

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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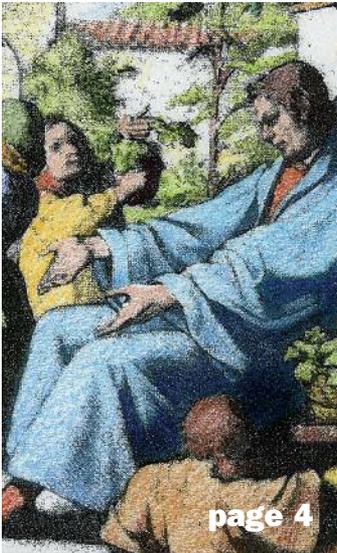
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4 The Family: A Place of Refuge

By Dr. Gene Edward Veith, Director of the Cranach Institute, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

The home, at its best, is a refuge, a place where both children and adults can find a haven from the world, with all of its conflicts and politics, a place of love and acceptance and security, in marked contrast to the dog-eat-dog atmosphere that has become common from the workplace to the pecking orders of the school social scene.

7 The Family: A Place of Healing

By Dr. Beverly K. Yahnke, Executive Director of Christian Counseling Services, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

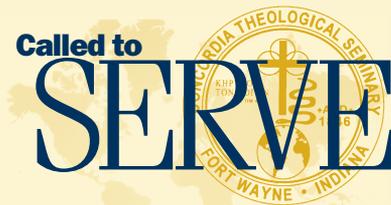
So what has become of the faithful family our Lord intended for His children to inhabit? Has the healing family, a place of teaching, comfort, and refuge become nothing more than an enigma for postmodern minds? Thanks be to God, the furor and froth of the culture may surround Christian families, but God's children are alive, well, rooted in Christ, and serving powerfully in their vocations.

10 The Family: A Place for Catechism

By the Rev. Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II, Dean of Pastoral Education and Placement, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Clearly Luther meant that this little book he was composing would have an honored and useful place in the Christian family. It was intended to be devotional, meaty but digestible, expressed in language that wasn't just for trained theologians but for fathers, mothers, and kids.

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The Family:

A Place of Healing

By Dr. Beverly K. Yahnke

The curators of today's culture may regard the Christian family as a quaint artifact of simpler times. In some circles, the Christian family has been characterized as culturally inept, a collection of intolerant people who will not embrace relativism and who would deny social freedoms to others. Admittedly, the Christian family cannot endorse many of the reckless social agendas nor condone some of the political mischief being made in these volatile days. Perhaps that is why a variety of pundits charged that the Christian family is out of step with the times, preempting man's natural desire to live life fully and freely.

It is remarkably tempting to reach up to the mantel, dust off the familiar Norman Rockwell portraits, and embark upon a heartwarming discussion of all that is good, right, and salutary about the Christian family. Perhaps, though, it is more important to note that the presence of each Christian family throughout our land constitutes a crucial, counter-cultural movement of enormous import and influence.

Even in these diversity-welcoming, "tolerant" times not many appear interested in hearing a genuine Christian response to the postmodern world's criticisms of the Christian life. So the myth persists that Christian families are domestic anachronisms which cling to archaic rules, rituals, and to one another. The pagan world misunderstands our reality—we cling with joy to the cross of Jesus Christ in living faith, enjoying extravagant blessings with hearts made new to live each day according to the will of our Father. The Christian family has life and has it abundantly!

It is remarkably tempting to reach up to the mantel, dust off the familiar Norman Rockwell portraits, and embark upon a heartwarming discussion of all that is good, right, and salutary about the Christian family. Perhaps, though, it is more important to note that the presence of each Christian family throughout our land constitutes a crucial, counter-cultural

movement of enormous import and influence. The Christian family must remain a place of healing and teaching, especially in these days when so many still grapple with the simplest tasks, such as defining what “family” actually means.

A third-grade boy offered this definition of the word, *family*. “A family has a mom and a dad, but they don’t have to live together, though. The kids do have to know that their mom and dad love them, even if their parents hate each other or are divorced. That’s what a family is.” The conventional wisdom of children has been changing in alarming ways. We wag our heads sadly, realizing that even the littlest ones are no longer safe from our culture’s tragic moral devolution. Some of our children observe “families” comprised of people sharing rent, food, and bedrooms without benefit of love or matrimony. In the minds of some children, a “family” is just a word for people with whom you live.

In an astonishing display of loving mercy, God receives children into His family through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Pagan souls washed in water with the Word are reborn and adopted as children of our gracious Heavenly Father, equipped by the Spirit to receive in faith the life-giving gifts of Christ’s conquest over sin, death, and Satan as well. In baptism we put on Christ, live in Him and He in us, so that in His name all we do, all we see, all that we think and say are the doings, vision, thoughts, and words of Christ Himself. We dare not miss the miracle and the promise: God gives us everything that is required of us to meet the challenge of every task facing the Christian family.



Apparently it is not only the children who have difficulty with the definition of family. As a result of relentless political advocacy and tireless media campaigns, many have now come to imagine that our nation’s insistence on equal rights ensures unlimited entitlements for homosexuals to create “families” and to adopt children. A June 2003 Gallup Poll reported that six in ten Americans now believe that gay sex should be legal. The grim news is that shortly after we poll, we vote to legislate whatever warped truth has caught the fancy of the majority. Christians understand that voting may legalize sin, but even a landslide majority vote will never absolve the sinner. The highest court of Massachusetts ruled recently that same-gender marriages were constitutional. We could have predicted that the media and some political ne’er-do-wells would err in this matter. Nevertheless, it was devastating to discover that even our brothers in the far reaches of the church on earth, who lack a clear confession and teaching, have also come to endorse gay marriage and gay families.

So what has become of the faithful family our Lord intended for His children to inhabit? Has the healing family, a place of teaching, comfort, and refuge become nothing more than an enigma for postmodern minds? Thanks be to God, the furor and froth of the culture may surround Christian families, but God’s children are alive, well, rooted in Christ, and serving powerfully in their vocations. God’s baptized children are living witnesses to real truth and real life lived in accordance with God’s will, as we serve God in our neighbor.

So, how is it that these families can remain the epicenter for healing and teaching in the midst of such cultural mayhem? What are the tasks of the Christian family in these days? And, just what is it that requires healing and teaching?

God’s Holy Word is given us to answer precisely these kinds of questions. There is no point in identifying the tasks of the Christian family until we are confident that God has equipped us thoroughly for the doing of His will, that which is pleasing to Him. Not only has our Lord given us the gift of earthly families, He ensures that His children will be partakers in a divine and eternal inheritance. In an astonishing display of loving mercy, God receives children into His family through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Pagan souls washed in water with the Word are reborn and adopted as children of our gracious Heavenly Father, equipped by the Spirit to receive in faith the life-giving gifts of Christ’s conquest

over sin, death, and Satan as well. In baptism we put on Christ, live in Him and He in us, so that in His name all we do, all we see, all that we think and say are the doings, vision, thoughts, and words of Christ Himself. We dare not miss the miracle and the promise: God gives us everything that is required of us to meet the challenge of every task facing the Christian family.

Confident that God’s own Spirit will equip His children to prevail against cultural assaults, parents must ensure that each lesson taught in the Christian family is rich in love, trust, obedience, and mercy. One must trust to receive love; one must trust to give love. The gifts given us by our Father are the gifts that He would have us give our children: love, mercy, and an invitation to know and trust Him, relying upon Him for all things. As parents teach the catechism patiently to their

children, little ones learn that God gives every good gift, including the gift of parents whom they are to honor and obey. Even the smallest ones learn, by grace, that just as their earthly father will guide, guard, uphold, and love them, their Heavenly Father's love and gifts are even grander.

Yet, we are witnessing in these days an epidemic of people who do not know what it means to give or to receive love, tenderness, or mercy. These people are among the most tragic of souls, often wounded early in life. Not a few souls are bereft of trust and affection, never given essential opportunities to understand the satisfaction and safety that comes from early, gentle lessons which teach loving obedience and mercy.

Deprived of love, they heal with scars of resentment, suspicion, and a powerful desire to meet their own needs and serve their own purposes. Saturation with self is rampant. Our culture's vocabulary betrays the narcissism that is everywhere around us. Many are self-absorbed, consumed with the journey towards self-esteem and self-actualization. Very rarely do the loveless have a clue about being self-sacrificing and *selfless*, willing to see, to hear, or to serve others. Such souls wander away from God and family, flaunting their prodigal status with a bitterness that repels love, living in rebellion and all the while defying rescue and remedy.

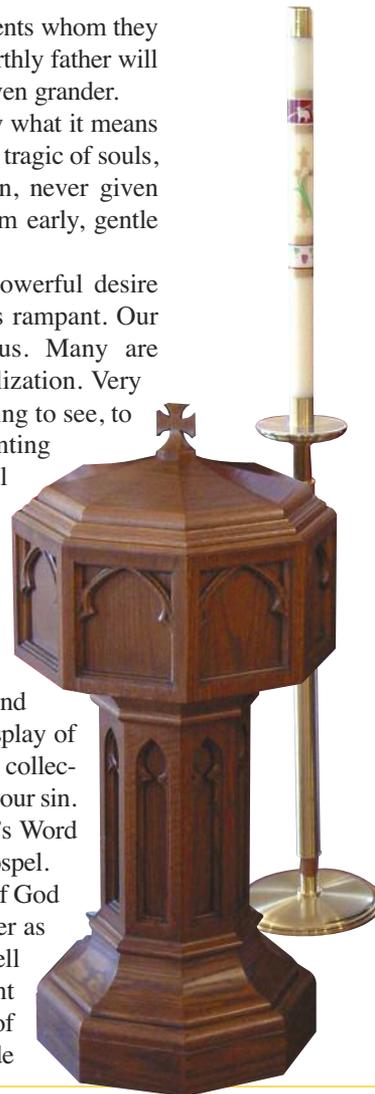
Yet we dare not become smug and self-satisfied, looking with pity or contempt at politicians, media personalities, individuals, or families who have failed to teach, or who have yet to learn the lessons of love, trust, mercy, and godly obedience. If we're honest, we'll admit that even well intentioned Christian parents and children daily sin much. Divine evidence offered in Genesis makes clear that ever since the crunch of the apple in the Garden, we share with all mankind in God's judgment of our first parents' sin. No exhibition of determination or display of will, nor strength of anyone's character is sufficient to trump our sinful nature. No collection of idolatries, not even money, achievement, or intellect can preempt or forgive our sin. For when the soul is wounded, only God's healing will do. The healing of God's Word brings us first to His judgment, then to His grace—first to His Law, then to His Gospel.

As mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters we all have fallen short of the glory of God and have not loved Him with our whole hearts, and we have not loved each other as we love ourselves. We each bear the wounds of the sins we have committed, as well as the wounds left by those who have sinned against us. No trite self-improvement sermon or video will remedy the guilt, the soul-felt disappointment and shame of being angry with our child, resenting or raging at our spouse, or failing to provide lessons of obedience and mercy for our children. None of us has mastered the gift of loving as we ought. That awareness is a gift of the Spirit of God, who calls, gathers, and enlightens us, revealing our sin so that we may repent and receive the blood-stained gifts won at the cross.

Receiving Christ's healing gifts is essential to each individual within the Christian family, and only Christ's gifts can sustain the Christian family. We have a Savior who has dwelled in human flesh, who has known what it means to sorrow, to grieve, to feel hurt and shame. As the sinless Son of God He promised that we will never be alone, whoever we are and whatever we have done. All of our sin, sorrow, grief, hurt, and shame has been borne by Christ on the cross, to be buried forever in His tomb. We eagerly take possession of the promise that there is always healing for us in Jesus Christ. In His Word of absolution and in His Holy meal we receive God's stunning Word of forgiveness; we receive the Life of Christ.

In Christ, we can begin each new day with confidence, eager to take on the tasks of love and learning required by our families. We take heart, knowing that by faith we are made whole in Christ's redeeming love. We need never live in fear, we live in hope. And the Christian family, redeemed, sanctified, and sustained by God will continue to be an unabashed voice of truth and a witness to God's love for all the wounded souls and prodigals who, by grace, may yet find comfort and healing in the body of Christ.

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