

HIS TRUTH FOR OUR YOUTH

*The. Rev. John A. Moldstad, Jr.
1992 Synod Convention Essay*

One of the most precious gifts from the hand of our providential Lord is our offspring. Often the statement is made that, out of all the earthly gifts God has given us, our children are the only "possessions" of this world we can--through faith in Christ--take with us into eternity. Despite some societal pessimism on the matter of propagation and rearing children, we Christians maintain with the psalmist that children are "an heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127). A wide chasm exists between people, on the one hand, who would view children as economic liabilities or time consuming infringements, and those of us, on the other hand, who view them as tremendous opportunities for instructing souls in Christ's Kingdom.

The responsibility of educating our youth rests chiefly with the parents, extends also to the church at large and applies to the secular government in the realm of training for good citizenry. In his Large Catechism, Dr. Martin Luther remarks under his treatment of the Fourth Commandment: "Parents should consider that they owe obedience to God, and that, above all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge the duties of their office, not only to provide for the material support of their children, servants, subjects, etc., but especially to bring them up to the praise and honor of God. Therefore do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. It is a strict commandment and injunction of God, who holds you accountable for it."¹ Again, Luther reminds us that this parental responsibility even starts from the time the children leave the birthing room: "No one should become a father unless he is able to instruct his children in the Ten Commandments and in the Gospel, so that he may bring up true Christians. But many enter the estate of holy matrimony who cannot say the Lord's Prayer, and knowing nothing themselves, they are utterly incompetent to instruct their children. Children should be brought up in the fear of God. If the Kingdom of God is to come in power, we must begin with children and teach them from the cradle."²

More than anything else, more than teaching our youth how to be good citizens, good in business, good homemakers, good athletes, or even good promoters of decency and morality, we want to instruct them in "the wisdom of the Lord." "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Putting it another way, we could say: Why boast over the accomplishments of our children, if those suggested "accomplishments" are not in and under their spiritual growth in the Lord?

Scripture impresses on Christian parents, as well as all believers, the necessity of giving our youth instruction in the Word of God. For parents, we take note of such verses as the following: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it," (Prov. 22:6). "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord," (Eph. 6:4). "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates," (Deut. 6:6, 7). Concerning the duty of the whole community of believers in assisting parents in the spiritual training of their children, we note these verses: Jesus said in Mark 10:14, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." To Peter, as a leader in Christ's Kingdom, Jesus said: "Feed my

lambs," (John 21:15). In his great commission Christ included every age group when he said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you," (Matt. 28:19, 20). Also, we could cite Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

I. WE WANT OUR YOUTH TO HAVE THE TRUTH WHICH WILL ENDURE FOR ETERNITY.

Shortly before Moses died and it was established that Joshua should lead the people of Israel into the land of Canaan, the people listened to the final speech from their great leader. At the end of his speech, he added this admonition: "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you--they are your *life*," (Deut. 32:46, 47). Not only would the Word of God sustain the people as they would cross the Jordan and dwell in the new land; it would continue to be the full source of LIFE for them in every way until eternity. Why? At the heart and center of what Moses taught and at the heart and center of all of Scripture is the Rock of our salvation (Deut. 32:4), Jesus Christ.

Christ is the only one who can give real life to every sinner, including our children, because He alone is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). When the whole process of educating our youth does not include the overarching purpose of leading them to Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, any other "truth" or "truths" taught at home or in the classroom--no matter how valid--will leave our youth empty and devoid of real life. "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son," (John 3:18).

In his book entitled, *What Do You Really Want for Your Children?*, Dr. Wayne Dyer exemplifies the feel-good-about-yourself approach which numerous educators espouse, as if this is going to be some kind of enduring truth or medicine for our youth. "Goodness is not a quality one discovers in something outside himself," says Dyer. "It is a quality that one must live. Thus, as parents, you can help your children to feel good about themselves, to appreciate the goodness of this world, and to always be looking for the good. Then they will *be* goodness and they will see it everywhere. . ." To show that Dyer is simply a promoter of the age-old false philosophy of good works meriting the favor of the Creator, he goes on to say in a paragraph on training youth to be "spiritual:" "Being spiritual is quite different from attempting to be a religious person, or a good Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Buddhist, or any other organizational label. It means being Christ-like, rather than being a Christian... Being spiritual means one does not kill, defame, defile, or act immorally regardless of who is telling one to so conduct oneself."³

It's not just secular educators, youth counselors and youth psychologists who often suggest that some kind of deistic moralism (similar to the creed of the Masonic Lodge) is the epitome of truth to be inculcated in young minds. It can also be found in the church, where not only Norman Vincent Peale adherents tout "positive thinking theology," but also where there are followers of Vatican II. Sounding very much akin to the Reformed Church in its equating of faith and reason, that Council urged its own educators to be more attuned to the changing times of today's youth in order that "the convergence of faith and reason in the one truth may be seen more clearly."⁴

But what can our tainted, sinful reason tell us or our youth more *clearly* about the real TRUTH, Jesus Christ and His verbally inspired and inerrant Word? Christ transcends our reason. He is the eternal God having come into the flesh for the redemption of all sinners.

Furthermore, His Word, the holy Bible, is not in need of being “adjusted” to fit the moral climate youth face in the 1990s, or to fit the ecumenism of the world's religious scene. It is God's unchanging truth for all times. And the height of HIS truth is this: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and *are justified freely by His grace* through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23, 24). It is only this truth which will serve our youth not only for seventy, eighty, or ninety years on this earth, but for an endless lifetime with the Almighty! In other words, to carry it even a step further, we can say that educating our youth in the eternal truth is not just teaching them true facts and precepts from Scripture, but also and especially imparting to them the proper division between Law and Gospel, with the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ receiving predominance.

How do *we* look upon our youth? Do we see them in need of the real truth which we just discussed?

In reading the special *Newsweek* summer/fall 1990 edition with the cover story on “The New Teens,” by David Gelman, it doesn't take much to convince people that today's youth face numerous obstacles. Gelman writes: “Today's teenagers face more adult-strength stresses than their predecessors did--at a time when adults are much less available to help them. With the divorce rate hovering near 50 percent, and 40 to 50 percent of teenagers living in single-parent homes headed mainly by working mothers, teens are more on their own than ever. 'My parents let me do anything I want as long as I don't get into trouble,' writes a 15-year-old high-schooler from Ohio in an essay submitted for this special issue of *Newsweek*.”⁵

The article goes on to state that, even though the overall drug abuse is down, the proliferation of crack cocaine continues in low-income neighborhoods, and a lethal one called “ice” is starting to find its way into many white high schools. At the same time, we are told that the drinking and smoking rates remain alarmingly high. A psychologist at the University of Wisconsin is quoted as saying, “The use of alcohol appears normative. By the upper grades, everybody's doing it.”⁶

Who wouldn't guess that sexual activity among today's youth is also on the rise? After all, when a sports icon like Magic Johnson, one who had great rapport with teens, goes public in admitting to have AIDS, but then does not demonstrate remorse over being promiscuous and instead urges “safe sex by condom” (a euphemism for fornication), how can we expect today's youth to champion virginity and monogamy? The *Newsweek* poll showed that most teens are regularly having sexual intercourse by the 11th grade. About 1/2 million teenage girls give birth each year, not to mention the abhorring fact that about 40 percent of all teenage pregnancies end in abortion (accounting for 26 percent of all abortions performed in the United States).⁷

Where can teens turn for guidance and truth in fighting sins common to youth? You and I know that it is only in the Book which is the lamp for our feet and the light for our path (Ps. 119:105). Yet, we must ask: How can one expect youth to decipher right and wrong, when even many purported leaders of the Book do not themselves set proper examples to be emulated? Pastor Paul Lehenbauer raised this question in a paper recently delivered at the Great Lakes Pastoral Conference: “And what do we say to the children and youth of our time who are faced with any number of clergy in some churches who have married and remarried, who approve of live-in mates, or are guilty of the sins so clearly condemned in the Epistle to the Romans, namely homosexuality? What do we say, when in the Roman Church the abuse of boys has become a great scandal in many parts of our country? Can we in all honesty expect bad examples to encourage righteous living? And where there is right teaching of the Word of God,

both law and Gospel, do not the evil examples, even of prominent lay leaders in churches, undercut and undermine the truth?"⁸

Sandi Monroe, at the time a 1982 teenage "Presidential Scholar," summarized succinctly how teens are shaped by the times in which they live: "They have matured in an age when morality has become increasingly relative and has been replaced by terms like 'situation ethics' and 'maximum individual autonomy.'" Speaking from the viewpoint of a then freshman in college, she made this astute observation: "I honestly don't believe that I can look at my generation and feel optimistic about the future, aside from hopes of divine intervention."⁹ Can't the very same be said of our youth in the 90's?

When we look at our children--no matter what age they are--we need to see them, first of all, as fellow sinners, who have the same desperate need for the Savior that you and I have. Sometimes, I fear, we get *too* hung up analyzing youth as to the unique kinds of peer and cultural pressures they face, that we are in danger of overlooking the *root cause* of the evils perennially associated with youth. Joe Temple in his book, *Know Your Child*, suggests: "A great deal that is blamed on television and movies today--though they do have their serious faults--should be blamed on Adam [here he means: original sin], and on the fact that our children are 'doing what comes naturally' unless we parents do something to interrupt."¹⁰ We might add to that: "...unless God does something to interrupt," and God *has* done that in His Gospel which is the "power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:18) and is likewise the *power* for sanctified living (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). This is what we, as parents and as the church at large, desire most for our children to have, for it is only then that the living according to God's commandments will result from the proper motivation. [This is said, however, with the realization that there is still a place for what we call the "Third Use of the Law" in teaching the regenerate the precise acceptable will of God (Art. VI of the Formula of Concord).]

Are we convinced that our children, just like ourselves, would be damned to eternal destruction in a literal place called "hell," if Christ had not come into the world as the Redeemer and offered His salvation to us in Word and Sacrament? In the March 1991 *U. S. News and World Report* a recent poll demonstrated that 60 percent of Americans now believe in a literal hell as compared with 58% in the 1950s. Among young adults (under 30) there are 71 percent who acknowledge hell's existence, while only 54% of adults over 50 make the similar claim. This is surprising. Yet, upon closer examination, one has to question exactly what people mean. For instance while 60 percent of Americans believe there is a hell, only 4 percent believe there is a good chance they could end up there. Professor John Brug in his critique of this article stated: "The 'comeback of hell' seemingly is not due to a renewed understanding of the seriousness of all sin. It apparently relates to a widespread shock at the prevalence of extreme violence in our world. Presumably, tyrants like Saddam Hussein and murderers, rapists and child abusers are perceived as candidates for hell, but not garden-variety sinners."¹¹

Continually we ought to remind ourselves of the real needs that our youth have. Only when we see their and our need for Christ--not just for the purpose of living decently and morally, but because of our otherwise natural destination of hell--can we see the urgency of applying HIS TRUTH to the lives of our youth. They have a need to be loved by God, just as all of us do, repeatedly hearing how "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). They also have a need to be loved by us parents and parishioners who cling to the redeeming love of Christ. They have a need to find their purpose in life. Instead of the world's advice for parents to "encourage adolescents' belief in themselves,"¹² our youth need to learn the pattern of St. Paul: "For to me, to live is Christ..." (Phil. 1:21). "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength," (Phil. 4:13). And finally they--like all of us--have the need to

receive guidance and direction. The Word gives that direction for their spiritual lives, whereas--coupled with prayer--the consultation with fellow Christian parents, friends and advisers lends guidance on those matters not decided in the Word.

Do we see the urgency of meeting the spiritual needs of our youth? In his second sermon book, *St. Paul: The Theologian's Prototype*, the Rev. Alvin Wagner uses the following illustration: "The British annals of the sea tell of a ship that was swept upon a rocky coast. Passengers were given orders to remain awake and watchful on deck. But one of them, stupefied by imtemperate drinking, threw himself on his berth, where he lay in the grip of a deep sleep. And, see, just before the ship struck it was lifted over a reef of rocks by a huge wave and left upon a sandbar. In that instant captain, crew and passengers took advantage of an opportunity to escape to the shore. But the one asleep in his berth missed the opportunity; dying in sin, he lost his life and his soul--just like the many thousands of young people today who are so intoxicated with the world's vices and excesses in drinks and drugs that they are sleeping away the golden opportunities given them by the Lord and His Word to awake, repent and live."¹³

Consider what there is for us to offer our youth to insure that they will have the truth meant to endure for eternity. We have been blessed with God's gracious Means of Grace (The Word of God, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper). These means, through which alone God, offers to us the forgiveness from Christ's cross and through which alone the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith, are used in our Lutheran church services. Entertainment-oriented churches often make their appeal to the youth, but unfortunately they frequently lack any emphasis on the tangible way God brings His grace to sinful souls in Word and Sacrament. Compared to the churches of the Reformed background, which in many cases attract more youth than the Lutherans, we should note this important distinction: The followers of John Calvin lean on a subjective feeling of some kind for their "assurance" of the Spirit's working, while the followers of Martin Luther lean on the never-changing Means of Grace. "For Calvin, the gap between God and man is bridged only in an incomplete way by the Incarnation and not at all by the Sacraments. In Reformed theology the immediate, internal working of the Holy Spirit on the heart of man bridges the gap between God and man."¹⁴

Luther knew that the spiritual needs of the youth could only be met in a strong adherence to the Word. He felt so deeply about it being the chief educational tool, that he wrote in his "Letter to the Christian Nobility" in 1520:

I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God's Word becomes corrupt. Because of this we can see what kind of people they become in the universities and what they are like now. Nobody is to blame for this except the pope, the bishops, and the prelates, who are all charged with training young people. The universities only ought to turn out men who are experts in the Holy Scriptures, men who can become bishops and priests, and stand in the front line against heretic, the devil, and all the world. But where do you find that? I greatly fear that the universities, unless they teach the Holy Scriptures diligently and impress them on the young students, are wide gates to hell.¹⁵

It should be noted that in Luther's day where church and state separation was not obvious, and where the universities were mostly run by the Roman Church, his real complaint was that Scripture was not being taught even when it was indicated in the institutions'

curriculum. Yet, one should not underplay Luther's vehemence on the entire subject of the vital role of Scripture in the overall education of our youth.

Through our conversations, our examples and by prayer we are to keep our youth ever-mindful of the Means of Grace. Do we take the time to *talk* with them?

According to the special *Newsweek* edition mentioned earlier, many youth complain that they feel isolated, unconnected to the larger world, and this detachment is occurring at a time when they are groping for who they are and where they fit in. Unfortunately there are a large number of youth who think mostly about making money and having prestige or, as one sociologist says, "looking for the good life they see on television." The major thrust of the *Newsweek* article is to encourage Moms and Dads and other adults to take time to communicate values to their children. "Mom and Dad have to earn a living and fulfill their own needs--they are not likely to be coming home early. But there must be a time and place for them to give their children the advice, the comfort..."¹⁶ Well, if even the secular world notes the importance of passing on valuable information to our youth, how much more shouldn't *we* who have HIS TRUTH for eternity want to impart *that wisdom* to our offspring in our daily conversations!

What kinds of examples are we setting? Can our youth tell by the way we conduct our business affairs, by the way we use our time, by the way we spend our money, that we draw our strength each day from Christ and His Word?

"At the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast in St. Louis on Ash Wednesday 1984, the main speaker was the movie star Dean Jones who gave a testimony of his personal faith in Jesus Christ. He told how he had recently been offered a role as a middle-aged detective in a proposed TV series. After reading the script, he was pleased. It was well written and an interesting story. But there was a part where he, as a middle-aged detective, would go to bed with his female photographer. That he didn't like. So he met with the writer and producer and suggested ways to leave that out of the story. But they would not change so he refused the job offer. He explained his decision to the 2,000 people at the breakfast. He had recently written to a 13-year-old girl who had asked for his advice as to what to do when her boyfriend asked her to go to bed with him. He had tried in his letter to explain how a Christian deals with such issues. Then he said, 'I would see that 13-year-old reading my letter and then watching me on the screen romping in bed and in a bathtub with someone who was not my wife. What a contradiction that would be!'"¹⁷ Yes, who can deny that the examples we set often speak louder than words in terms of urging our youth to uphold the Word?

Nancy Kolodny, author of *How to Survive Your Adolescent's Adolescence*, has written: "While it is true that as children evolve into teenagers parental influence as role models may seem to wane in favor of input from peer groups and school sources, the fact is that adolescents tend to measure themselves against an imaginary yardstick composed in large part of the role models provided over the years by their parents. This yardstick--a composite of perceived values, beliefs, and behavioral skills--serves as both an evaluative device, allowing the teenager to see how he or she 'measures up' in the quest for independence and maturity, and as a familiar point of reference to which teenagers can return, again and again; for a sense of direction and guidance."

Kolodny then goes on and says: "The way in which parents most frequently undermine the credibility and power of their role models is the 'Do what I say, not what I do' syndrome... For example, parents who advocate absolute honesty but frequently use 'little white lies' in their own lives are victims of this malady. Consider also the mixed message given by the parent who tells a teen that alcohol is dangerous but has a couple of martinis before dinner every night in order to relax. While all of us probably fall into this self-contradictory trap once in a while, it's

important to realize that if this becomes a persistent pattern it seriously erodes our impact as role models."¹⁸

In training our youth, we Christians also should not overlook the use of discipline. Our children--as all of us--still have the Old Adam, even as we seek to motivate them by the Gospel. For this reason, Scripture repeatedly speaks of using discipline with our children, but always it is to be exercised in true Christian love. "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him," (Prov. 13:24). "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to itself disgraces his mother," (Prov. 29:15). The use of corporal discipline is much debated in our society, largely due to reported abuses. Yet, Scripture does not prohibit parents from exercising spankings, and--in fact--demands its usage when the occasional circumstances warrant it. We don't want to be like modern day Eli's who "spare the rod and spoil the child," but we also do want to make sure that even when the "rod" is necessary it is carried out not in a setting of hatred but in love and with an explanation of that love. "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged," (Col. 3:21). If children at a young age are not taught with discipline, how can one expect them as teenagers to be obedient?

HIS TRUTH FOR OUR YOUTH, as we mentioned earlier, is more than just educating on morality . It is having our young people see that in Christ there is forgiveness and life--life not only in heaven one day for the believer when he or she dies, but life *right now* through regular contact with God's Means of Grace. Educational methods today which neglect the divine authority but propose to teach a morality of some kind (i.e., "Don't do drugs! "), without giving the real reason and motivation for it, are making "men without chests" --to use C. S. Lewis' analogy. "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise."¹⁹ Our synod's Bethany Lutheran College has in its catalogue this important statement: "The Bible is not regarded as a mere source book of religious precepts for legalistic or moralistic application, but rather as a living book in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation."

II. WE WANT OUR YOUTH TO MAKE USE OF THIS TRUTH THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.

The religious instruction that we give is meant to be inculcated and integrated into the lives of our youth. We ought not be content with their knowing just the basics, but aim for thorough indoctrination. "Religious instruction must be integrated into life. Why is religious instruction considered dull by pupils? Because they fail to see that the memory material and the Catechism lessons have any bearing on their life," writes H. E. Plehn in his excellent essay on Christian education in *The Abiding Word*, vol. II.²⁰

The Rev. R. Dale, in his essay to our synodical convention of 1974 reminded us of the major objective we have before us in presenting God's truth to our youth. He wrote: "Our objective in Christian education is to communicate this Word of God to all people in such a way that each person, as the ELS Explanation says, 'clings to Jesus with (his) whole heart, and consecrates (his) whole life to Him as a perpetual thank-offering for all His love to us.' (ELS Catechism/Explanation, Q. 382)."²¹

Are we giving our youth enough of the "meat" from the Word so that when they wander out into the "famine-stricken" strongholds of evolution, humanism, materialism, and universalism, that they will be able to "stomach" the criticism aimed at Christianity? Do the words of the writer of Hebrews find direct application to the caliber of spiritual knowledge many of our congregations' youth carry with them today? "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.

You need milk, not solid food!" (Heb. 5:12). We should take note that when Peter said, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation," he didn't urge any to *remain* babies; daily growth with the milk-bottle of Scripture is called for.

Teaching our youth proper stewardship of time, abilities and money is essential. But H. E. Plehn asks some searching questions: Why should children study their Sunday School lesson if father and mother never or seldom read their Bible? Why, indeed, should children attend Sunday School if father finds the garden or the lawn, or the Sunday papers, or golf, or fishing, or almost anything else more important than Bible-class attendance or teaching a class or even attending the formal church service?"²² To this list we could add: Why should a teenager who makes a little money each month think seriously about setting aside a certain percentage as a gift for the Lord, when his or her own parents do not have a planned giving pattern, or even are noticed throwing a mere dollar or two in the plate every so often? What a privilege we have to be able to train our youth as faithful managers of the things God has given us. Yet it is an awesome responsibility that begins with an honest self-evaluation as parents, teachers and fellow congregational members sending out signals unwittingly.

How can we best ensure that this comprehensive approach in bringing HIS TRUTH to our youth will be effective? Only God the Holy Spirit, of course, works the desired results in the souls of our young ones as they are brought to the Lord in baptism, trained in the Law and Gospel and--when at the proper age--partake of the Lord's true body and blood in Holy Communion. "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow," says the Apostle Paul in I Cor. 3:7. There are, nevertheless, a number of ways--many of them proven over the course of numerous preceding generations--which are of great assistance in doing the planting and watering for our youth. We shall briefly look at the following: home devotions, church services, Sunday School & Bible classes, Christian Day School, confirmation, youth programs synodically and in the local parish, Lutheran high school and Lutheran college.

(a) Devotions in the home. . . In a study on the subject of how one's religious beliefs have direct effect on the suicidal person, Paul W. Pretzel observes that data indicates "how important religious beliefs appear to be more the product of the home environment than of formal religious education. The experiences which the child has with his mother and father appear to be closely related to his present attitudes toward God and to the nature of the universe in which he lives."²³ That isn't too surprising, when we consider that "the home is still the most important part of the child's environment. No one has more opportunity to influence children than parents."²⁴

The Rev. R. Dale wrote in 1974: "Children in today's average American home suffer from what we might call 'parental drain.' Their parents 'drain' themselves with their own activities so that little is left of them emotionally to give to their children. . . The obvious problem is that children are placed lower on the list of priorities than work and recreation. Results are tragic. . . But by far the most critical problem in the average American home is the lack of family worship. . ." ²⁵

You've probably heard the story of the time a pastor was invited to supper in the home of one of the families from his church. After the meal, the mother handed the preacher a Bible and asked if he would lead them in a devotion and a prayer. The pastor was happy to do so, and was impressed by the offer. No sooner had he concluded his prayer, though, than the little girl at the table looked at her mother and father and said, "Mommy, why don't we do this all the time?"

Could it be that many are simply not taught how to have "the family altar"? Could it be that people's lives are so unscheduled that there is hardly any time to consider having a common three-minute devotional reading and prayer with family members, let alone have time for a meal together? Could it be that television or sports preempts any such "prime time" with God's Word and the precious souls under our care? If we are too busy to have a meditation time on HIS TRUTH, then--as the saying goes--we are just TOO busy! Moses, I'm sure, had come from a busy household where father and mother were expected to rise at the whim of the Egyptian taskmasters each day, and yet we have every reason to believe that he was well-schooled in God's Truth in his home. Though Timothy's father was a Greek and probably not a believer, his mother and grandmother found time to apply God's Word to the young mind of little Timmy. Remember that St. Paul wrote to him later: "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus," (2 Tim. 3:15).

Your essayist can testify to the wonderful blessing of coming from a home where daily devotions were commonplace, even when friends or relatives had dropped over for a visit. How easy it is to maintain that same devotional pattern with one's own children when it has become a "way of life" from former years. This is one very vital way to have our youth see God's Truth as a regular part of each day's busy routine. And what blessings can be expected! "So is My word that goes out from My mouth," says the Lord; "it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it," (Is. 55:11).

(b) Church services. . . We've already touched on this one a little earlier, but permit me to suggest here the use of children's sermons in the regular service. Object lessons which give the young a handle on the meaning of a particular Bible verse can be effective educational tools, and may also serve well the "older" youth besides. Some pastors also use effectively in their services an ongoing, short instruction period in Luther's Small Catechism, as a way to refresh the memories of those once confirmed.

(c) Sunday School and Bible classes. . . In most of our ELS churches the Sunday School is the chief agency for training our young. It therefore cannot be underestimated how important it is to seek out qualified teachers and excellent materials. Teen Bible classes should also be considered as a possibility. Yet, it is appropriately said: "The church that focuses on the *entire family unit*, that begins with adults in study groups and remains with them until they are fashioned by the grace of God, is reaching the heart of its teaching task."²⁶ So often we emphasize getting the children involved in Sunday School irregardless of the parents' involvement in Bible Class. But this should not excuse us from striving for the ideal: *full* family involvement in the study hour for God's Word each Sunday. In fact, the likelihood of a "graduated" Sunday School student becoming active in a teen Bible study or an adult class is far more remote when there is no parental attendance either.

(d) Christian Day School. . . Luther once used the picture of an ostrich to emphasize the point of how serious we are to take the matter of educating our children in the Word of God: "There is not an irrational animal that does not look after its young and teach them what they need to know. The ostrich is an exception; God says of her (Job 39:16) that she, hardened against her young ones as if they were not hers, lets her eggs lie on the ground. And what good would it do us if we possessed and performed all else and were downright saints but neglected the chief purpose of our life: to take care of the young? I do believe that among outward sins none so heavily burdens the world in the sight of God or deserves such terrible punishment as the sin which we commit against children by not educating them."²⁷

There are various methods for giving our youth religious training, but the Christian Day School has been proven to be one of the most effective. "This school enables the child to experience a totally Christ-centered program, a program which focuses the application of God's Word on him and on all areas of his life. Daily instruction in God's Word encourages him to struggle against sin, to seek forgiveness in Christ, and to grow in love and service to God and man."²⁸ "God's Word is the foundation of the Christian School. The Word is a living, ruling factor, personal in nature. The Word of God rules when its teachings penetrate into every activity, function and enterprise of the school and each branch of learning is permeated with Christian truth."²⁹

Admittedly, many of our congregations today are unable to establish and maintain daily church schools not only because of the enormous cost factor but also due to the lack of students. For our churches which do not have the capabilities and are unable to benefit from a neighboring sister church's facilities, the scrutinizing use of the public system should not be derided, even when some may opt for home schooling. J. W. Montgomery has pointed out that in 1530 Luther "took an unequivocal stand for compulsory public education, and this was not just a matter of paper resolves."³⁰ At the same time, it bears emphasizing that, when the public system is used, this makes religious training in the home and utilizing the avenues in the church all that more important.

In his synodical essay of 1974, the Rev. R. Branstad, then president of our Bethany College, traced the history of the parochial school in America. He surmised: "Somewhat by default the state took over what had traditionally been part of the work of the church but which it could no longer really afford, partly because it had lost its commitment for its own schools." Also, he went on to say, "The more heterogeneous population of the cities demanded a less denominational approach."³¹

What of situations, though, where it would be entirely feasible--yes, quite probable--for a church to operate its own school, or for parents to send their children to a school of our fellowship, and yet give it no serious consideration? Each reason for refusal has to be examined on its own merits. But so often, as the Rev. Paul Madson suggested as a co-essayist in 1974, "the impression is left that religious education is something good for the life to come, but that it isn't very practical here on earth. This is the attitude some parents may have toward a Christian Day School, or toward a Christian high school and college. They think that for their children to attend a church school will deprive them of the seeming natural advantages of a public school. . . They do not want to deny their offspring the benefit of Christian instruction, but they do not see why it should be integrated with their general education, such as in the Christian school... They see it as religion *and* life, rather than religion *in* life."³²

In this year when we are gearing up to celebrate next convention's 75th anniversary celebration of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod, it would be good for us to reflect on the remark that was made by former BLC Pres. S. C. Ylvisaker, who edited *Grace for Grace*, a book commemorating the 25th anniversary of our synod:

When we are about to begin a new period in the history of our Synod, may we all bear in mind that the future of our church depends upon the training that we will give our children. Never has there been a greater need for Christian day schools. True, such schools are not popular with the great masses, but they are precious in the eyes of the Good Shepherd, and His blessing will rest upon all those who labor faithfully to bring the little children to Him by means of the Christian Day School.³³

(e) Confirmation class. . . “Book religion” was despised by the reforming “enthusiasts” of Luther's day, because they felt they were so completely led by the Spirit that they didn't need the learning by print or by rote. Since Luther believed, however, that the Word is the very means through which the Holy Spirit is given, he stressed the reading of the Bible and repeated instruction in its chief teachings as compiled in his Small Catechism of 1529.³⁴ The Lutheran Church still finds the extensive training in his Catechism to be an excellent tool in reminding adolescents and teens of the real significance of their baptism.

But do some parents make *too* much out of confirmation, as T. Kodel suggests in the following quote: “A good number of parents, to state it colloquially, still consider that 'to get religion' their children must 'get baptized,' 'get confirmed,' and 'get Communion.' Although confirmation is not a sacrament in Lutheran terms, it may be merely a step away in too many minds. . . .Confirmation as recently and currently practiced is far out of proportion to its real significance. To demystify it will take time, because parents do little religious training at home... Thus confirmation is the last stronghold, perhaps the only 'magic' left for church to 'hold on to the youth.' Parents will suffer, therefore, their offspring's complaints, for they know 'this is it' in Christian education.”³⁵ His answer for retrieving confirmation from its dead-end cul-de-sac is for the church to try to find ways to integrate the youth in education and ministry opportunities.

(f) Youth programs. . . In a new handbook put out by our ELS Board for Education and Youth, the Rev. Charles Keeler states: “Congregations which have an average of 200 or more on Sunday should be considering a second pastor. A Youth Pastor may be considered foreign in the conservative Lutheran church, but this option should be strongly considered. Many Reformed churches of only 300 members employ a second pastor just for youth ministry. They have learned the value of ministering to young souls. Sad to say, we have developed a reputation of not retaining our teens. There may be a direct correlation here.”³⁶

It is an easy temptation for us to take the position that after confirmation the social and recreational activities of our young people are of no concern to the congregation. Certainly it should go without saying, that when these activities are arranged they ought to be coupled with a brief Bible study or at least a short devotion or prayer. But the reminder that the Rev. P. E. Kretzmann gave years ago on this matter is still appropriate for us today: “After all, even these activities are to come under the heading of sanctification, as we learn from Col. 3:17 and I Cor. 10:31.”³⁷

The synodical youth conventions give our teenagers a wonderful opportunity to enjoy Christian fellowship and learn about the work we do in our ELS. Often the friendships developed at a weekend retreat or summer youth camp remain in effect through high school and college and for a lifetime.

(g) Lutheran high school and college. . . “If the young people of our congregations can be held to the Church and to the exercise of their Christian faith into their adult years through the unstable years of adolescence, they will, quite likely, remain faithful through life... While it is true that a strong faith will be strengthened when it successfully withstands a test, it likewise is true that much damage is done the weak faith of young Christians when they come under the influence of unbelieving instructors in secondary schools.”³⁸ This is why it is so advisable for parents, pastors and parishioners in our synod to encourage our youth to make use of the Lutheran high schools of our sister synod (WELS) and our own Bethany Lutheran College. We ought to be extremely thankful to our Lord for blessing us with a fine institution and a qualified faculty committed to teaching also and especially THE ONE THING NEEDFUL. The Large

Catechism states: "If we want qualified and capable men for both civil and spiritual leadership, we must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and mankind."³⁹ [We will add a word on our Bethany Lutheran Seminary later.]

III. WE WANT OUR YOUTH TO LIVE IN THE JOY OF THIS TRUTH.

In educating our youth to follow God's Truth, motivation is a vital component. "Christian education. . . demands a motivation which secular education cannot produce. This particular motivation is wrought only by the Holy Spirit through the use of the Gospel. It is the crowning jewel which sets Christian education above and apart from all other."⁴⁰ The Apostle Paul put it this way: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:16, 17).

Special emphasis is to be laid on teaching our youth the recognition of blessings. The fact that God has made the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and has completely exonerated us, as a result of the grace poured out upon us in Christ Jesus, is the supreme favor of our God. "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:10, 12). It is *this* blessing which enables us to observe all the other blessings God showers upon us in our everyday lives. We want our youth to say, just as we have learned to say: "Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies," (Ps. 36:5).

Along this line parents can be quite influential in shaping their own children's attitudes about the local church and its minister and leaders through their attentiveness to speak *well* of them in the presence of their offspring. By the same token, what damage can be done in the reverse! If our youth get a heavy dose each week of "roast pastor" at the supper table, can we expect them to acquire a real love for the Lamb? There is no question in my mind--speaking from my own home life as a child--that a warm and evangelical attitude toward the entire work of the church becomes pleasantly contagious throughout the family.

IV. WE WANT OUR YOUTH TO TRANSMIT THIS TRUTH TO THEIR FUTURE POSTERITY.

We can learn from our past how to do this. Anniversary celebrations, such as the one we are approaching, provide excellent opportunities for us as a synod, as congregations and as individuals to assess our roles in making sure that "His Truth Endures to all Generations" (the 75th anniversary theme from Ps. 100:5). Now, surely we know that "the kingdom of God certainly comes of itself without our prayer" and that Jesus' promise that His WORD will not pass away (Matt. 24:35) must of necessity be fulfilled irregardless of any ELS initiatives. But the responsibility of transmitting His Word in its truth and purity to succeeding generations has been given by God to fellow believers and not to the angels. Furthermore, we who realize the blessing God has bestowed upon us in keeping our church body faithful to His Word and to the Lutheran Confessions (as the correct exposition of Scripture), have an even greater responsibility of handing over the same to our youth. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48).

At the time that our ELS (then known affectionately as the Norwegian Synod) was reorganized in 1918 there were three congregations (Parkland, Somber, and Lime Creek) which had Christian Day Schools. The number seems small, but when it is compared with the fact that

the old Norwegian Synod in 1917—which dwarfed our ELS in size—had only fourteen, those three made a significant statement on the commitment of our forefathers to be Christian Day School-minded. The Rev. T. Aaberg wrote in his *A City Set on a Hill*: “It is significant that soon after 1917 the number of Christian Day Schools in the Merger decreased until there were none, while the number in the ELS increased so that by 1930 there were thirteen, and this at a time when the synod numbered but thirty-five parishes. The willingness to maintain schools has always been considered a barometer of true church vigor.” Aaberg, himself a strong advocate of Christian Day Schools, then quotes once again the famous remark made in connection to the purchase of Bethany College and uses it in support of having Christian Day Schools: “Once we are convinced that the school is a necessity, we will also discover that we can afford it. We can do a lot of things that we think are absolutely impossible once they have become a matter of life or death to us.”⁴¹

There is no question that many of our ELS forefathers saw the Christian Day School and the operation of secondary and higher educational institutions to be the key element in transmitting God's Truth to our present youth and the following generations. The Rev. Luther Vangen wrote in his synodical essay of 1966: “Some of our congregations are highly blessed in having Christian Day Schools. Realizing the exceeding precious worth of these schools, let us firmly resolve that we do all in our power, as God gives us the ability and points the way, to preserve them for our children and for generations yet to be born. Let us have more Christian Day Schools and more of our young people attending our Bethany—and receiving the blessings of Christian education. What value shall we place on Christian education? What can we give our young people that will excel this in value—in real, eternal value? May our God give all of us eyes to see the worth of Christian education for people who must live in this world and willing hearts and ready hands.”⁴²

We ask rhetorically: Has some of the vigor and steam of our forefathers' resolve to expend their time and efforts and resources on church schools escaped our vision today? Is there a better way to train our youth so comprehensively in God's Truth that they will be astute to checking doctrinal errors floating in the ecclesiastical alphabet soup around them? How will our youth of 1992 train their own youth some day, if we do not show them at this present time the best educational means we have available as confessional Lutherans?

The transmission of God's Truth for the youth of every age requires people to do the work. Our seminary is in need of many more young men who will become our future pastors. Young men and women ought to be encouraged to pursue becoming Christian Day School teachers. “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field,” (Matt. 9:38).

Dr. C. F. W. Walther referred to the office of preaching and teaching God's Word as “the most glorious of all” for the following reasons:

1. The work of their office centers about man's spiritual welfare, his immortal soul.
2. They employ the most salutary means and instrument in their work, namely, the Word of the living God.
3. They aim at the most salutary and glorious end, namely, to make man truly happy in the present life and to lead him to the life of eternal bliss.
4. They are most wholesomely engaged in an occupation which entirely satisfies their spirits and advances their own selves in the way of salvation.
5. Their labor yields the most precious results, namely the salvation of man.
6. Their labors have the most glorious promise of the cooperation of the Lord, so that they are never entirely futile and in vain.

7. Their labors have the promise of a gracious reward, which consists in a glory in the world to come that is unutterably great, exceeding abundantly above all they ever could have asked and prayed for in this life.⁴³

We who are pastors and teachers here today ought to think back to the time when some adult whom we respected took the occasion to bring up the subject of our entering full-time church work. We might never have given it much of a thought if the seed hadn't been planted by that estimable individual. Could we do the same with certain young people in our own congregations? Maybe even taking them for a visit to our Bethany Lutheran Seminary, or taking them for an in-session visit to one of our Christian Day Schools could provoke their young minds to do some serious thinking.

Eyen though God has promised that HIS TRUTH will endure throughout all generations, we ought never take HIS TRUTH "for granted" in the sense of being careless about it. God had to rebuke the church at Ephesus: "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" (Rev. 2:4). At the same time, He also warned the church of the Laodiceans not to be indifferent or lukewarm about their love for the Word: "I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16).

We have a wonderful opportunity before us as a synod to show our deep love and concern for God's Truth--especially that truth which states we sinners are declared forgiven through the merits of His beloved Son! We have an opportunity to help be a part of transmitting God's Truth to our youth. HIS TRUTH FOR OUR YOUTH is the theme which has been adopted for the two year synod-wide offering commemorating our 75th anniversary, beginning at this convention. By resolution of our synod the worthy purpose of this offering will be threefold:

- promoting and maintaining Christian Day Schools;
- supporting youth ministry throughout our synod;
- advancing the cause of parish education at all levels.⁴⁴

It is interesting for us to note that during the 1890's and right up until 1903, the old Norwegian Synod--our mother church body--discussed the Christian Day school at almost every convention. In his report to the Jubilee Synod in 1903 Pres. U. V. Koren said: "If there is any cause that is of supreme importance for us, a cause which the Synod now at the beginning of a new period should embrace with all its power and enthusiasm, it is the cause of schools for our children."⁴⁵ At that convention the decision was made to set aside a fund in memory of the Rev. H. A. Preus, and then the congregations which needed assistance while embarking on a drive for a school could receive support from this fund. Voted for this purpose was \$2,000 out of the Jubilee initial offering as the beginning of this fund. A committee was elected to gather contributions from the churches and was given the assignment to administer the special fund.⁴⁶

What is it that we treasure? "God's Word a treasure is to me," for it alone is the "oil of gladness." Isn't this the real treasure-chest inheritance we wish to pass on to our heirs? Jesus once said that the kingdom of heaven was "like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" [Matt. 13:44]. May we "bury" this precious treasure in the hearts and minds of our infants, toddlers, adolescents and teens. May we realize that selling all else to do so is providing us with a great "field" of opportunity for the glory of our Lord and the salvation of many souls!

Ye parents, hear what Jesus taught
 When little ones to Him they brought:
 Forbid them not, but heed My plea
 And suffer them to come to Me.

Obey your Lord and let His truth
 Be taught your children in their youth
 That they in church and school may dwell
 And learn their Savior's praise to tell.
 (Lutheran Hymnal, #630)

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

Endnotes

- ¹ Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord*, "Luther's Large Catechism," p. 388.
- ² F. Painter, *Luther on Education* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), p. 119.
- ³ Wayne W. Dyer, *What Do You Want for Your Children?* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1985), p. 363.
- ⁴ Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1975), p. 735.
- ⁵ This entire issue from *Newsweek* magazine is devoted to the subject of the teens in the 1990's. The quote is from p. 10.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ⁷ *Ibid.* These statistics are found on pp. 12 & 54.
- ⁸ P. Lehenbauer's conference paper, entitled "Raising Christian Children in a Wicked World," April 16, 1991, pp. 5 & 6.
- ⁹ This article appeared in the *Presbyterian Journal* in the edition of April 21, 1982.
- ¹⁰ Joe Temple, *Know Your Child* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 10.
- ¹¹ "News and Comments" section of the WELS *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Fall 1991, p. 300.
- ¹² Nancy J. Kolodny, *How to Survive Your Adolescent's Adolescence* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1984), p. 160. Here she is speaking of "positive parenting."
- ¹³ Alvin E. Wagner, *St. Paul The Theologian's Prototype* (ELS: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1991), p. 124.
- ¹⁴ David P. Scaer, *Christology*, Vol VI of Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series (Graphic Publishing, Lake Mills, IA, 1989), p. 28.
- ¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press Publishing, 1960), p. 100.
- ¹⁶ *Newsweek*, p. 16.
- ¹⁷ Erwin Kolb, *A Witness Primer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986) pp. 23 & 24.
- ¹⁸ Kolodny (previously quoted), p. 21 & 23.
- ¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1947). p. 35. Lewis makes this remark in discussing the faults of an English textbook under the fictitious name, "The Green Book."
- ²⁰ Theodore Laetsch, ed. *The Abiding Word*, vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 638.
- ²¹ *ELS Synod Report* for 1974, "The Task of Instruction" by R. Dale, p. 48.
- ²² *The Abiding Word*, II, p. 640.
- ²³ Paul Pretzel. *Understanding and Counseling the Suicidal Person* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1972. p. 226 & 227.
- ²⁴ Dale's essay, p. 52.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ²⁶ This quote is taken from the *Concordia Theological Monthly* of March, 1946, "Miscellanea" section, p. 219.
- ²⁷ E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. III (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 1959, p. 1565.
- ²⁸ *ELS Synod Report* for 1987. R. Diepenbrock's essay: "Christian Education," p. 65.
- ²⁹ Russell Peterson, *Lutheranism and the Educational Ethic* (Boston: Meador Press, 1950), p. 32.
- ³⁰ J. W. Montgomery, *In Defense of Martin Luther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1970), p. 123.
- ³¹ *ELS Synod Report* for 1974, R. Branstad's essay: "The Responsibility of Instruction," p. 58.
- ³² *ELS Synod Report* for 1974, P. Madson's essay: "The Purpose of Instruction," pp. 37 & 38.

- ³³ S. C. Ylvisaker, ed. *Grace for Grace* (ELS: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), p. 82.
- ³⁴ Montgomery, p. 136.
- ³⁵ Thomas E. Kodel, *Growth in Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 112.
- ³⁶ Booklet put out by the ELS Board for Education and Youth in the year of 1991 called "Serving Our Lutheran Youth," p. 59.
- ³⁷ This quote is taken from a *Concordia Theological Monthly* article in the July, 1940, issue, "Fallow Field--the Church's Youth," p. 518. Kretzmann speaks at length in this article about how youth activities should not be a matter of trivial concern to pastors and congregations.
- ³⁸ *The Abiding Word*, II, p. 647.
- ³⁹ Tappert, p. 388.
- ⁴⁰ *ELS Synod Report*, P. Madson's essay, p. 38.
- ⁴¹ Theodore Aaberg, *A City Set on A Hill* (Graphic Publishing Co., Lake Mills. IA. 1968) pp. 92 & 93.
- ⁴² *ELS Synod Report* for 1966, essay by Luther Vangen, "Educating for Eternity," pp. 39 & 40.
- ⁴³ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 285
- ⁴⁴ *ELS Synod Report* for 1990, p. 108.
- ⁴⁵ *Grace for Grace*, p. 80.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.