

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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By the Rev. Dr. Peter J. Scaer, Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Our world, it seems, is obsessed with outward physical beauty. Television shows feature the supposedly life-changing results of plastic surgery and air endless “makeovers.” Magazines put out their annual list of “beautiful people.” In such a vain, superficial world, it’s refreshing to reflect on the true beauty, which is the life of Christ lived out still among His people. We should therefore encourage one another in doing good, knowing that our lives are witnesses to the love of Christ.

7 The Beauty of the Church

By the Rev. Scott C. Klemsz, Director of Admission, Public Relations, and Publications, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

The church building becomes a sacred place where your Savior comes to meet you, comfort you, and restore you. You hear a welcome in the Scriptures proclaimed from the pulpit. The font washes your dirty life clean. The altar feeds your hungry soul. The church’s windows, art, sculpture, and light all bid you a warm hello. The church becomes your sanctuary from the world, a place of refuge.

10 The Beauty of Freedom

By Elizabeth A. Fluegel, Teacher, Immanuel Lutheran School, Alexandria, Virginia

Since America’s beginning, religious freedom has been essential to our country and necessary to the liberty of mankind. We can agree that religious freedom has been a blessing to us. As recently as the 1998 LCMS Synodical Convention, a resolution was adopted which encourages “the Synod and its members to promote and protect freedom of religion and religious expression both at home and abroad (Res. 2-05A).”

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The Beauty of Holiness

By the Rev. Dr. Peter J. Scaer

My family and I are blessed to sit in the pews of what is surely one of the most beautiful churches in all of Fort Wayne. Light from the stained-glass windows bathes the sanctuary. At the front stands an impressive altar into which is carved a relief of the Last Supper. Figurines of the four evangelists adorn the pulpit. The stone baptismal font is both elegant and formidable. Those who built our church did so with faith and conviction. They wanted the beauty of the architecture to reflect the beauty of the Lord who serves us. The solidity of the baptismal font reminds us that baptism is indeed a sure foundation for the Christian life. Our church fathers built a magnificent pulpit to remind themselves of the magnificence of preaching. The altar was designed in such a way as to remind us that Christ is still miraculously and wonderfully providing us His body and blood. And the light through the stained-glass reminds us that the church is indeed the threshold of heaven. From the pew one can see so much that is beautiful.

Yet, there is still another place from which to view the beauty of the church. The pastor has the special privilege of standing in the pulpit, where he can look over the sea of people who fill the pews. And in the face of Christians one sees the reflected beauty of Christ Himself.

Now, I am not blind and I am not wearing rose-colored glasses. I know all about original sin and its effects. I know that we Christians are afflicted by all the same ills which plague the world. Indeed, one of the chief complaints from outsiders is that they see Christians who too often do

not practice what they preach. Perhaps they have a point. When we look into the mirror of God's Law, we see ourselves with all of our warts, shortcomings, and ugliness. But that is not the whole story.

From a worldly perspective and from the mirror of the Law, we can look at all that's wrong with the church and we can tally up its sins, which are many. But then, every once in a while we do well to take a step back in order to see God at work in the lives of His people. In the church we will truly see people who, at their best, embody the kind of life that Christ spoke about in the beatitudes

We may consider the New Testament churches at Corinth and Ephesus. The church at Corinth caused Paul no small amount of grief. It was beset with every worldly vice and ugliness, from sexual immorality and a proliferation of lawsuits, to class warfare and spiritual pride. Indeed, some say that the church of Corinth most closely resembles the church of today. On the other hand, when

ness



Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, he speaks in glowing terms, describing the congregation as Christ's beautiful bride, dressed in baptismally white garments. Some might conclude that the church at Corinth was unseemly while Ephesus was beautiful. I think, however, the difference is not one so much of quality as it is of perspective.

From a worldly perspective and from the mirror of the Law, we can look at all that's wrong with the church and we can tally up its sins, which are many. We see a divorce rate which is as high as that in society, or we may notice broken families, bickering, self-centeredness, pettiness, and the like. But then, every once in a while we do well to take a step back in order to see God at work in the lives of His people. In the church we will truly see people who, at their best, embody the kind of life that Christ spoke about in the beatitudes. In the lives of Christians we see the reflections of the blessed life of Christ Himself.

Indeed, the evangelists offer plenty of stories of people whose beauty was to be found in their faith and quiet piety. Mary, the young mother of our Lord, reminds us that true beauty lies not in outward appearance, but in holiness and humility. The older Zechariah and Elizabeth shine as examples of those who live in righteousness and hope (Luke 1:6). We may think of the centurion, whose faith was so strong that he did not feel himself worthy for the Lord even to come into his house, and so sent friends to Jesus, imploring on his behalf, "Say

the word and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:7). Or we may recall such women as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, who helped to support Jesus' ministry "out of their own means" (Luke 8:1-3). We may further consider the widow, who by giving a couple of copper coins gave all she had (Luke 21:1-4). Again, we might want to reflect on the story of Zacchaeus, who upon being forgiven gave half of his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:1-9). We would be remiss if we failed to mention the woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, and concerning whom Jesus said, "She has done a beautiful thing to Me," and added, "I tell you the truth, wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Matt. 26:10, 13).

Now, the beauty of God's people is not a thing of the past but can be seen even here and now. Christians are no longer able to serve our Lord directly in the way Mary Magdalene did, but Jesus says, "Whatever you do to the least of these My brethren, you do unto Me" (Matt. 25:40).

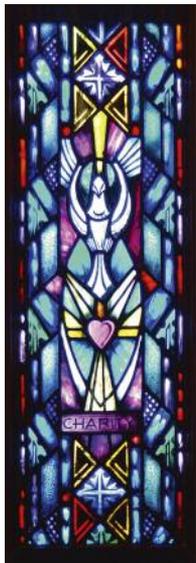
And so it is, in any given congregation, we may look to those who, without any self-consciousness,

offer themselves in service to the Lord. From my own days back in the parish, I recall with fondness the older lady who bought a copier for the church and came faithfully to print the bulletins (albeit sometimes upside-down). I think of other ladies who were always there to lend a helping hand—to clean the church, to prepare meals after the funeral, to mend the hymnals. I recall the younger parents who week in and week out brought their children to church, in spite of hectic schedules, crying babies, and long drives. Then, there is the woman who devoted herself to the VBS, and the older couple who, without being asked, cleaned out the church basement. With admiration, I think of the woman who dedicated her life to running a crisis pregnancy center to help women in need. And even as Mary, Joanna, and Susanna helped to support our Lord's ministry and the widow gave her mite, so also I am reminded of faithful folks who continue to give to the church in a sacrificial manner.

So it is that the piety of our fellow Christians is a true visible beauty of the church. And this beauty is the reflected beauty of God and the beauty of Christ living and working in and through His earthly family. Indeed, it is the beauty of the Christian life that draws people to God. Our Lord puts it this way: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Our Lord's chief disciple adds, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

Our world, it seems, is obsessed with outward physical beauty. Television shows feature the supposedly life-changing results of plastic surgery and air endless "makeovers." Magazines put out their annual list of "beautiful people." In such a vain, superficial world it's refreshing to reflect on the true beauty, which is the life of Christ lived out still among His people. We should therefore encourage one another in doing good, knowing that our lives are witnesses to the love of Christ. What's more, we do well to remember that our main goal as Christians is not to look good in the sight of men, but to look good in the sight of God. As Peter writes, "Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." May the lives of the saints who surround us continue to inspire us and reflect the true beauty of the Savior who gave His life for us all.

The Rev. Dr. Peter Scaer is an Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.



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