

# For the Life of the World

## Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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### **The Gospel, Lutheran Missions, and the Paradox of the Far East**

By Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

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### **The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa**

By Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

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### **Faith through God's Mercy**

By Deaconess Grace V. Rao



# CONTENTS

Volume Twelve, Number Four

## FEATURES

### 10 The Gospel, Lutheran Missions, and the Paradox of the Far East Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

To the question, "Can I be Christian and still be Asian?" we simply affirm the proclamation of the Bible: the paradox of living in the world but not of the world, living in a specific culture and language and people, yet confessing "one Lord, one faith, one birth."

### 14 The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa By Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

The Lutheran Church has precious theological traditions and confessions to mine from when communicating the Gospel in Africa. Lutherans should remember that the theology of the cross is the solid foundation for understanding the Gospel.

### 20 Believing, Teaching, and Confessing By Adriane Dorr

In every culture, the problem of human beings is still the same and the answer is also the same. We are sinners before God, bottomlessly sinful and entirely powerless to please Him. That is the same with Japanese as with Germans. But our Lord Jesus has answered for our sins on Calvary. Not only that, but He bestows on us that forgiveness that He accomplished on the cross in such a way that we are not left in doubt as He baptizes us, absolves us, and puts on our tongues His body and blood. The same Gospel is for us whether we are Germans or Japanese!

### 23 Faith Through God's Mercy By Deaconess Grace V. Rao

Through God's forgiveness, we experience the love of creation, the love of redemption, and the love of sanctification. Further, through His grace, our faith is generated and sustained, and those acts of mercy allow us to continue fulfilling His command.

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Mary Magdalene Washing the Feet of Jesus, by Frank Wesley, India. Lucknow watercolor. McGinley collection.

# Faith Through God's Mercy

By Deaconess Grace V. Rao

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**Through God's forgiveness, we experience the love of creation, the love of redemption, and the love of sanctification. Further, through His grace, our faith is generated and sustained, and those acts of mercy allow us to continue fulfilling His command.**

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**M**ercy is a gift from God, lived out daily in the lives of believers in Christ. This truth is identified and spoken of throughout Scripture. God's Word tells us about the One who gives mercy and His love for mankind and about what Christ has done and continues to do for us in Word and Sacrament. By that same mercy, our vocations are intricately designed to be His channels of compassion and charity. Through God's forgiveness, we experience the love of creation, the love of redemption, and the love of sanctification. Further, through His grace, our faith is generated and sustained, and those acts of mercy allow us to continue fulfilling His command. As Wilhelm Loehe wrote, "However, the Lord not only commands mercy upon the entire world, but He also promises His own helping presence to those who will exercise mercy saying, 'Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.'"





**It's amazing to see the Lord's acts of mercy with the growing numbers of believers in a country where Hinduism is predominant. Early conversion led to persecution, however, it did not prohibit the western churches from bringing in the light of the Gospel. Believers understood the theology of cross, and they faithfully endured it.**

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One of God's merciful acts is the foundation and growth of Christianity in India. It goes back to the time of the apostles. It is noteworthy to understand that the apostles Thomas and Bartholomew planted the Gospel seed. St. Thomas entered India as a carpenter, preached the Gospel, performed miracles, and died a martyr at Mylapore in southern India. More recognition is given to St. Thomas in comparison to St. Bartholomew, because no mention of his name occurs in ecclesiastical literature before Eusebius mentions, "Bartholomew left a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew which Pantaeus, a missionary of the third century, found there in the hands of the local people."<sup>1</sup> The Lord brought people to faith through the instruments of His apostles, and it was the dawn of early Christianity.

It's amazing to see the Lord's acts of mercy with the growing numbers of believers in a country where Hinduism is predominant. Early conversion led to persecution, however, it did not prohibit the western churches from bringing in the light of the Gospel. Believers understood the theology of cross, and they faithfully endured it.

The next decades saw several developments in growth of churches. In 1895, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) inaugurated the first overseas mission church in India in the Synod's history. In 1959, at the Synod's proceedings, it was recognized as the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), and as a partner church faithfully embraced the Sacred Scriptures and the beautiful Lutheran Confessions as the true exposition of the Word of God.

By faithful confession of the Lord's doctrine with a proper distinction between Law and Gospel, LCMS World Relief and Human Care (WR-HC), the mercy arm of the Synod, under the leadership of Rev. Matthew Harrison, ventures into the caring ministries in further strengthening the church. Human need is tremendous, and especially reaching out to the poor, the needy, and the suffering. There is also a need to strengthen the IELC educational, spiritual, and economic programs.

As a deaconess serving at LCMS WR-HC, my first overseas human care mission to India was memorable. In 2005, we received an invitation from the IELC, which offers the deaconess program but wanted to strengthen the curriculum's theological focus. The team members were Rev. Dr. Arthur Just, Deaconess Eva Rickman (then WRHC deaconess intern), and me.

There are tremendous opportunities for the growth of seminary and deaconess programs in India. As a deaconess, I could identify the necessity of training programs for women in spiritual care, medical/nursing care, counseling, social work, teaching of faith, care for the weak and impoverished, administrative responsibilities, and other vocations needed for the church's life. Added to this, assistance is required for caring for the children with disabilities, orphans, battered women and children, substance, alcohol and for those suffering from sexual abuse. With their newly elected president, Rev. Samuel, we see a strong partnership between the IELC and the Synod's mercy arm. It is our goal to bring them the theology of mercy through human care ministries together. 🏠

*Deaconess Grace V. Rao serves at LCMS World Relief and Human Care in St. Louis, Missouri.*



<sup>1</sup> Pfatteicher, Philip, "Festivals and Commemorations," p. 231.