way, Jesus sympathizes with our struggles. But when Christ sends His Spirit into our hearts, He also gives us "the sword of the Spirit" (the Word of God), and access to His *Abba* (Father) in prayer to resist the devil.

In other words, we receive the same Spirit-breathed Word and access to God in the Spirit by which Christ resisted Satan in the desert and at Gethsemane.

Through the Word and prayer, the Spirit does not make us immune to temptations, but He does assure us of God's help in the midst of such struggles and reminds us that Christ has defeated Satan and gone to the cross for us so that, by His death, He might free us from the evil one who held the power over death.

Anointed to serve others

The Spirit anoints us to proclaim the Word. As the Father sends the Son and gives Him the Spirit to speak words that are "Spirit and life," so also does the Son breathe the Spirit on His disciples so that they might speak words that bring people to faith in Christ. Like Jesus, the Church is led by the Spirit into the world to call sinners to repentance and forgive their sins.

Early Heresies Regarding the Holy Spirit

In the 1st century A.D., the Corinthians tended to appraise their teachers on the basis of their human wisdom. St. Paul warns them that their faith does not rest on human or worldly wisdom, but on what the Spirit from God has taught them through the proclamation of "Christ crucified." A true apostle speaks words taught by the Holy Spirit when his preaching points not to his own wisdom but to Christ, the wisdom of God.

For St. John, a true prophet speaks by the Spirit of God, or according to "the spirit of truth," when he acknowledges that Jesus Christ came "in the flesh." Otherwise, he is a false prophet who speaks according to the spirit of deceit of the antichrist.

No one can claim to speak by the Paraclete (Holy Spirit), "the Spirit of truth," unless his words remind us of the words of Jesus, who is the Truth, the One whose words and works reveal the Father's love for us.

During the 2nd century A.D., the Church had to test the spirits in Phrygia, modern day Turkey. There, the Montanists (named after their leader Montanus) prophesied in ecstatic speech, foretold the imminent descent of the New Jerusalem, and acted as if their leader were an incarnation of the Paraclete. Since then, the rise of Montanist-like prophets has led the church to be wary of anyone who claims to speak words by the Spirit contrary to the apostolic message concerning Christ's words and deeds for our salvation.

During the 4th century, the Church defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit against the *Pneumatomachoi* ("enemies of the Spirit") and others, who spoke of the Spirit as a creature through whom God works in us. Like an angel, the Spirit is a minister of God, but not God.

The Church argued for the Spirit's divinity on the basis of His works. How can a mere creature bring us into communion with God? God alone can. Since the Spirit sanctifies us through the Word and Baptism, He is God. For St. Basil (who died in 379), our Baptism in the name of the Triune God reveals that the Holy Spirit shares in the divine name and in the worship due the Father and the Son.

The Creed of Constantinople (in 381) sums up the church's historic response to the *Pneumatomachoi* by confessing the Holy Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of life ... who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified."

— L.A.S.



Through the spoken Word, the Spirit convicts and comforts, kills and makes alive, preaches Law and Gospel, leads the sinner to die to self in order to be raised anew (see “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”).

That the Spirit works through the Word is not a Lutheran invention, but a teaching deeply rooted in the Spirit’s inseparable union to Christ and the words He speaks to lead people to eternal life in Him.

The Spirit anoints us to be servants of others. We are often self-serving and prefer to be served. Christ is not like that. The Father anointed Jesus as Servant for a life of self-giving unto death for others. Like Jesus, the church is led by the Spirit to die to self in order to make room for the neighbor.

Christ “in here”

The Spirit does not simply have us look to Christ “out there” in order to follow Him, but actually shapes Christ “in here”—in our hearts and minds—so that our lives in service to others mirror Christ’s own humility and self-giving to them.

Paul’s teaching on the fruit of the Spirit makes little sense apart from Christ’s own life in the Spirit in humble service to all.

The Spirit also anoints us to share in the sufferings and glory of Christ. Again, Jesus’ life in the Spirit did not make Him immune to suffering. The same is true for us. Those who put their trust in Christ have His Spirit and anointing even as they experience sufferings in this life.

Like the Son, the Church does not measure the Spirit’s presence in her midst according to her lack of suffering but according to her trust in the God who can comfort and raise His suffering people from the dead. Indeed, the same Spirit in whom the Father raised Christ from the dead now dwells in us as the firstfruits of our bodily redemption, our final adoption as children of God. The resurrection at the last day is the fulfillment of the Father’s outpouring of the Spirit upon us to conform us to the image of His Son.

In the midst of our present sufferings, when it is hard to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with God’s will and leads us to pray for the final revelation of the glory of Christ and the life of the world to come: “Come, Lord Jesus!” Amen.

Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez is an assistant professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. His e-mail is sanchezl@csf.edu

‘A Joyful Trinity Sunday’ by Greg Wismar

Major Christian holidays have their own special greetings. In December, we wish one another “a blessed Christmas,” and on Easter, we greet fellow believers with “He is risen!” and hear the responding “He is risen indeed!”

Although Trinity Sunday is a major celebration of the Church Year, it has no such traditional greeting. In fact, the day has little notice beyond its observance at our worship service, even though it has a surprisingly rich history as a day for great rejoicing.

Until the Middle Ages, a specific day for celebrating this central confession of the Christian faith, that we worship “God in three persons, [the] blessed Trinity,” had no fixed date in European nations. That changed in 1334 when a specific “Trinity Sunday” was added to the official calendar of the Western Church and was assigned a non-movable date on the Sunday after Pentecost.

Finding joy in the knowledge of the one true God and expressing that truth seems only natural. Individual Christian people have found many ways to honor the Trinity. Religious processions and concerts on Trinity

Sunday have been part of the piety of Christians in many places. Countless churches have been given the name “Trinity” or “Holy Trinity” in honor of this greatest teaching and confession of the Christian faith.

The Trinity is often symbolized in the artwork of cathedrals and local churches by three interlocking circles. One of the most famous Trinity symbols is the shamrock, which, according to Irish tradition, was used by Saint Patrick to explain the mystery of the Trinity to converts to the Christian faith.

Another plant with related symbolic usage is the pansy, often called the “Trinity flower” in areas of Europe.

Many of our greatest hymns close with what are called “doxological” stanzas—an expression of praise to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are well worth learning by heart.

Our Lord rejoices in our affirmations of faith and in our expressions of praise. Perhaps this year you will expand your celebration of Trinity Sunday by greeting someone that day with the words “A Joyful Trinity Sunday to you!”



Changing Colors, Changeless Themes by Greg Wismar

Each of the three colors in a traffic signal has an important meaning that affects the actions of motorists and pedestrians. In the life of the Church there are special liturgical colors that influence and enrich the worship of God’s faithful people. We see three of them in June this year.

The **red** used on Pentecost Sunday recalls fire of the Holy Spirit that fell upon those at prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem. Red is associated with witness, discipleship, and sacrifice.

Then on Trinity Sunday, **white** in the Church reflects a sense of joyful celebration. The great festi-

vals of the Church Year, including Christmas and Easter, feature white.

Green symbolizes growth.

Week by week, and year by year, we grow in grace, visually aided and enriched by the changing colors of the Church that convey the changeless themes of our faith.

Dr. Greg Wismar is pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Newtown, Conn.

Rethinking Sunday School

With fresh materials and new priorities, congregations are re-energizing Sunday school.

by James Heine

Many of us have vivid memories of Sunday school—our teachers and classmates, Rally Day each fall, the lessons we were taught, and the leaflets we carried home to Sunday dinner. But few of us are familiar with the origins of Sunday school and how, over the years, Sunday school has influenced young people in our church body and in society.

The concept of a “Sunday” school grew out of social-reform movements in late 18th-century England. Robert Raikes (1735–1811), a British publisher and philanthropist, is generally credited with establishing the first modern Sunday school in 1780, when he engaged a woman to instruct boys in the “four Rs”—reading, ’riting, ’rithmetic, and religion—on the only day they had free from work: Sunday.

To understand Raikes’ motives, think of Charles Dickens’ novel *Oliver Twist*, says Deaconess Pamela Nielsen, senior editor of Sunday school, youth, and family materials at Concordia Publishing House.

“Think of Oliver and his buddies—little ruffians, little hooligans,” she explains.

Raikes thought of those children, too, Nielsen adds, and he and the reformers who followed him saw impoverished, uneducated, uncivilized youngsters who knew little but the hard, often criminal, life of the street and the hard labor of the factory floor. Raikes had an antidote to the situation. Nielsen paraphrases Raikes’ thoughts: “We’ll bring them in. We’ll feed them. We’ll teach them the basic educational things, and we’ll give them some religion.”

The concept of the Sunday school spread rapidly in the 19th century, but because it was often a lay movement, it was not always heartily endorsed by established churches, including Lutheran churches. Although Sunday schools began to appear in the Missouri Synod in the 1840s, many distrusted the movement because of its lay orientation and doctrinal laxity. Not until the early decades of the 20th century did Sunday schools find general acceptance in the Synod.

By the end of World War II and the beginning of the 1950s, Sunday schools were a visible and well-established fact of parish life in many congregations.

All illustrations by R.J. Shay



Modern challenges

Today, Sunday school has “fallen off the radar” of many congregations and, in many others, it’s not terribly healthy, Nielsen says. This is true not only of Missouri Synod congregations but also of most mainline denominations.

“We’re all experiencing a consistent downturn in students, to the tune of about 5 percent a year,” Nielsen says. “We sell the same amount of teacher packs to the same number of congregations, but the student-pack numbers keep going down.”

The annual decline translates into a loss of about 30,000 students a year, Nielsen says.

Demographic changes play a role in this decline, as do a host of other issues, e.g., divorced parents (Who’s got the kids this weekend?), work schedules, and the explosive growth of extracurricular activities at school and elsewhere.

“It would have been unheard of when we were kids that there would be a soccer tournament on Sunday morning. And now, that’s a regular thing,” Nielsen notes.

Even the growth of church activities has affected some Sunday schools. Where a congregation once may have had one or two worship services on a weekend, now there may be three or four, including a “children’s church,” which may compete with the traditional Sunday school hour.

“There’s just a lot of cultural

pressure,” Nielsen says about the state of Sunday schools.

Regardless of the pressure, Nielsen believes Sunday schools continue to play an important role in the life of the church. They offer an opportunity to “immerse and enculturate a child of God into the family of God,” she says.

When we are born, we know nothing about our family, its history, or its rituals. As we grow, we acquire all of that by being immersed in our family, Nielsen says, by observing how things are done by Mom and Dad, by big brother saying, “Look, look!”

In the same way, Sunday school can help immerse a child of God in the family of God, Nielsen says. It is a way to learn the family history—the Bible—and the family rituals and customs—our worship.

That is one aim of “Growing in Christ,” Concordia Publishing House’s new Sunday-school curriculum (see “New Curriculum,” Page 14), Nielsen says, to connect students with the life of their church family.

“We have liturgy links in the openings. We try to mirror on a small scale what goes on in church, so there’s some connection when students go there with Mom and Dad,” she says.

Fresh Thinking

In some ways, the circumstances facing many Sunday schools are a result of their past success, Nielsen notes. She compares the situation to that of worship a generation ago. “Nobody’s taken Sunday school’s temperature lately in a lot of our churches,” she says. “It’s perhaps a bit like where we were with worship 25 or 30 years ago. Then somebody started talking about worship and thinking about it, and it got on people’s radar. And now worship’s a big deal.”

Nielsen not only encourages congregations to think seriously about Sunday school, but if necessary, to think out of the box.

“Maybe it’s Saturday school, or maybe it’s Wednesday school,” she



Sunday School Milestones

1780. Robert Raikes established his first Sunday school in Gloucester, England.

Mid-1780s. The first Sunday schools appeared in the U.S.

1824. Local Sunday-school organizations formed the American Sunday School Union. The cross-denominational

nature of the union does not appeal to established churches.

1840s. Sunday schools began to appear in the Missouri Synod.

1911–18. CPH publishes German Sunday-school materials.

1911–51. The “Concordia Sunday School Series” (which includes the *Concordia Primary Leaflets*).

1916–50. *Concordia Sunday School Teachers Quarterly*.

1951–68. Sunday-school materials produced by the LCMS Board for Parish Education.

1968. “Life in Christ” Sunday-school series. Undated series for different class levels, Old Testament and New Testament.

1970–84. “Mission:Life” Sunday school materials.

1976–88. “New Life in Christ” Sunday-school materials.

1988–2006. “Our Life in Christ” Sunday-school materials.

2006. “Growing in Christ” materials.

explains. "If your family service is Saturday night at five, you're probably not going to have a full house at Sunday school on Sunday morning. So maybe you do something before or after that Saturday-night service."

The new "Growing in Christ" materials don't limit you to Sunday morning for 45 or 50 minutes, she adds.

Raising the visibility of Sunday school and making it a priority are two ways of putting it back on people's radar, observes Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II, dean of pastoral education and placement at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. Along with his wife, Clair, Fickenscher serves as the Sunday-school superintendent at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne.

St. Paul succeeded at putting Sunday school back on the radar screen, says Fickenscher. With just two exceptions (Easter and the annual Sunday-school picnic) St. Paul consistently holds Sunday school every Sunday, at the same time and in the same location.

"Something that is catch as catch can is always perceived as low priority," Fickenscher says. "It's quickly perceived as not very important, and then right away it becomes pretty optional."

At St. Paul, they make a big deal out of Sunday school, Fickenscher says, and that influences participation.

New Opportunities

When you consider that about three-quarters of LCMS children do not attend Lutheran day schools, you can understand the continued importance of Sunday schools, Nielsen says. They can serve as a source of faith education and Christian nurture. They can also provide children with an introduction to the work of the church in the world.

The new CPH curriculum includes Web links to many of Synod's departments and Recognized Service Organizations for that purpose, Nielsen says. It introduces children to the work of the Synod in the world and to the activities they can support by their prayers and contributions.

Many people view Sunday school as little more than an opportunity for moral instruction of the young—here's how you keep out of trouble, share, and be good, says Fickenscher, who is a consultant for the "Growing in Christ" curriculum. That's an oversimplified view. Sunday school is not about what we need when we're 8 or 10 and then grow out of when we're 14 and confirmed, Fickenscher adds. Neither is it about what we need when we're 42 and a parent. Sunday school is about eternity, and that's why it's important, he explains.

"Sunday school is a wonderful opportunity to share the saving means of grace, the word of God, which keeps our faith alive and strengthens our faith throughout our lives and for eternity."

Jim Heine is a freelance writer. He is a member of Old Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.

THE NEW CURRICULUM

For the first time since 1988, Concordia Publishing House will offer a new Sunday-school curriculum for use in the parish. In development for the past five years, the new curriculum will replace the "Our Life in Christ" series, which itself was a revision of the "New Life in Christ" curriculum that debuted in 1976.

"Growing in Christ" addresses many of the issues parish Sunday-school departments confront today, observes deaconess Pamela Nielsen, senior editor for Sunday school, youth, and family materials at CPH. It's simple to use, flexible, and easily tailored to meet the needs of individual congregations.

To counteract the general decline in Bible literacy in our culture, the new curriculum stresses the who, what, where, when, why, and how of Bible stories, especially for elementary and middle-grade students. At those age levels, students "are just sponges for facts," Nielsen says.

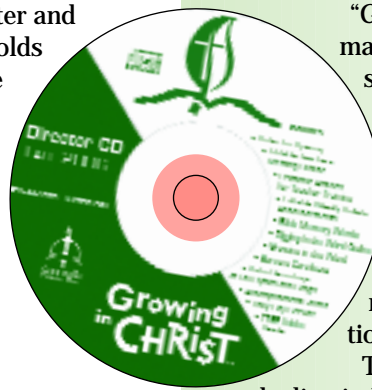
The curriculum does something else, too, Nielsen adds. Every lesson connects students to Christ the Savior—not Christ the good example, or Christ the moral leader, or Christ the good teacher. "That's all there, of course, but always, always, Christ our Savior from sin, death, and the devil," she says.

In response to the concerns of pastors, "Growing in Christ" also prepares its students for confirmation classes, Nielsen says. "We're setting Luther's *Small Catechism*, and his explanation, the entire thing, to music, and recording it, simply to help children learn the words."

In an era when everyone seems to be working 24/7, the new curriculum is also deliberately teacher friendly, Nielsen says. People who are willing to teach Sunday school are often some of the busiest people around. They're involved in everything else in their congregation and in their families and communities, too.

"We've tried to give them everything they need in the guides so there's less 'bring this from home' or 'go find this and collect that,'" Nielsen says.

— J.H.



All the current buzz over such non-authoritative books as the “gospel” of Judas cannot diminish our joy and confidence in God’s eternal plan for His Church.

Happy Birthday, Sturdy Church!

by Uwe Siemon-Netto

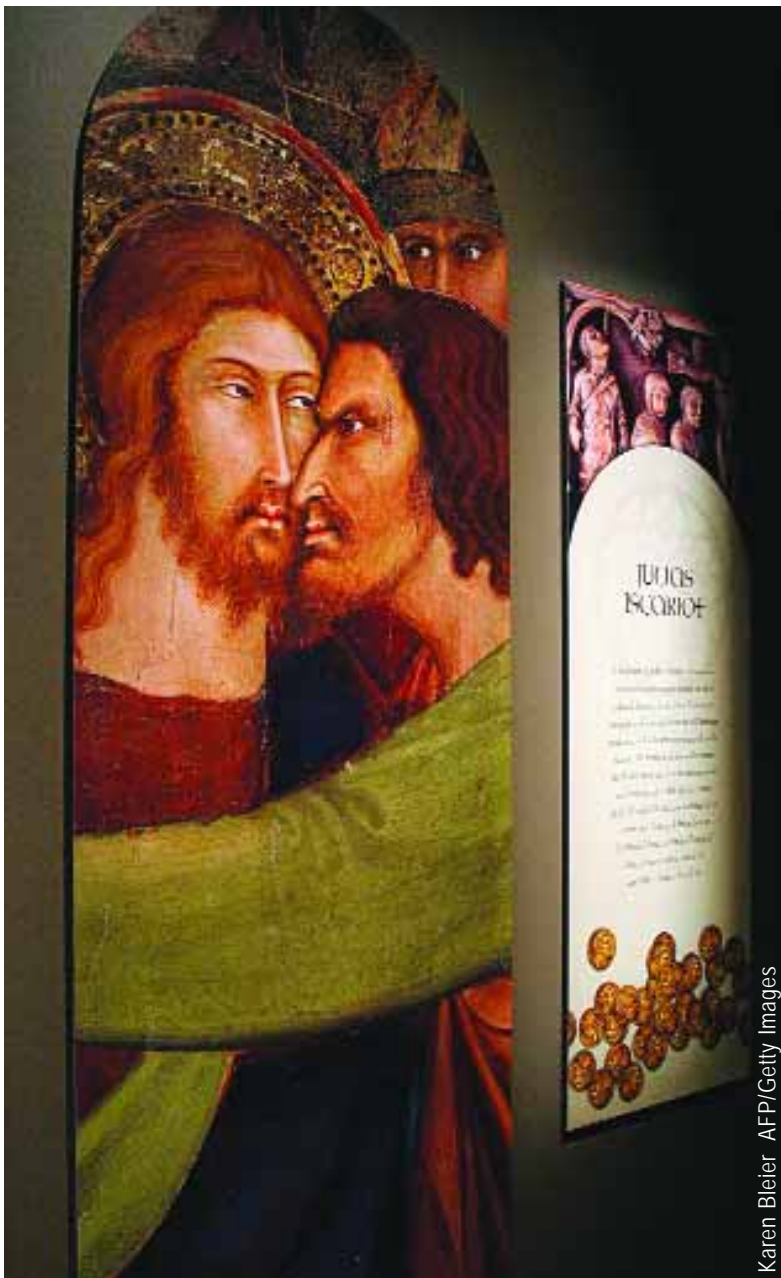
This is the time of year—Pentecost—when we celebrate the birthday of our sturdy Church without fretting too much over its perennial afflictions, such as right now the kaffuffle over the “gospel” of Judas and *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon.

The Church was born when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of the risen and ascended Christ. Then and there, this Church began to embrace and shape many cultures, something it still does. Nowhere is it growing faster than in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; this applies to most branches of the Body of Christ, including the Lutheran.

Of course, there are those who label our present time as the “post-Christian era.” You would think that even those pushing this line might at least acknowledge the aesthetic accomplishments of this allegedly fading epoch—the music, the art, the architecture, and, yes, civilized behavior.

Well, in a way they do, but without acknowledging the powerful message in the story of the Church that motivates Christians: The Gospel, the Good News that God made Himself small, suffered, and died for our sins and then rose again so that we who believe may also rise.

The so-called “gospel of Judas” contains no such good news, according to professors James Voelz and Jeffrey Kloha of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This 1,700-year-old document recently published by the National Geographic Society is odd in content, Voelz said. What is equally odd is that in portraying this text, the media “conveniently omit a lot of information that would put the manuscript in a bad light.”



Karen Bleiler AFP/Getty Images

The exhibit of the Gospel of Judas at the National Geographic Society's headquarters in Washington, D.C., opened in April. It includes the concept of Judas acting at Jesus' request when he hands Jesus over to the authorities.

In their adolescent urge to titillate, journalists and postmodern sages push a story that is not at all good, especially not for those secularists prepared to recognize only what can be seen, heard, felt, or at least measured. For the “gospel of Judas” disdains matter; it shows contempt for the body.

In this bizarre work, Christ is not described as Jesus but as an individual named Seth, and this Seth conspires with Judas against his own biology. Fulfilling Seth’s will, Judas participates in “Christ’s” liberation from His own body. Thus what the media and the “post-Christian” intellectuals find so worthy of the public’s attention is an utterly warped anthropology.

And here’s the rub. Holding the body in such low esteem has always been the property of Gnosticism, a heresy that has haunted Christianity in long intervals almost since the Church’s beginning. As Father Gabriel Jay Rochelle, an Orthodox priest, reminds us in a brilliant article on the “gospel of Judas,” Gnosticism “denies the need for those historical roots so foundational for Christian faith, which cleaves to a real human person and movement and to a bodily resurrection.”

Gnosticism means knowledge in the sense of cognition. By valuing only the spirit, it has been a movement of intellectuals, even though its tenets seem curiously irrational. In the first centuries of the Church, Gnostics taught that while God created the soul, a lesser and evil deity called the Demiurge formed the body, which the noble seekers of enlightenment held in contempt—but in two different ways: they either became ascetics denying themselves worldly pleasures, or they dealt with their physical nature as they pleased since it was of no consequence in the first place.

The latter seems to be the preferred flavor of contemporary Gnostics—to wit, the multitude of sexual depravities post-modern man endeavors to raise to a level equal to

the love between a married couple consisting of a man and a woman.

Back then, Gnostics considered themselves Christian. The same claim is made by misguided feminist clerics from many denominations constantly attempting to “re-imagine Christ.” They have gone so far as to try to do away with “bleeding men dangling from a tree,” as one of their leaders opined a few years ago at an event where an agitated assembly of women pastors and Catholic nuns concelebrated a “communion service” with milk and honey to celebrate female body juices.

There is bad news and good news about Gnosticism. The bad news is that it has a way of afflicting the Body of Christ like sinusitis time and again. The good news is that it almost disappears for long stretches of time. It did so after the third century. It came back in the 11th century in southwestern France in the shape of the Cathars, a Gnostic sect of extreme ascetics that was severely persecuted. But unlike orthodox forms of Christianity, it did not survive.

In their hostility to the Church, modern French secularists are busy reminding their compatriots of the Cathars’ plight. But they are not accomplishing more than increasing the number of visitors to the sect’s former bastions, the city of Albi and the ruins of the castle at Montsegur.

Gnosticism is a perennially failing enterprise. The true Church, on the other hand, is burgeoning more strongly than ever after nearly 2,000 years, calling to mind a warning by the Pharisee Gamaliel, St. Paul’s teacher before the Sanhedrin (council of 71 Jewish sages) as it was pondering the fate of the apostles soon after that first Pentecost:

“Leave these men alone. Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to

stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

There could be no more cheerful news for this season of Pentecost than the overwhelming evidence that Gamaliel was right.

Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto is director of the Concordia Seminary Institute on Lay Vocation, St. Louis, and the Concordia Center for Faith and Journalism, Bronxville, N.Y. His email address is: layvocation@csl.edu



The reconstruction of the “gospel of Judas” manuscript was completed in 2006. In its 13 papyrus sheets bound in leather, it portrays Judas’ betrayal of Jesus as an act of obedience to the instructions of Jesus. This follows the Gnostic notion that the human form is a prison, and that Judas put into motion events that would release the Spirit of Christ from its physical constraints. It presents Judas as Jesus’ most trusted disciple and the only one who knew Jesus’ true identity.

Karen Bleier AFP/Getty Images

Scripture and Inscriptions

Can newly found ancient inscriptions
rock our faith?

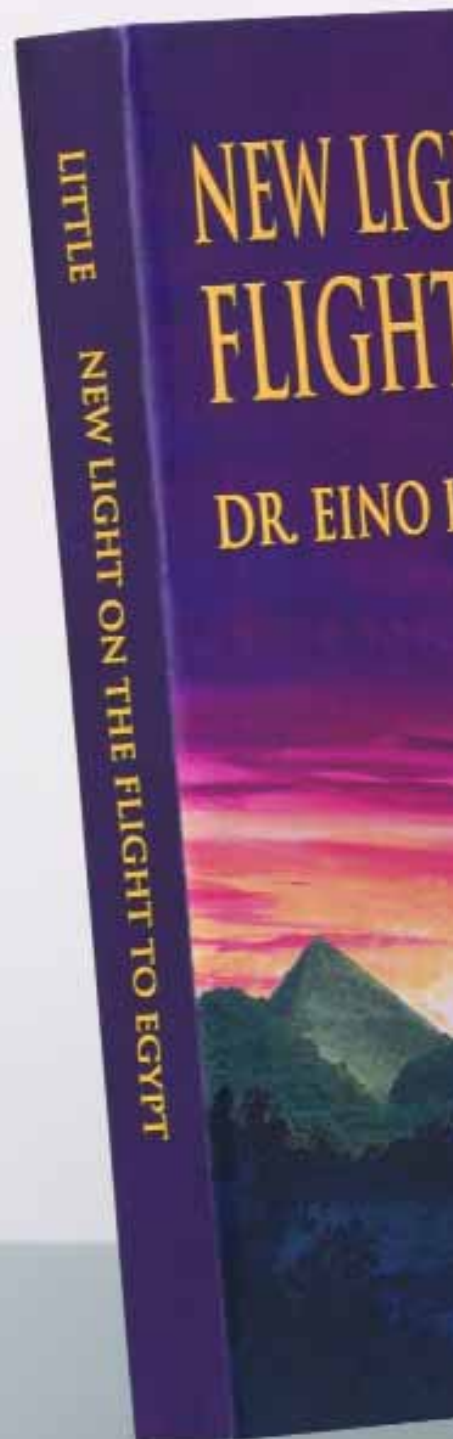
by Karl Barth

By now, almost everyone interested in things spiritual is familiar with the controversies caused by Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. In the April 2006 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, Dr. Paul Maier addresses some of the book's claims. For example, the book states "almost everything our fathers taught us [about our faith] is false." It also claims Constantine was not the first Christian emperor but "a lifelong pagan," and Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus and sits next to Him in Leonardo Da Vinci's representation of the "Last Supper." And much, much more.

The movie rights alone netted

Brown the reported sum of \$6 million. Small wonder the book's popularity has energized others to jump on the gravy train. Our Sunday paper lists other books now on the best-seller lists: *The Templar Legacy* by Steve Berry, *Labyrinth* by Kate Moss, *The Secret Supper* by Javier Sierra, and *The Last Templar* by Raymond Hoary. In addition, various spin-offs have cashed in, including a travel book, *Fodor's Guide to the Da Vinci Code*.

Interesting, as well, is yet another revision of the New Testament, by James Tabor, a University of Virginia, Charlotte professor, titled *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*. The April 17, 2006





issue of *U.S. News and World Report* says in its article about Taylor's book that the author believes "Jesus saw Himself as the founder not of a new religion but of a world royal dynasty." Jesus had already, according to Taylor, set up a provisional government with 12 tribal officials and had planned to have James, not Peter, be His successor.

If all of this were not enough, I am now informed that there is yet another book, still unpublished, dealing with the early days of Christianity. The title is *New Light on the Flight to Egypt*. It is written by Dr. Eino Little, director of the study of antiquities at Whatsamatta U. and a self-proclaimed expert on Joseph, husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

There is scant information about Joseph in Scripture. But Little questions the validity of what we do know. For instance, he contends that Joseph was not a carpenter, as reported by St. Matthew, but rather that he owned and operated a chain of pizza parlors in various cities in Galilee. Jewish people in that area who ate only the unleavened matzo during the celebration of the Passover were taken by the pizza flavor. Jews in Judea, however, had little taste for Joseph's product, believing that nothing good could come from Galilee. So Joseph decided to expand his business into Egypt.

As for the flight to Egypt, Little claims that it was Joseph's intention to convince the city council of Giza to approve his plans to erect a pizza palace between the Sphinx and the

Khufu pyramid. Joseph's bid was turned down when the United Camel Drivers strenuously objected, saying their business of providing tourists with camel rides past the sites in Giza would be adversely affected.

Little bases many of his claims on a letter allegedly written by Pontius, the pilot of the flight to Egypt. The author scoffs at critics who point to the fact that his theories presented in the book rely heavily on newly unearthed inscriptions on Etruscan doorknobs from the 7th and 8th centuries.

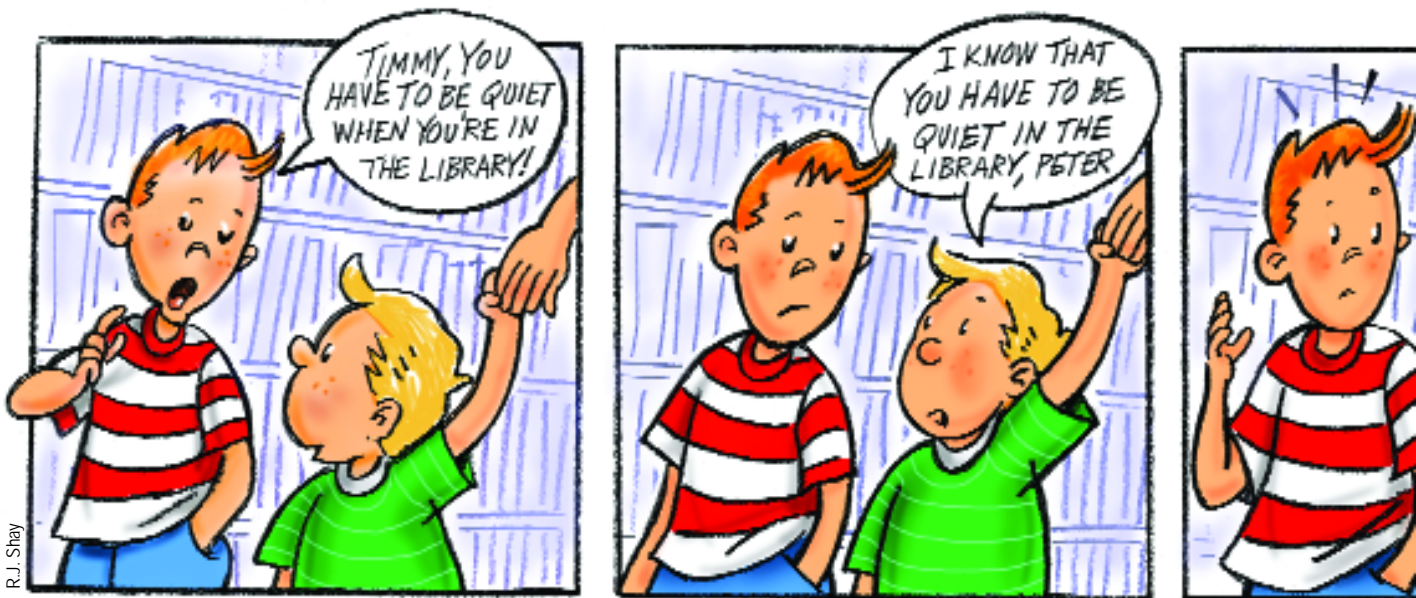
Naturally, reaction to this latest salvo at the New Testament record has been mixed. One scholar, who has read the entire manuscript, says he was reminded of Martin Luther's comment regarding the writing of Latomus, a Belgian professor and one of Luther's well-known religious opponents. Luther stated that Latomus' writings were "so swollen with haughtiness, arrogance, pride ... rashness, superciliousness, ignorance, and stupidity that there is nothing to surpass it."

Little has no plans at present for another book. He is, however, waiting word from Hollywood about a possible film version of *New Light on the Flight to Egypt*, and I'm like, I can hardly wait!

Dr. Karl Barth is president emeritus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Note: This spoof is intended to show the folly of those who believe that recent "discoveries" or fiction can shake the foundations of our faith in Jesus and His redeeming work. But our God is in His heavens, and Psalm 2 reminds us that He laughs at their futility: "The Lord shall hold them in derision."

RAISING CIVIL KIDS IN AN UNCIVIL WORLD



The world seems to conspire against Christian parents teaching their children God-pleasing behavior.
Here's some help.

by Ruth Badciong

Children don't automatically learn and follow the rules of proper behavior. But they do automatically want to know, "Why?"

Proverbs says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (22:6). Bringing up children to lead God-pleasing lives is a difficult task. Bringing up godly children in a world where rudeness, self-serving behaviors, and lack of respect for elders, those in authority, and even life itself has become the norm is nearly impossible.

Thankfully, nothing is impossible with God.

So how can parents raise civil children in a society where the media are filled with violence and illicit behavior, where rude put-downs on TV shows get positive endorsements from laugh tracks, where posters and bumper stickers make fun of civil leaders, and abortion and euthanasia are considered a normal part of life?

Here are some suggestions to help you deal with it all.

First, remember, you have a Helper.

You can't do it alone—and you don't have to. As God the Holy Spirit works faith in children's hearts through the Word and the Sacrament of Baptism and strengthens that faith, fruit is produced.

Adults can help children appreciate that fact in their own lives by "catching" them practicing polite behavior and giving the glory to God,

"Thank you for holding the door for me, Sydney. Jesus helps us to be kind."

"I know it's not cool for teens to hang out with old people, Matt, but it meant a lot to your grandparents that you visited them on Saturday. I can really see the fruit of the Spirit in your life."

Show respect for life at all stages.

A society's attitude toward its most vulnerable members, including its unborn children, provides a window into its level of respect for all people. When the theory of evolution is presented as scientific fact at public schools and in books, movies, and magazines, children learn that human life is no more valuable than that of animals and, therefore, no more deserving of our respect, care, and compassion.

Christian parents, grandparents, and teachers have the responsibility and privilege of sharing the truth of God's Word with the young people in their lives. Each person, regardless of age, stage of development, or level of ability, is a unique creation of God for whom Jesus Christ died and rose again.

Visit www.lutheransforlife.org for more information and resources for sharing this life-affirming message with your children.

Give respect to leaders as God's servants.

You don't have to drive very far before you are likely to spot a bumper sticker or sign poking fun at a civil leader—sometimes in a profane manner. It's tempting for Christians to hop on the bandwagon, especially when the leader is not a Christian or shows a lack of respect for God and His Word.

But that's not God's plan for us. While we should not condone nor ignore sinful attitudes or actions on the part of our civil leaders, we can show respect for the office of president, senator, governor, or mayor. Using titles with leaders' names, such as "President Bush," helps children to develop respect for the civil office. Praying for governing authorities by name with your children promotes their respect and understanding that government leaders are God's servants.



Luther to Parents: Teach Children

Martin Luther's Reformation was really a revolution. It sparked change in many major areas of 16th-century European life, including the home and family. The late-medieval Roman Church claimed that a wall existed between its sacred vocations within the church and secular callings held by everyone else. Luther, on the contrary, argued that anyone moved not by selfish, sinful motives, but prompted by the Spirit of Christ, actually did good works: faith active in love in the Christian. Good trees (the new man of faith) produced good fruit (Christian lives). That happened in the Christian family.

In Luther's worldview, God accomplishes His tasks through government, church, and the household, all key areas of daily

life. Those who exercise authority really hold a responsibility, a trust, a stewardship role on behalf of the Creator as "masks of God."

The Law's second table turns to the neighbor, to fellow human beings. It starts with the Fourth Commandment focusing on family in particular, calling for respect and obedience by children. But if adults had thoughts of treating children like cattle, like possessions, they need only to look at Luther's "Table of Duties," where parents are reminded not to provoke children to wrath but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Cultivating faith within the household is their first responsibility.

The parents' tasks did not end there, however. Luther urged town councilmen to open schools. That required the parents' involvement

and support. When they were tempted to take the low road and send their children out into the fields rather than to the classroom, Luther published his "Sermon on Keeping Children in School." How could boys and girls grow up to be solid citizens if they did not learn what that included and what it meant? They needed basic liberal arts education to deal better with life. And they also learned the basics of the Christian faith, expanding as they climbed the educational ladder.

But while Luther promoted universal childhood education, parents could not simply hand over their responsibility to the school-teacher. The home was really the first classroom, and parents taught both in a formal way and incidentally as children caught the examples set by parents.

Display civil behavior.

Peter's question, "Mom, why *do* we have to be quiet in the library?" is an honest one that deserves an answer.

"We should be quiet in the library so people can read and study. It's a way to show respect."

Adults can model civil behavior such as waiting patiently in line, offering assistance to those in need, and greeting clerks and other patrons cheerfully and with a smile. We can also show our children that we appreciate civil behavior on the part of others. "Thank you so much for letting us go ahead of you. Wasn't that kind of her, boys?"

Watch what your children are watching.

Television, radio, video games, and the Internet are a part of the free time of most children and youth in the United States. All media can be valuable educational tools. Unfortunately, not everything that is available to our children is valuable or safe. Watch, listen,

play, and surf the exact same media your children are. Take time to know what attitudes are being promoted. Do the language and actions of the characters or entertainers glorify God and build up others? Or, do they promote selfishness, profanity, and disrespect for authority?

Pay attention to the types of media that *you* view or listen to as well. Openly discuss with your children the kind of music Jesus would want them and you to listen to. What TV programs would He approve? What games would He play or not play? Why?

Help your children choose God-pleasing heroes.

Who are your children's heroes? Who are your own heroes? Many celebrities, including professional athletes, claim to follow Christ, but their words and actions toward others reveal an attitude very unlike that of Christ Jesus. Your children are taking notice.

I am an avid fan of the Green Bay Packers, but my favorite Packer isn't one whose name many people know. When Aaron Kampman was asked why he

by Word and Example

Looking back on his childhood, Luther remembered the sacrifices made by his mother. It made an impression. And he wrote of his father taking him out under the stars to talk of the world God gave them. When word came to Luther at Coburg of his father's passing in 1530, Luther wrote, "Never have I hated death so much." One short sentence speaks volumes about what Luther thought of his home life.

His *Small Catechism* was penned for home instruction, giving parents a tool to carry out their

responsibilities for teaching the faith. Teaching is a promise parents make at Baptisms still today.

Some 20 years ago, Steven Ozment's *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* looked at how evangelical thought on faith and life percolated deep down into German households. One of Ozment's prime sources was the Weinsberg family chronicle, providing an insider's view of how the home was changing—interesting since the Weinsbergs were Roman Catholics from Cologne. True, confessional

lines had not been drawn with the finality found later in the century, but certainly Luther was already well known.

Yet, despite reservations the Weinsberg family might have had about other parts of Luther's theology, the Reformation's emphasis on Christian parents teaching God-given children by word and example was welcome in their home.

Raising children is no small task, as Luther and Katie knew firsthand. Amid all that competed for Luther's attention, the interests of the home stayed close to his heart as Christian parents aimed to build faith and shape lives. As he closed his "Table of Duties," Luther wrote, "Let each his lesson learn with care, and all the household well shall fare."

Dr. Robert Rosin is a professor of historical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.



Arthur Kirchhoff

works so hard both during games and at practice, he credited his upbringing in a hard-working Iowa farm community. Then he added, "And I remember the Scripture, 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.'"

Hold up before your children those men and women whose lives honor God and serve people.

Civil behavior is part of our witness.

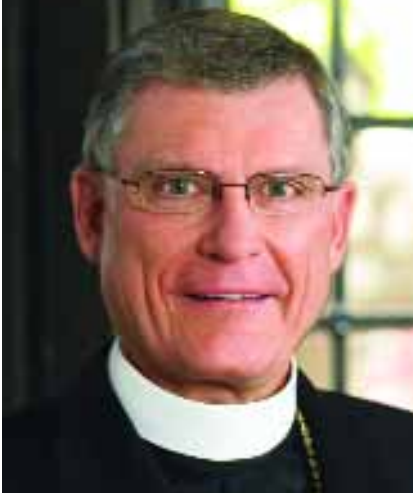
Showing respect for others can't add in any way to our salvation—that is a free gift of God. But it is an

important part of our witness to others. Parents, teachers, and other adults are not perfect models for our children. For that, we need to point them to the Savior. But we can reflect Christ in our relationships with others.

When we fail, we can confess our sin to our Savior and to our children, leave it at the foot of the cross, and rise to start again.

May God grant you His grace and the power of His Spirit to raise civil and godly children in an uncivil world.

Dr. Ruth Badciong is a former Lutheran schoolteacher and professor. She is director of campus ministry at St. Martin's Lutheran Church in Winona, Minn., and writes for Lutherans For Life and Concordia Publishing House. Her e-mail is badciong@hbci.com



God's Spirit Empowers Us

Happy Birthday to the Church!

This month, we celebrate Pentecost, often called the birth day of the Christian Church.

On the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus' disciples to be His witnesses to the world. That very day, about 3,000 were added to the Church by the Holy Spirit's power through Peter's witness.

In a post-resurrection meeting with His disciples, Jesus told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized you with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5).

What would happen then? "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This assignment is ours as well. We also are to be Christ's witnesses

- in "Jerusalem," that is, close to home, where we live and work;
- in "Judea," among those who share our culture but who live farther away;
- in "Samaria," with those from other cultures but who may not be living all that far from us geographically; and
- "to the ends of the earth," crossing every boundary and overcoming every barrier in order to take the Good News of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ to the whole world.

The Book of Acts shows us that the early church attacked this assignment with enthusiasm and joy. Times were tough for the early Christians, but the Holy Spirit carried them forward. Working through God's Word and the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit continues to strengthen and empower us today to be witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Motivated by the Gospel, we want to be witnesses to Christ so that many more might be saved.

To that end, the 2004 Synod convention said that each LCMS congregation and school should see itself as a "mission outpost" to the unchurched. The convention also reminded us that witnessing to Christ is

not only for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers, but is every Christian's privilege and responsibility.

"God's desire is that all be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and only under the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12)," the convention said. "Our Lord has given to all who are baptized the opportunity and responsibility to spread the Gospel (2 Cor. 3:2-3) as part of the priesthood of all believers, declaring the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9)."

When we consider how many people do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, we could get overwhelmed. In fact, the goal of the *Ablaze!* movement to reach 100 million people with the Gospel by 2017 is a reminder that the task is large—too large for mere human beings. The first LCMS president, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, spoke to this in his day:

"Ah, if this great, important, holy matter rested on the fervor of our love, on the abundance of our means, on the training of our missionaries; in short, if it rested on our will and on our faith and strength, then we would have a sad situation. For we are poor miserable sinners, whose love soon disappears; whose strength is only weakness; and whose knowledge is only patchwork. But we should not look at ourselves, but only at the fact that God has commanded this work of missions. He has promised to bless our humble work, and to bless it abundantly."

We are about *God's* mission, not one of our own devising. Though Satan would love to stop us from telling others the Good News of Jesus—and he does try—there is no need to fear. The Holy Spirit is there to empower us for His mission, just as He empowered those early Christians on the first Pentecost!

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

e-mail: president@lcms.org

Web page: www.lcms.org/president

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16-17