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ARCHIVES

BRIEF STUDIES

CHILDREN AND THE DEITY (A Review of *Little Visits with God*) *

When a mixed company of grownups and children gather to worship, all too often it is the little Christians who are expected to adapt to the language and approach of the adults. Some ecclesiastical or devotional child-labor laws are necessary to emancipate the young in the work of worship, both in the Sunday morning hours and in the hour of family worship.

This book of 200 devotions will help families with young children talk together about the Christian life. Bible passages speak to everyday happenings, and discussion questions help to clinch the points. Additional Bible readings are suggested for older children and adults, and a simple prayer concludes each selection. Jahsmann, whose work for children through the Concordia Sunday School Series is well known, and Simon, whose *Christian Parent* magazine is aimed at helping parents bring up their children in Christ, together with the publisher and the Literature Board of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, have put many families in their debt. May many families use this volume in consistent time payments.

This movement to recognize children will bring, however, blessings proportionate in some measure to the clarity of its theology. What is to be *said* must be correctly determined. At the same time it must always be recognized that what the child is caused to *think* is really determinative both of theological accuracy and of spiritual effectiveness. To throw out comment on this volume's theology is to claim to understand what the child who hears will *understand* from the words—clearly a glassy foundation, if not a complete glass house. Without claiming any personal innocence, which alone might be said to make the action permissible, let me cast a first stone. My target, be it clear, is not this volume which supplies the examples, but a theological approach to children apparent in many visits with God on which they are taken.

One oversight in these little visits with God would seem to be that the child is never adequately introduced to the host. As soon as this is said it must be partially retracted, for He, whom to know is everlasting

* *LITTLE VISITS WITH GOD*. Allan Hart Jahsmann and Martin P. Simon. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957. 287 pages. Cloth. \$3.00

ing life, is apparent on every page. The foreword is correct when it says: "This book will help children not only to know about God, but also to love Him and to trust in Him. It cultivates right attitudes and shows how the Christian faith is to function in daily living. These devotions touch the heart as well as reach the mind. They are childlike without being childish. They lead to Jesus, the Savior and Good Shepherd. And it is through childlike trust in Jesus that we are saved" (p. V). But in 200 visits with God might it not be possible to help children know *more* about God and know Him more accurately as He has revealed Himself?

It is the expressed prayer of the authors that the Holy Trinity will be pleased with the volume (and surely He is!), but there is no introduction to the Holy Spirit in the five references to His name my checking revealed. (Related to this is the fact that no attempt is made to "put them in mind of their Baptism.") At the same time, however, the distinction between the first and second Persons of the Holy Trinity is stressed to the overshadowing of the unity in Essence. The second visit, called "What Jesus Made," is based on John 1:3, here given as "all things were made by Jesus." In one other instance the book quotes from the RSV — here the RSV translation "through Him" would have helped. But the point St. John makes on Creation is not that Jesus is another Person about whom we can say, "*He* did it," but to show His unity in the Godhead who *did*. A suggestion that the book could well begin on page 197, "God Made Everything," is not to exhibit a congenital clinging to the chronological, but to question whether the simple interchange of the names "God" and "Jesus," with the assumption of acquaintance with the mystery of the Trinity it implies, constitutes a more adequate introduction to God than a specific attempt to assist parents in making clear what is meant by the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Of more vital concern is the distinction that is often implied between the attitude of the Savior Jesus and the Father God (in whom Mary rejoiced as "God, my Savior"). God didn't punish someone else for man's sin. *He* suffered!

"Well," said her mother. "God is perfect and holy, and He can't allow His children to do wrong. He has to punish us for sinning."

"Oh," said Jeanie. "But Jesus saved us from being punished."

"How?" asked her mother, as if she didn't know.

"By having His Father punish Him instead of us," said Jeanie.

Jeanie was right. Jesus felt sorry for people because they were all

in trouble with God. He died on a cross so that everyone could have forgiveness. "With the Lord there is mercy." That is why we love Him so very much. (p. 216)

Since on page 111, in connection with the passage "Bless the Lord, O my soul," it is asserted that "the *Lord Jesus* deserves to be thanked and praised," one cannot quite relax with the conclusion that mercy is to be found with the *Lord*, although the prayer that concludes this dialog ascribes both mercy and forgiveness to the "Dear Lord, heavenly Father." It is the same discomfort one feels on page 50, "God's children, who love *Jesus*, are to go away from whatever is wrong." Many passages simply do not convey the truth that "*God* was in Christ" in the saving of men. Many other passages *do* convey this truth. It is not a question of whether the book's theology is true or half-true, but whether the picture-puzzle pieces of truth it presents can all be put together by the child into an accurate outline of the face of God.

"The time would fail me to tell" of other stones I would cast. But we *do* have to be afraid of lightning—in the sense of knowing that it is dangerous and can kill—even though it shows how strong and great God is (p. 29). To say that God makes the thunder roll and the lightning crack with no reference to God's great plan in nature is to convey a kind of Rip van Winkle picture of God. To say, "When God wants to do something for us, there isn't anything that can stop Him" (p. 21), is to forget about the chickens who would not gather under the wings of the hen and to leave unanswered the problems of the fathers and the brothers whom enemy soldiers *have* killed. The fact that God never forgets His children (p. 43)—and the truth that "on some days angels may keep things from falling on us and hurting us. On other days they may keep us from getting in front of a fast car or a bus" (p. 46)—does not inform the child of his responsibility of "taking" care, nor does it adequately prepare him to retain his hold on God's love from his hospital bed after the day in which he is struck down.

The theology *understood* by children is the theology being taught. Admittedly, who can understand his heirs? The seriousness of the problem depends upon the glass house in which one takes up residence.

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