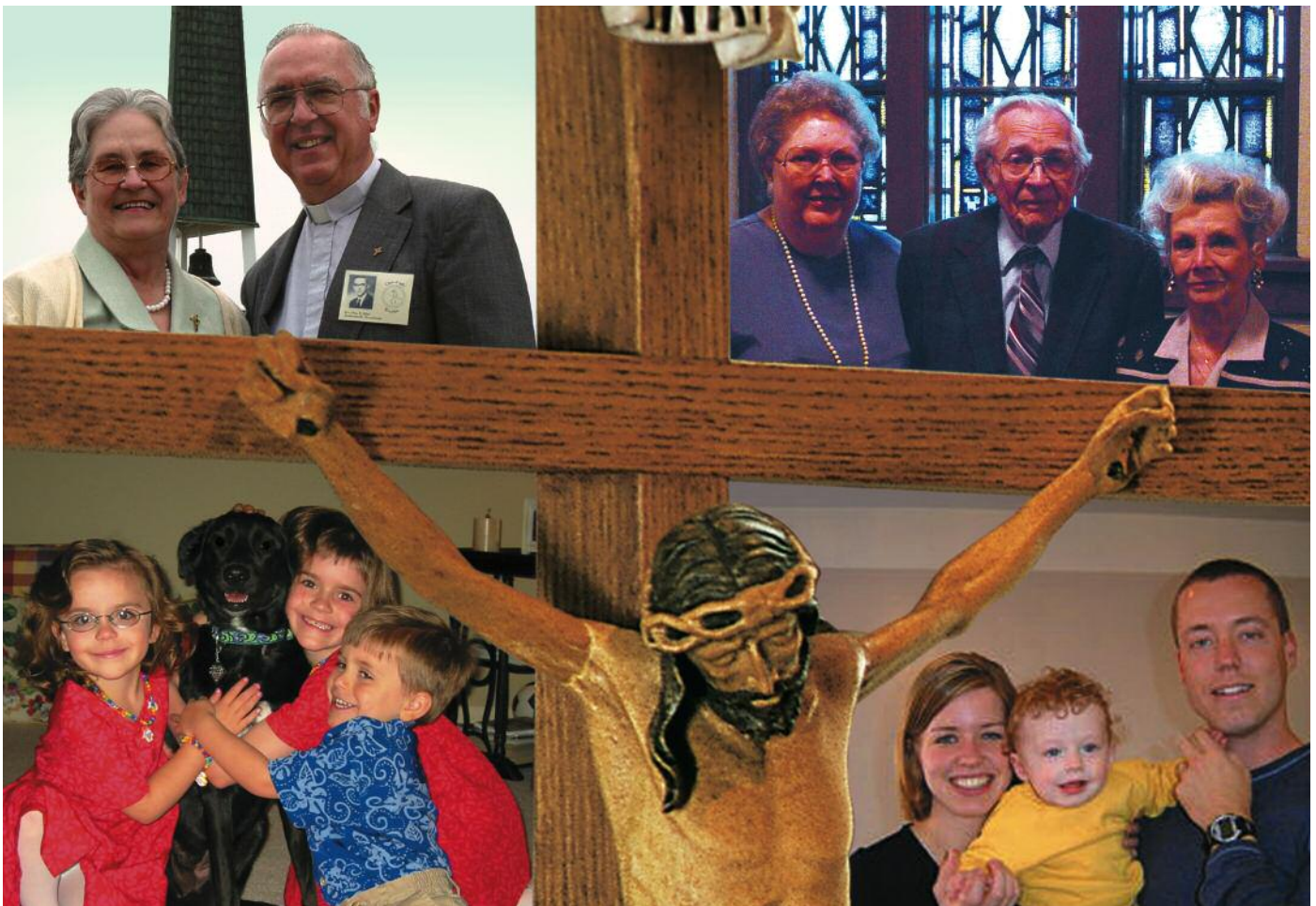


For the

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**The Cross
and Personal Piety - p.4**

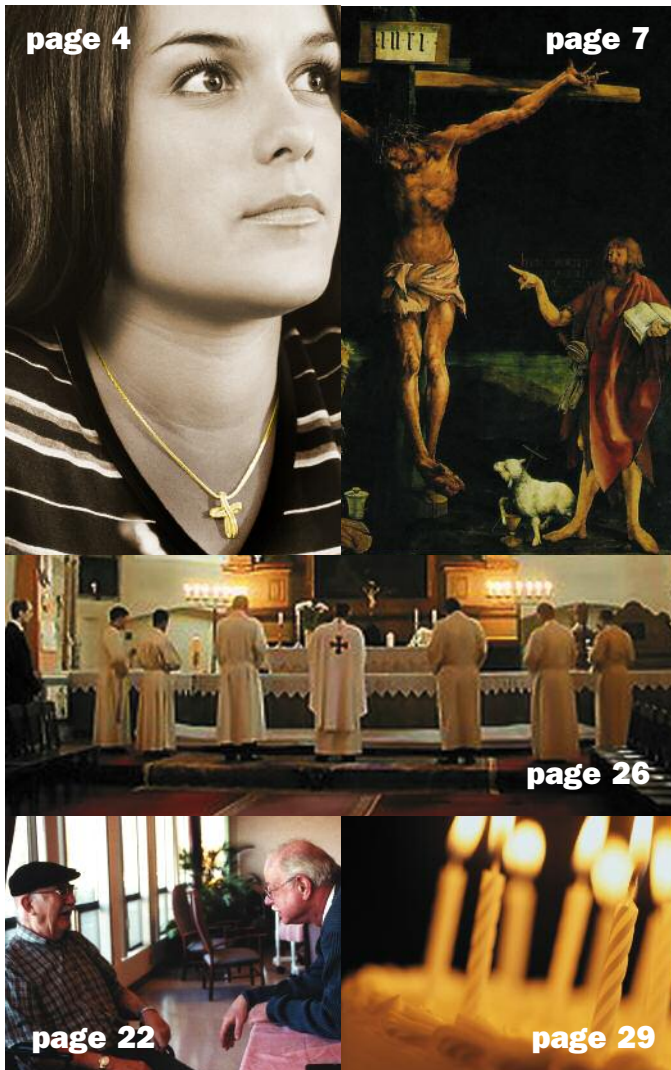
Cross and Church - p.7

**The Cross
in the Christian Life - p.10**

Called to Serve - p.14



CONTENTS



page 4

page 7

page 26

page 22

page 29

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FEATURES

4 The Cross and Personal Piety

By the Rev. Harold L. Senkbeil, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

“Be who you are.” Not being swayed by the godless influences of the world around us nor captivated by forms of piety that contradict the faith we confess, Lutheran Christians will want to publicly confess the faith as... well, Lutheran Christians.

7 Cross and Church

By the Rev. Dr. Scott R. Murray, Pastor of Memorial Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas

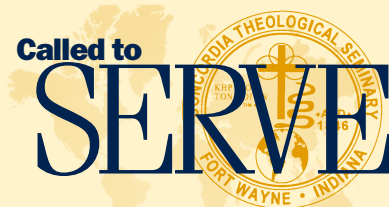
Christ’s cross always brings suffering (John 17:14). The Church patiently receives the suffering God sends. In faith the children of the Church receive from God only what He sends, but He sends the cross. We interpret suffering as evil and even the work of the devil. However, God Himself sends us the cross we bear and because He sends it, it must be for our good.

10 The Cross in the Christian Life

By Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, Religion Editor of United Press International in Washington and a research scholar at the Institute on Religion and World Affairs, Boston University

Cheap grace is an insidious, sneaky error menacing us every waking hour, especially in this postmodern era with its ever-shifting values and deities. The cross—our own and that of Christ—often seems veiled. We prefer to fast-forward to the resurrection, trying to bypass suffering as if we could undo the fall to which we owe our thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18).

13 What Does This Mean?



| | |
|---|--------------|
| Faithfully Confess the Truth | p. 14 |
| Word and Sacrament Ministry | p. 16 |
| Summer Greek Enrollment Increases 19% | p. 20 |
| Kantorei Visit Dr. Kenneth Korby | p. 22 |
| Dr. Klug Called to Church Triumphant | p. 24 |
| Guild Makes Difference in Lives of CTS Students and Their Families | p. 25 |
| CTS Plans Trip to Spain and Portugal with Dr. David P. Scaer | p. 28 |

Two particularly beautiful words in the German language are not often heard these days. These words are *Gottvertrauen*, meaning trust in God, and *Gelassenheit*, a term that can be translated in different ways. Langenscheidt's *New College Dictionary* offers three options: composure, calm, and imperturbability. Actually, it means precisely what it says—the ability to let go (*gehen lassen*). In my childhood, *Gottvertrauen* and *Gelassenheit* were considered typically Lutheran attributes

because they were linked to what Martin Luther called “the purest theology,” meaning the cross of Christ. This is currently not a fashionable theology, for ours is an era of feel-good religion and—to use Dietrich Bonhoeffer's phrase—“cheap grace,” or the false assumption that sin is wiped away without atonement.

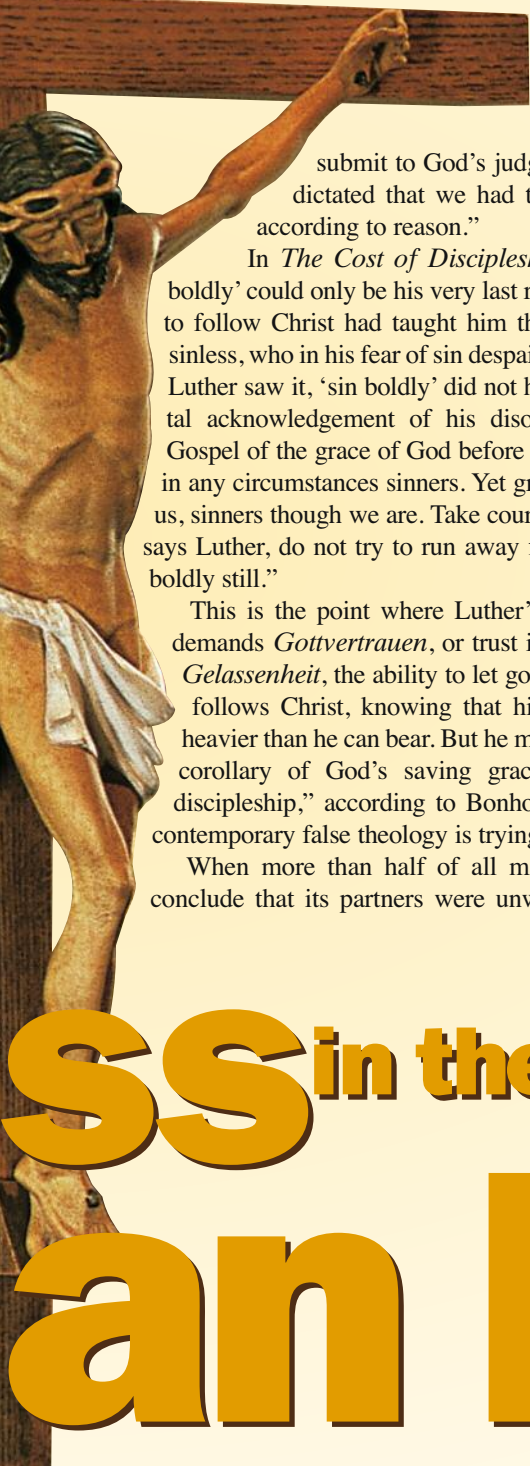
The recent mass hysteria in Germany—especially in the churches—over the war in Iraq was testimony to the absence of *Gottvertrauen* and *Gelassenheit*, precisely because it ignored the liberating message of the cross. This message has gone out of style in the land of the Reformation and beyond. In fact, the “Lutheran” bishop of Hamburg, Maria Jepsen, suggested replacing the cross on church spires with a crèche. “Wouldn't that be a nicer symbol?” she asked inanely. What, then, is the message of the cross for the everyday lives of Christians? Malcolm Muggeridge suggested, correctly, that suffering is the only method by which we have ever learned anything. Is that what the cross is all about? Or, to introduce an absurd argument here, is the cross an expression of religious sadomasochism, as North American feminist pastors aver in their blasphemous conferences where they endeavor to “re-imagine” God and Christ?

At a time when we are increasingly confronted with a competing monotheistic religion whose God demands absolute submission, it is well to remember that ours is the only faith whose God makes Himself small “pro me,” in Luther's words. Ours is the only faith whose God accepts the punishment for our sins and demands no action in return on our part.

At a time when we are increasingly confronted with a competing monotheistic religion whose God demands absolute submission, it is well to remember that ours is the only faith whose God makes Himself small “*pro me*,” in Luther's words. Ours is the only faith whose God accepts the punishment for our sins and demands no action in return on our part. “He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ,” Luther stated in 1518 in his Heidelberg theses, which first delineated his theology of the cross (thesis 25).

The Cross Christi

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The liberating message of this theology for everyday life is that God placed the cross of Christ between “me” and “me”—between us and our sinful nature—so that we are free to accomplish what we have been sent here to do: serving our neighbor in our varied secular vocations, as student, husband, housewife, teacher, lawyer, journalist, craftsman, or politician. If we perform our work in the world to the best of our abilities out of love for our fellow man, we render the highest service to God, even though our work is under sin. “You are a sinner,” Luther admonished us. “Sin boldly but even more boldly still believe and rejoice in Christ.”

Through the centuries, Luther’s detractors have accused him of egging on his followers to murder, steal, lie, and commit adultery. Instead he told us that although everything we do is under sin, this should not prevent us from doing it if it is an act of

love. Dietrich Bonhoeffer told his closest friend and editor, Eberhard Bethge,

the point at which he fully grasped the depth of Luther’s insight: when he, Bonhoeffer, participated in the conspiracy to kill Hitler. As Bethge told me decades later, “Of course, Bonhoeffer realized that he, too, had to submit to God’s judgment. However, at that very moment reason dictated that we had to get rid of Hitler; therefore we had to act according to reason.”

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer explained, “For Luther, ‘sin boldly’ could only be his very last refuge, the consolation for one whose attempts to follow Christ had taught him that he can never become sinless, who in his fear of sin despairs of the grace of God. As Luther saw it, ‘sin boldly’ did not happen to be a fundamental acknowledgement of his disobedient life; it was the Gospel of the grace of God before which we are always and in any circumstances sinners. Yet grace seeks us and justifies us, sinners though we are. Take courage and confess your sin, says Luther, do not try to run away from it, but believe more boldly still.”

This is the point where Luther’s Theology of the Cross demands *Gottvertrauen*, or trust in God, in order to evoke *Gelassenheit*, the ability to let go. Trustingly, the Christian follows Christ, knowing that his own cross will not be heavier than he can bear. But he must bear it. The invariable corollary of God’s saving grace is “the obligation of discipleship,” according to Bonhoeffer. And it is precisely this obligation that contemporary false theology is trying to water down.

When more than half of all marriages in the United States fail, we must conclude that its partners were unwilling to bear the cross matrimony puts on

The Christian follows Christ, knowing that his own cross will not be heavier than he can bear. But he must bear it. The invariable corollary of God’s saving grace is “the obligation of discipleship,” according to Bonhoeffer. And it is precisely this obligation that contemporary false theology is trying to water down.

SS in the an Life

By Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto

everybody's shoulders. When Christian ministers bless same-sex unions, we know that they and the partners in such unions feel exempt from the commandment of discipleship. The message here is: Don't bother bearing the cross of resisting urges Scripture proscribes.

A "me" culture ignoring the needs of customers, shareholders, and groups and communities other than one's own is the opposite of a Christian culture of discipleship and the cross. An executive newspaper editor who does not accept the personal consequences of having enabled a subordinate to cheat his readers with fraudulent reporting is placing himself outside the discipleship in the secular realm, the discipleship is asked of every Christian. He thus rejects the cross—his own cross and therefore Christ's cross as well.

Cheap grace is an insidious, sneaky error menacing us every waking hour, especially in this postmodern era with its ever-shifting values and deities. The cross—our own and that of Christ—often seems veiled. We prefer to fast-forward to the resurrection, trying to bypass suffering as if we could undo the fall to which we owe our thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18).

A senator who calls himself a Christian but votes in favor of abortion refuses to pick up his cross. In his case, this cross would be the danger of being kicked out of office in the next election. By not accepting this risk, the senator indulges in "cheap grace," which Dietrich Bonhoeffer—who was martyred for practicing his beliefs—described as "the bitterest foe of discipleship."

"The word of cheap grace has been the ruin of more Christians than any command of works," Bonhoeffer wrote. Cheap grace is an insidious, sneaky error menacing us every waking hour, especially in this postmodern era with its ever-shifting values and deities. The cross—our own and that of Christ—often seems veiled. We prefer to fast-forward to the resurrection, trying to bypass suffering as if we could undo the fall to which we owe our thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18).

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned, clergymen preaching cheap grace, rather than the cross and the need for *Gottvertrauen*, do not propagate *Gelassenheit*. Indeed, their false teaching has the opposite effect. What Bonhoeffer wrote about Germany before going to the gallows holds as true for our world today: "What are those 3,000 Saxons put to death by Charlemagne compared with the millions of spiritual corpses in our country today? With us it has been abundantly proved that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations. Cheap grace has turned out to be utterly merciless to our Evangelical Church."

Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, a Lutheran lay theologian, is Religion Editor of United Press International in Washington and a research scholar at the Institute on Religion and World Affairs, Boston University.

