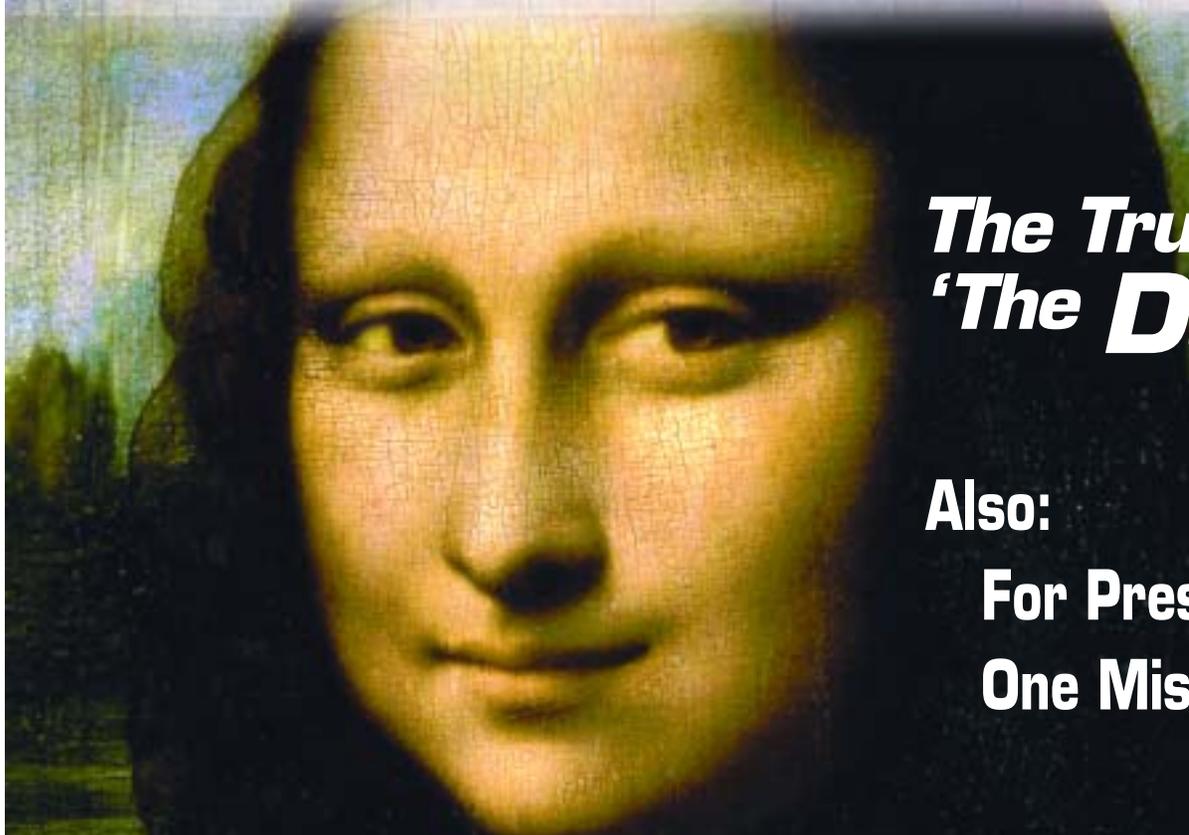


The Lutheran WITNESS

MAY 2004

VOL. 123 NO. 5



***The Truth about
'The DaVinci
Code'***

Also:

For President...

One Mission: Ablaze!



The Lutheran WITNESS

A MAGAZINE FOR THE LAYPEOPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

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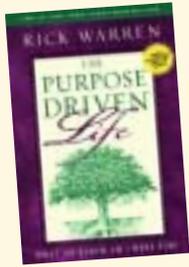
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Photo courtesy Yvonne Batson

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'The Purpose Driven Life'

I appreciate that your article about *The Purpose Driven Life* was not replete with scathing criticism.

Rev. Mark Goble
Memphis, Tenn.

THANKS FOR THE POSITIVE TREATMENT of Rick Warren's book ("A Look at *The Purpose Driven Life*," April '04). Pastor Paul Naumann does a good job of providing a critical lens while maintaining the essential value of the book. Very refreshing!

As for Prof. John Pless' sidebar comments, I wish he would have used "alongside of" or "in addition to" rather than suggesting "alternatives" when recommending other books. Let's thank God for members of God's family like Mel Gibson and Rick Warren who help to keep Christ visible in the wider public. God help more of us to do the same!

Rev. Dr. Rick Meyer
Dallas, Texas

THE PASTORS OF OUR CHURCH BODY ARE well trained to rightly divide the Word of Truth. They are able to help their members grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. Under such evangelical pastoral leadership, the laity, though exposed to other Christian literature like *The Purpose Driven Life*, will also employ the wise course of adapting and adopting in accordance with the Lutheran understanding of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. I was pleased to see that the April article employed this judicious way of helping readers to decide for themselves how they might deal with Christian literature that is not particularly Lutheran.

Dr. Paul Bramstedt
Belleville, Ill.

WHY IS *THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE* SO popular? I believe it is because many American Christians are purposeless. They know that God has saved

them. They know they are to live as redeemed children of God, but they don't know how to do it. What Rick Warren does is give them some foundational principles and some suggestions in an easy-to-read book.

Yes, because of his Reformed or Baptist background, he's not quite correct with some of his statements, but the main points of the book are something that we as Confessional Lutherans too can embrace. Perhaps what is needed is a Lutheran study guide for the book. The book is worth reading.

Paul F. Hein
Loveland, Colo.

YOU PUT INTO WORDS SOME OF THE same concerns I have for this book. On the surface of it, it is good. But, it seems to leave the reader thinking, "Have I done enough?" I've tried to tell friends who think this book is so good that they need to be careful and remember that we do good things *because of what Christ did for us*—not to gain His favor.

Thank you for the very insightful article about this book. With this insight, one can read this book and gain good things from it, but not forget that it's not what I do, it's what Christ did for me.

Ellen Machemer
Stevensville, Mich.

Faith and politics

THANK YOU FOR PRINTING PASTOR Frerking's "Religion and Public Policy" ("In My Opinion," March '04). Out of fear or ignorance or, dare we say, unwillingness to invest the time and money, many of us have avoid-

ed helping candidates and organizations that are bravely taking public stands against evils like abortion and so-called "gay marriage," and for the freedom of children to have their faith in public schools. We buy into the nonsense of "separation of church and state," watch a good candidate or ballot initiative go down by a few votes, and then wonder why our laws and public officials can be so rotten.

I am a physician who is also a Christian. Do Christians want their doctors someday to be forced by law to refer a woman for abortion if that is what she demands? Do Christians want their pastors to face jail if he refuses to marry two men? Do not laugh. The law and judges' opinions are clearly leading in this direction.

I pray that as individuals and a church we do not remain silent, not voting and inactive in the face of political forces that can cause great human suffering. Thank you, Pastor Frerking, for pointing out that if Christian religious beliefs are not influencing the political process, some other system of belief will be there to fill the vacuum.

Dr. Richard C. Heckmann
Lowell, Ark.

I WANT TO THANK *THE LUTHERAN Witness* for printing the most cogent, sensible reply to those who criticize people (usually elected officials) for "injecting ... personal religious beliefs into public policy initiatives." And what a blessing it is to know that Pastor Frerking's reply also appeared in a secular newspaper, the *Columbia (Mo.) Daily Tribune*! My prayer is that those who are critical of "religious convictions" would see just how ridiculous they are!

Meredith Berg
North Hudson, Wis.

Easter hope

I WANT TO THANK DR. JEFFREY GIBBS for the excellent and much needed article on the Resurrection (“Our Faith, Our Funerals, Our Future,” April '04). One sentence especially bears repeating: “At funerals, let us comfort one another in the face of death with the words of Easter hope and the promise of bodily resurrection.”

*Rev. Dan Dierks
Schererville, Ind.*

More passion

I'M A VIETNAM VETERAN AND HAVE SEEN a lot of things. I recently retired after 28 years as a correctional officer. I was used as a state's witness for an execution. So I know a *little* about the fundamental process of taking human life.

After we saw Mel Gibson's “The Passion of the Christ,” I felt I needed to go somewhere and decompress. The violence in the movie left me shaking and numb. I read the account once again in Scripture and the imagery started to click. Sermons are much more relevant now. Today I face the question that I've often avoided. I breathe deeply and quietly ask myself, “What exactly does Jesus mean to me?”

Jesus is the telephone call in the execution chamber that halts the execution, releases the prisoner, and expunges *all* records. Jesus is the Court of Last Resort. Jesus is my only hope. It's the realization that screams, without Jesus, I haven't got a prayer.

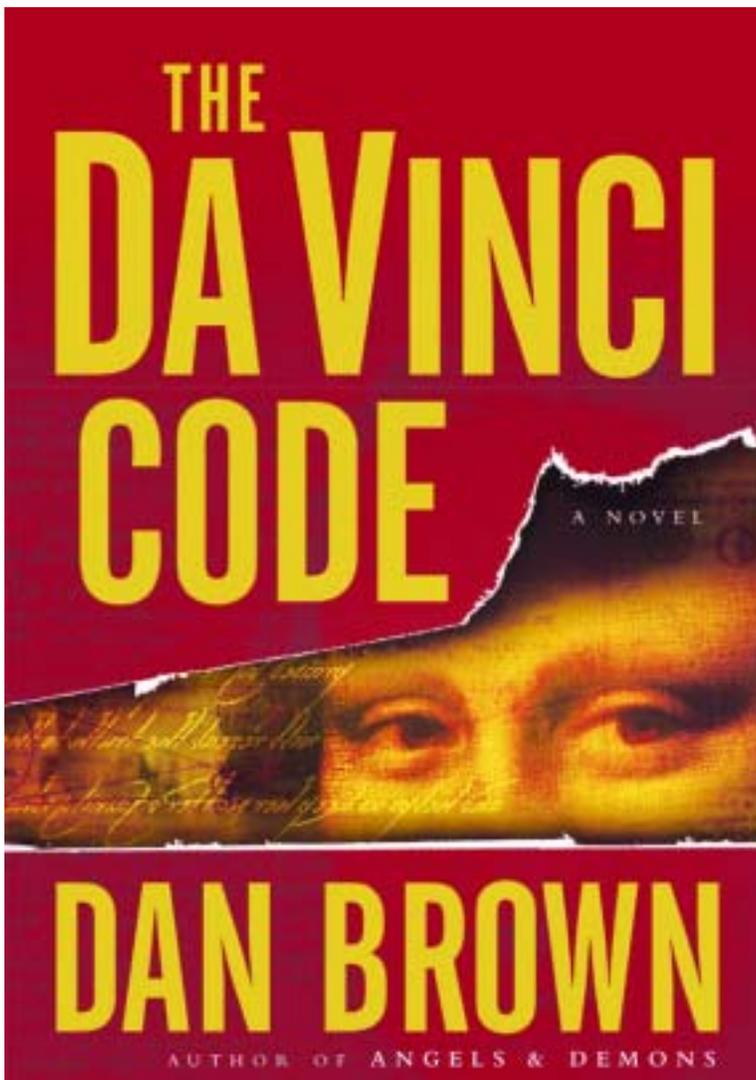
What does Jesus mean to you?

*David Burford
Kirkwood, Mo.*

Correction

The author for the April “Family Counselor” column was incorrectly identified. The column was written by Dr. Leslie Fyans, not by Dr. William B. Knippa. We apologize for the error.

THE TRUTH ABOUT



Dan Brown's novel is built on a foundation of historical error and ancient heresy.

time documentary on the ABC television network this past November. According to recent cover stories in *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*, the book has triggered a nationwide wave of interest in ancient gnostic writings and in the pseudo-scholarship on which *The Da Vinci Code* is based. Gnosticism was a heretical movement that promised salvation through an occult of secret knowledge (*gnosis*). They claimed this knowledge was revealed to them alone.

The disheartening truth is that many people are reading *The Da Vinci Code* and accepting its specious claims as at least possible, if not altogether true. And while *The Da Vinci Code* has been on bookstore shelves for more than a year, it is destined to be the subject of conversation for many months to come.

Columbia Pictures recently acquired the rights to turn the book into a major motion picture in 2005. Christians should arm themselves therefore with the Gospel they know to be true and be prepared to expose *The Da Vinci Code* for what it is—an inaccurate attack on Christianity and a denial of our Lord Jesus Christ.

by Brent McGuire

The extraordinary success of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* demonstrates that Jesus Christ remains a scandal and a stumbling block to the very world for which He died and rose.

The mystery novel, which has sold more than 6.5 million copies in 40 languages, depends for its suspense on the plausibility of the theory that Jesus of Nazareth preached and practiced goddess worship, married Mary Magdalene, and before His death bequeathed to her the queenship of the earthly kingdom He was unable to claim during His earthly life.

As ludicrous as the premise is, the bestselling book has received a lot of serious attention, including a prime-

The Plot

The Da Vinci Code begins with the murder of an art curator at the Louvre. Robert Langdon, an expert on ancient symbols and the book's hero, arrives on the scene to make sense of clues left by the deceased. Langdon and the curator's granddaughter, a cryptographer named Sophie Neveu, are soon on a hunt to find the murderer while having to elude both the Paris police (who suspect Langdon himself of the murder) and an albino assassin working for Opus Dei (a reclusive Roman Catholic sect).

Langdon and Neveu solicit the expertise of Langdon's friend Leigh Teabing, an historian who reveals that the curator's murder is part of a grand conspiracy stretching back 2,000 years to the founding of Christianity. Jesus,

Teabing explains, was merely a mortal descendant of David who sought to claim His rightful kingship over Israel and to inaugurate a religion of the “sacred feminine.” (The religion’s central teaching is that the female body is holy, and worship practices include ritual fornication.)

Although thwarted in His attempt to claim the Jewish throne, Jesus was survived by the children He had by wife Mary Magdalene. Their descendants included Leonardo da Vinci, who concealed in his artwork the truth about Jesus and Mary’s marriage and the goddess religion that they founded; hence the “da Vinci code.”

Also, according to the novel, the fourth-century church sought to supplant the feminist message of early Christianity and declared as heretics all who professed the “true” message of the “sacred feminine.” In the face of persecution by the patriarchal and marriage-hating Roman Catholic Church, the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and certain others entrusted with the truth formed a secret fraternity called the Priory of Sion, which, against all odds, has survived into the present day—the Masonic Lodge is one of its present-day cells.

This story also tells us that over the years, the Priory of Sion passed down the truth about Jesus and Mary Magdalene through the legend of the Holy Grail, which refers not to the chalice that Jesus used at the Last Supper but to Mary Magdalene herself, whose womb is the receptacle or “chalice” of the royal blood. The murdered curator, it turns out, belonged to the Priory of Sion and was a descendant of Jesus and Mary. The clues he left, including the interpretive key to da Vinci’s paintings, were intended to convey to his granddaughter the message that she too belonged to the lineage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.



Mary Magdalene by El Greco, SuperStock

The evidence

A dust jacket blurb provided by *The New York Daily News* says, “[Brown’s] research is impeccable.” Such a statement is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the author goes the many pages of the middle, expository chapters without making a *single correct* historical statement. In the novel, the fictional historian Teabing begins with a lesson on the Bible’s origin. He says, “More than 80 gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them.” However, we know that in the history of the Church, there were always and only these four Gospels that were universally accepted. In light of the literacy rates at the time, the claim that more than 80 gospels were written, much less considered for inclusion in the Christian Bible, is absurd. Moreover, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not *among* the Gospels included in the

Mary Magdalene is described by the Gospels as being present at both the crucifixion of Jesus and the empty tomb on the morning of His Resurrection. The Bible doesn’t reveal much more about her. Dan Brown has his character, Teabing, say that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ wife.

Scriptural canon—they are the *only* Gospels.

Teabing goes on to say that the decision as to which books were to be considered canonical was made by Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea in 325. This too is false. We find already in A.D. 188 Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, writing, “I take it that there are neither more nor fewer than these four Gospels.”

Because of competing accounts both of Christ’s life and the message of salvation, the earliest Christians looked to writings whose apostolic authorship or apostolic endorsement was unquestioned. By the year 200, the church had already come to recognize what we today call

the Bible, distinguishing between those texts written by apostles and those that were not.

The Da Vinci Code, however, claims that “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike.”

A dust jacket blurb provided by The New York Daily News says, “[Brown’s] research is impeccable.” Such a statement is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the author goes the many pages of the middle, expository chapters without making a single correct historical statement.

First, as we have seen, Constantine did not commission a new Bible—the canon of New Testament Scriptures had already been received by the church.

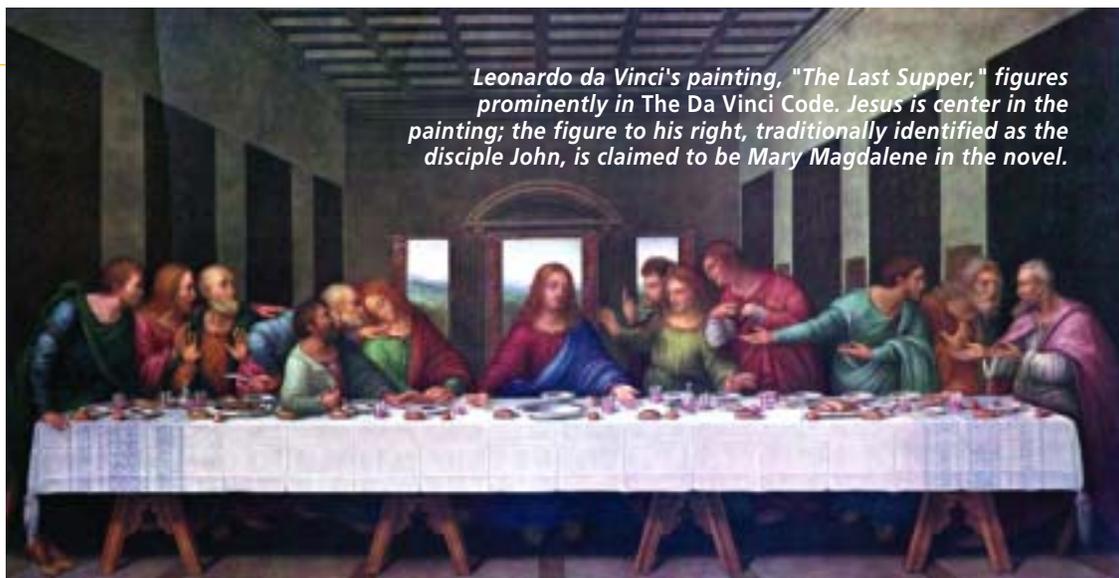
Second, the gnostic “gospels” that Brown favors did not by and large emphasize Christ’s human traits but rather His supernatural characteristics. Part of the gnostic heresy was a disdain for all earthly or material things and a belief that salvation involved an eternal release of the soul from the body’s prison. The Gospels of the Evangelists, on the other hand, not only speak of Christ’s divinity but report that Jesus Christ ate, slept, wept, died and rose again *in the flesh*.

Third, the gnostic gospels that the church rejected were not written earlier but actually much later than the Biblical Gospels. The earliest gnostic gospel, the so-called “Gospel of Thomas,” was written at least 100 years after Christ’s ascension—and certainly not by the apostle Thomas.

The book continues, “Until [325], Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. Jesus’ establishment as ‘the Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea ... a relatively close vote at that.”

In truth, Christians have always believed and confessed, even at their peril, that Jesus is Lord, God and Savior. From the earliest to the latest book

Leonardo da Vinci's painting, "The Last Supper," figures prominently in *The Da Vinci Code*. Jesus is center in the painting; the figure to his right, traditionally identified as the disciple John, is claimed to be Mary Magdalene in the novel.



Part of Dan Brown’s analysis of Leonardo da Vinci’s works includes the belief that he painted the *Mona Lisa* as an androgynous self-portrait, the perfect blending of the human male and female roles. This, then indicates that Jesus would require a female counterpart who would make Him complete. In the novel, that woman was Mary Magdalene. The majority of art historians agree the portrait has nothing to do with androgyny, but is simply a masterful painting of an Italian lady.

(which still predates the earliest gnostic writing by 48 years) the entire New Testament testifies to Jesus being the Son of God. The controversy at Nicea was not over Jesus as the Son of God—all parties agreed on that—but rather over the presbyter Arius’ contention that there was a time when the Son of God was not. The vote at the Council of Nicea was hardly close—298 in favor of the words “very God of very God” and “being of one substance with the Father” and only two against.

One other claim made by *The Da Vinci Code*, that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and with her founded a religion of the “sacred feminine,” rests on an ambiguous passage in the gnostic Gospel of Philip, written no earlier than 138—more than 100 years after Christ’s ascension and well after the apostle Philip’s death.

Interestingly, Brown fails to discuss the aforementioned Gospel of Thomas, which belongs to the same family of writings that Brown claims advance a goddess religion. Its last words read:

“Simon Peter said to [Jesus’ disciples], ‘Let Mary [Magdalene] leave us, because women are not worthy of life.’

“Jesus said, ‘Look, I shall lead her so that I will make her male in order that she also may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

As magazine columnist Sandra Miesel observes, “That’s certainly an odd way to ‘honor’ one’s spouse or exalt the status of women.”

Other “Facts”

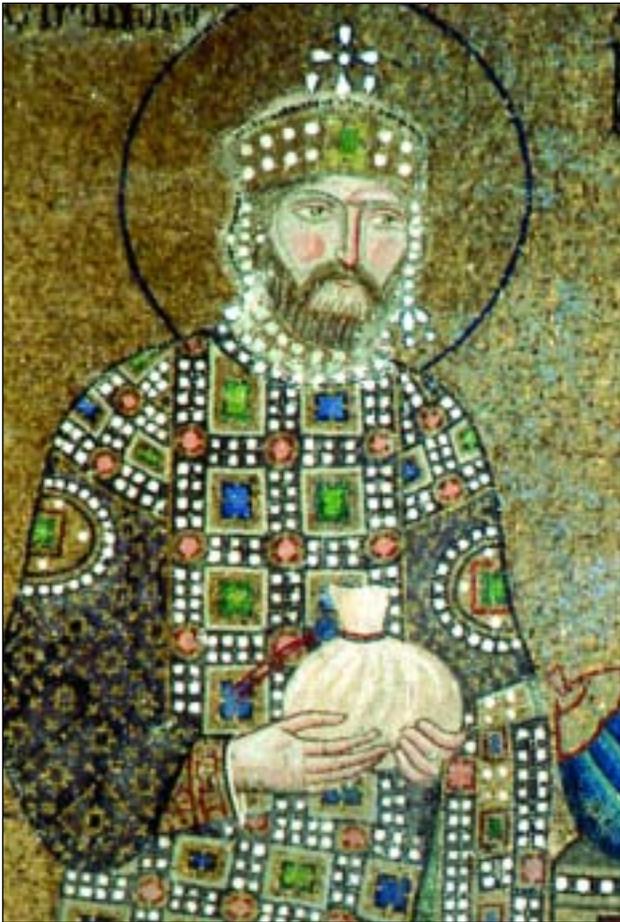
The rest of the book contains enough factual errors and logical inconsistencies to fill this entire issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. Brown elsewhere misstates the etymology of “Jehovah” (getting it exactly backward), incorrectly states the derivation of “heretic” (the word is Greek, not Latin, in origin and was used well before 325 to mean “faction” or “sect,” not simply “choice”),

DIGGING DEEPER INTO 'DA VINCI'

and contends that the Lord's Supper is a Christian expropriation of an Aztec ritual (how first-century Palestinians came into contact with 12th-century Aztecs he doesn't bother to explain).

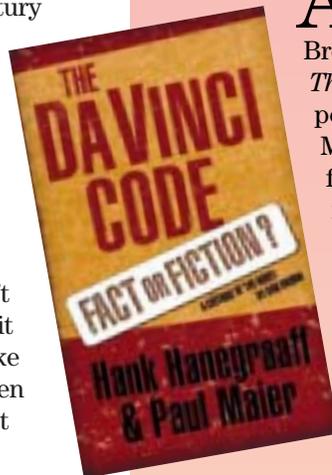
Also patently false is the claim that accounts of Jesus' ministry were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran in the 1950s. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947 and contain no texts that speak of Jesus of Nazareth.

Someone may say, "Putting all that aside, isn't the book still an exciting whodunit?" This is a bit like, "Besides that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the play?" At some point the effectiveness of even an otherwise suspenseful murder mystery is lost when nearly every statement of fact is wrong.



In A.D. 325, Roman emperor Constantine called a council of bishops to settle a debate as to whether Jesus was equal to the Father—not, as stated in *The Da Vinci Code*, to invent a new doctrine of the divinity of Christ, the council favored the words "one in being with the Father" by a vote of 298 to 2—a vote that the novel states was "relatively close." The council at Nicea also did not determine which writings about Christ would be kept in the Bible and which would be rejected, as stated in the novel.

SuperStock



Are you interested in a more thorough study of the claims presented by Dan Brown through his fictional characters in *The Da Vinci Code*—claims about the possible marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, how the Biblical canon was formalized, why other "gospels" were rejected and Leonardo Da Vinci's secret clues?

Perhaps you have a friend or relative—Christian or non-Christian—who is confused or misled by the wild assertions presented as "fact" through Brown's best-selling novel. And when the sure-to-be-a-blockbuster movie is released next year,

many more millions of people will be debating what is fact, what is fiction, and what is fiction disguised as fact.

This can be a serious opportunity for Christians to witness to the truth.

If you want more than this *Lutheran Witness* article can provide, then you may want to read *The Da Vinci Code—Fact or Fiction?* by Dr. Paul L. Maier and Hank Hanegraaff. This book tackles these issues with historical facts as well as Biblical teachings.

Maier is the fourth vice president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is a professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo. He is a widely recognized expert on the historical, geographical and archaeological background of the Bible.

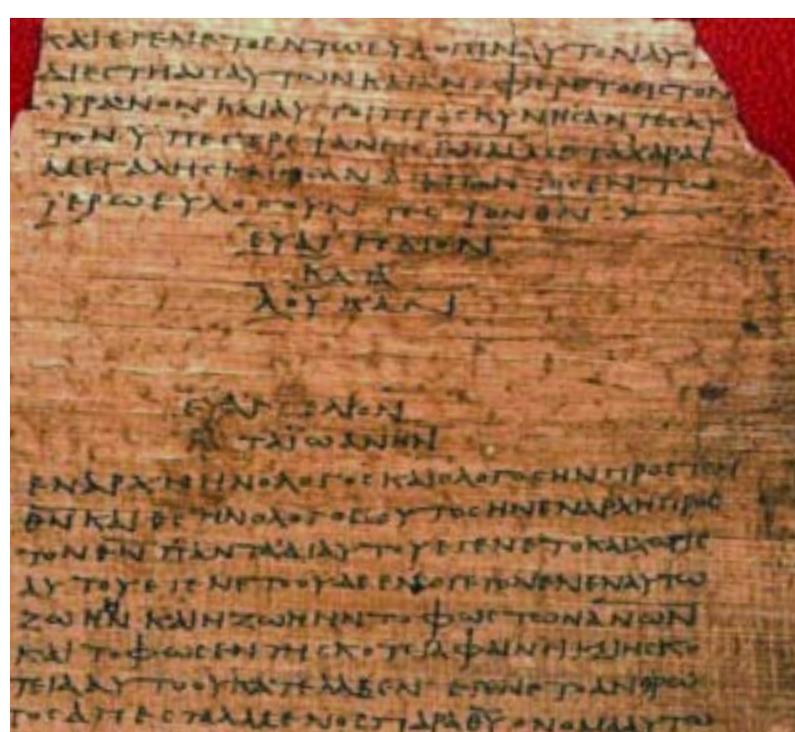
In the book, to be released this month by Tyndale Press, Maier writes:

"You might call this 'The Jesus game,' and here is how it is played: You begin with a general sketch of Jesus on the basis of the Gospels, but then distort it as much as you please. ... Paint in a bizarre background, add episodes in to the life of Christ that could not possibly have happened, and if the surviving Jesus still resembles anything in the New Testament, you lose. But if you come up with a radically different—above all, sensational—portrait of Jesus, you win. The prizes are maximum coverage in the nation's print and broadcast media, frowns from the faithful, but plaudits from everyone else."

After a detailed debunking of the *The Da Vinci Code*'s phony "facts," Maier offers this parting thought to Christians who read it or eventually see the movie: "Several times in his novel Brown [writes], 'Everyone loves a conspiracy.' One can only hope that, at the end of the day, everyone has a final, higher love for the truth."

— Don Folkemer
Managing Editor

MAY 2004



A fourth-century Coptic text of the gnostic "Gospel of Thomas" was discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. Through his fictional "experts," novelist Dan Brown presents many long-disproved theories and heresies as accepted facts, including mutually contradictory teachings in the "gnostic gospels."

Irony

Behind the phenomenal falseness of *The Da Vinci Code* is an irony. Dan Brown has helped spark interest in the teachings of the first- and second-century gnostics. Brown claims that the church persecuted these "true followers of Christ" and went to great lengths to suppress their writings.

Until recently, however, the best way to learn about early gnostic teachings was to read Christian authors, such as the apostles Paul and John, Tertullian, Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Mindful of Christ's words, "For there is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed, nor secret that shall not be made known," Irenaeus undertook to expose the ridiculous and mutually contradictory teachings of the gnostics in his day. Rather than a caricature of their opponents, and other early Christians' representations of gnostic beliefs have been shown to match well with the gnostics' actual writings that have come to light in recent textual discoveries.

The fact is, the gnostics themselves are responsible for the dearth of public material about their beliefs. They were a "mystery" religion that thrived on secrecy. The word "gnostic" refers to their belief that salvation is a matter of receiving "hidden knowledge." Their private meetings, secret handshakes and levels of initiation are not the desperate measures of a persecuted sect but are the religious trappings of a society whose teachings are meant to remain secret. The Masonic Lodge is the modern torchbearer for ancient gnosticism.

The irony of *The Da Vinci Code* is that it has helped make popular an intentionally secret religion. In a

strange twist, Dan Brown has made a mint bringing to light a body of literature the authors of which—and for good reason—never wanted publicly disseminated.

What a contrast to the faith into which believers in Christ have been baptized! Jesus' disciples do not keep their light under a bushel but brandish it openly as a light for the world (Matt. 5:5; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33). The Gospel of Christ is described as a "mystery" by Paul, but one that is to be "brought to light for everyone" (Eph. 3:3, 6, 9). "We proclaim Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom" (Col. 1:28). "What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light; what you hear in the ear, preach from the rooftops," Jesus commands (Matt. 10:27).

Conclusion

The apostle Paul dealt with an early form of the gnostic heresies in his letters to the Christians at Colossae and Ephesus. In them, he stresses the divinity of Christ ("the image of the invisible God," "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of trespasses") as well as the goodness of creation ("For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth") over against the gnostic teaching that Jesus was less than the one true God and the view that matter is inherently evil (Col. 1:15–16; Eph. 1:7).

Scripture talks of Jesus' marriage—not to Mary Magdalene but to the church (Matthew 25, Mark 2, Luke 5, Ephesians 5). Christ's commitment to the church is an exclusive one. He did not love Mary Magdalene as a husband. He loved her and the rest of the church as their Savior, "giving Himself for it that He might cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church" (Eph. 5:25–27).

And, over against Brown's portrayal of gnosticism's esteem of marriage, it was the Christians who regarded matrimony as holy and who repudiated the gnostic prohibition of marriage as a "teaching of demons" (1 Tim. 4:3).

The challenge *The Da Vinci Code* poses to Christianity is neither new nor formidable. Christians need not fear the publication or success of such a book. As in the case of the church's first battle with gnosticism, the light of our risen Lord Jesus Christ has power even today to dispel the darkness of *The Da Vinci Code*.



Brent McGuire is currently working on his dissertation toward a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He is a member of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Dallas.

FATHERS OF FAITH

Last May, Rev. Grant Bode provided a Bible study titled “Mothers of Faith” for Mother’s Day. This year, Father’s Day is June 20; however, the June Lutheran Witness will be dedicated to other subjects, so we are providing this Bible study a bit early. —Ed.

by Grant Bode

Today I bought a baseball glove. I haven’t owned a baseball glove since high school. I haven’t thrown a baseball since who knows when. But today I threw a baseball. Why? My 7-year-old boy, Gideon, has discovered the joy of throwing and swinging at a baseball. I know it sounds so cliché—dads, boys (and girls) and baseball. But what can I say ... I am a father.

This father-son activity motivated me to read about the role of a father in the Bible. A father was to be a teacher and example to his children. He was to teach them first and foremost about God, His commandments and His love. And he was to teach his son a trade by which to be honest and industrious.

Jesus also teaches us much about being a good father. He told the powerful parable of the prodigal son in part to illustrate a father’s love. Read the story Jesus told in Luke 15:11–31. List the admirable qualities and virtues you see in the father of the story?

How did the father *show* that he loved his prodigal son? I found at least seven specific things he does to show his love.

The older son was angry. Why?

How did the father gently guide his older son into seeing his younger brother in a new light?

Taking this lesson to heart, how do you see these qualities working for fathers and their children in today’s American lifestyle? Think of specific situations you have faced as a parent or as a child.

The context of this parable is that Jesus was accused of welcoming sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:2). So in the parables of Chapter 15, Jesus depicts “lost souls” that by the grace of God come to be found. The father of the parable is God, our gracious and loving Father in heaven.

As men and fathers, what other qualities does Scripture speak of that we can put into practice? Read the following verses and write answers in your own words.

James 3:17 _____

Eph. 6:4 _____



Col. 3:21 _____

Fathers, take the time each day to tell your children you love them. And *show* your love for them as well. Share with them this lessons of Jesus’ parable and the story of Our Father’s love for all his children.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love (2 John 1:3).



Rev. Grant Bode is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Lester Prairie, Minn.

ONE MISSION—

There's a lot on tap when the Synod meets in convention July 10–15.

by David L. Mahsman



What difference does it make, really, that there's a Synod convention this summer?

"Generally, ... the demand is made upon our meeting—and, we must admit, with perfect justification—that it is not only to be beneficial for us personally, but that it also brings a blessing upon our congregations and the whole church."

These words of President C.F.W. Walther to the 1848 convention no doubt pertain also to the 2004 convention, which will convene July 10–15 in St. Louis. Representing the Synod's membership, some 1,200 voting delegates—half pastors, half laypeople—will gather under the theme, "One Mission—*Ablaze!* ... To the Ends of the Earth."

A mission theme

The current president, Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, quoted one of the constitutional objectives of the Synod when asked about the value of a convention: "The convention," he said, "strengthens congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and

extending that Gospel witness into all the world."

Indeed, the convention theme is a mission theme. "One Mission," a phrase taken from Kieschnick's stated vision for the Synod, refers to the work of Christ, who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "*Ablaze!*" is the initiative of LCMS World Mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. "To the ends of the earth" reflects the scope of the mission in words from Is. 49:6.

First Vice President Daniel Preus says that the underlying purpose of all the convention does "is the proclamation of the Gospel so that as many as possible—in our own churches and throughout the world—may hear of God's grace in our Savior Jesus Christ."

On the agenda

Convention business will include the election of the president (see Page 17), other officers and certain board and commission members. Resolutions will be adopted that will set the direction of the Synod for

the next three years and that will state the Synod's official position on various issues.

Resolutions will be prepared by eight floor committees, which will meet May 21–24 and again immediately before and during the convention. The committees will respond to "overtures"—proposed resolutions—submitted by congregations and various agencies of the Synod.

By the time this issue of *The Lutheran Witness* reaches you, these overtures will have been published in the *Convention Workbook*. For details, ask to see your congregation's copy. In very general terms, here are some of the more frequently raised issues, organized by the floor committees to which they have been assigned:

✝ Missions: Overtures include calls for affirmation of *Ablaze!*; endorsement for Kieschnick's "One Mission, One Message, One People" vision; and encouragement for inner-city, cross-cultural and immigrant ministries, and efforts to minister to "the world at our doorstep" and a "mission outpost."

✚ District and Congregational Services: Many of these address the “Lutheran Hymnal Project,” work on a new hymnal that was set in motion by the 1998 convention (see story, Page 21). Other overtures include encouragement to preach and teach creation, to seek an increase in the number of pastors for congregations, and to establish a new board expressly to support Lutheran schools.

✚ Theology and Church Relations: Included is a proposal to declare altar and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. Other overtures address issues raised following the participation of Atlantic District President David Benke in the post-9/11 “A Prayer for America” at Yankee Stadium. Homosexual relationships and same-sex unions, the theology of the divine call, and relationships with other Lutherans are addressed in other overtures.

✚ Program and Finance: There are various proposals for funding the Synod’s national and international work. Special attention is given by a number of overtures to funding for missions and church-work education, especially for seminary education.

✚ Higher Education: Proposals include establishing separate national boards for universities and seminaries; changing the way boards of regents are elected; decreasing the number of Concordia University System campuses; and affirming the need for two seminaries. A number of overtures seek to increase the number of Synod-certified teachers in schools operated by LCMS congregations.

✚ Human Care: Overtures would promote health and healing ministries; facilitate inclusive ministry with and to people with disabilities; seek to protect children and encourage “problem-pregnancy”

centers. A number also address the care of church workers—they deal with compensation issues, health-insurance and pension plans, and care for retired workers.

✚ Structure, Planning and Administration: The “longest” overture, in a sense at least, is a revision of the Synod’s Bylaws (to make them more “user friendly”). It requires its own separate volume in addition to the *Workbook* that handles all the others.

Representation at Synod conventions is addressed from various perspectives, including a proposal from the Commission on Structure that would have the 2007 convention consider a proposal that would allow every parish in the Synod to send two delegates to national conventions.

Probably never before has the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM), which interprets the Constitution and Bylaws, gotten so much attention in the *Convention Workbook*. Its opinions related to ecclesiastical supervision in the wake of the Benke/Yankee Stadium issue and others that define the authority of the Board of Directors drew both praise and criticism.

✚ Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution: Many, if not most, of the 58 overtures assigned to this floor committee also address issues that relate in one way or another to the Yankee Stadium event and the CCM, as well as procedures for filing and investigating complaints against members of the Synod.

But there’s more to a convention than elections and resolutions. The Synod’s Bylaws say, “The national convention of the Synod shall afford an opportunity for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information.”

This year, the convention will be preceded by a number of missions-related events, including a celebra-

tion of “Pentecost 2000+,” which encourages cross-cultural ministries; a “Mission Festival Celebration,” the “official” kickoff of *Ablaze!*; and a “Mission Semfest” at Concordia Seminary. Leaders of LCMS partner churches worldwide will be in St. Louis for a July 6–9 *Ablaze!* International Conference and will take part in the festivities.

Stay informed

There will be a number of ways to stay on top of convention news:

- *REPORTER Online*, the Synod’s news site, carries convention-related news now and will be updated throughout every day of the convention. Go to <http://reporter.lcms.org>.
- Convention stories also will be sent out via LCMSNews, a free e-mail news service. Sign up at www.lcms.org/enews.
- A special convention Web site offers information now and will include updates during the convention. That site is at www.lcms.org/convention.
- The August *Lutheran Witness* will feature a report on the convention. More news will be included in the August *Reporter*, the Synod’s official newspaper.

“As a lay member of an LCMS congregation, I would want to know what happens [at the convention] because this is ‘my’ church, this is the body of which my congregation is a member,” says Dr. Robert Kuhn, chairman of the Board of Directors. “I am a part of the LCMS, and the LCMS is a part of me.”



Rev. David L. Mahsman
is executive editor of
The Lutheran Witness.



FOR PRESIDENT...

The five men whose names will appear on the ballot this summer for president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod take note of the issues facing the church body today.

When some 1,200 voting delegates come together in St. Louis July 10–15 to do the work of the Synod in convention, one of their most important tasks will be to choose the man who will lead the church body for the next three years.

The Synod's congregations have nominated their choices to stand for election to the presidency. The five who received the most nominations and who allowed their names to stand will appear on the ballot for president.

To get a sense of how each of these five men might lead, *The Lutheran Witness* asked them two questions:

- ✚ What do you believe are the most critical issues facing The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod today?
- ✚ How should those issues be addressed over the next three years?

Here, in alphabetical order, are the five nominees and how each replied to those questions.

William R. Diekelman

Dr. William R. Diekelman, 57, is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Owasso, Okla., and president of the Synod's Oklahoma District.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has the privilege of serving God. We must accept His challenge to go and make disciples of all nations, using every resource available to accomplish this, our primary purpose. Indeed, we boldly proclaim in our mission statement that, "in grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments," our mission is "vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world."

While we must always guard our solid, Biblical doctrine, theology and confessional statements, we should also use them powerfully in our witness to the love of God for the world. God's Word and the Sacraments—His means of grace—are the powerful tools He has given us to rob hell of every soul Satan would claim. Through



their regular use, we will proclaim Christ crucified and raised again for the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

We are challenged in our 6,150 congregations in the United States, along with mission posts and partner churches around the world, to proclaim the Gospel in ways that nurture those within the family of God and reach out to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Organizations such as the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, the International Lutheran Laymen's League, and a wide range of Recognized Service Organizations offer the people of our congregations additional ways to become involved in day-to-day, hands-on Gospel ministry.

Our Synod's *Ablaze!* emphasis, which seeks to reach 100 million people around the world with the Gospel, encourages our congregations to find creative ways in their communities to invite people into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We know about sending missionaries into the world. Today God is making it easy for each of us to be a missionary as He sends the world to us.

Every one of us is valuable and necessary for the achievement of our stated mission.

We are sisters and brothers in Christ. Rather than trying to find fault with one another, pointing out each other's weaknesses, let's make our congregations places of spiritual wellness. Let's lift up and encourage one another so that we can demonstrate hope for the hopeless, health for the sin-sick, and healing in the name of Jesus Christ.

We need to nurture and strengthen our professional church workers at every level. Daily they need the prayers and encouragement of those through whom they have been called. Appropriate salaries and medical benefits are expensive, but so important to our church workers and their families.

The Concordia University System and our seminaries are strong centers of training and equipping. We thank God for the increasing ways these resources are used in our Synod, even as we probe still more diverse ways to use these institutions.

Funding the mission will always be a challenge. We will always use, for mission and ministry, all the

resources God gives us. Through a renewed emphasis on stewardship principles and diligent resource management, we should be able to use the ample wealth God has given us to accomplish our work around the world. Individuals, congregations and districts of the Synod must be challenged evangelically to own this mission and provide the necessary funds to do the work of the church.

We want our children and grandchildren to be brought up in congregations that celebrate our Gospel ministry. We have a responsibility to pass on to future generations what our parents have taught us about the mighty deeds of God.

Gerald B. Kieschnick

Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, 61, is completing his first term as president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

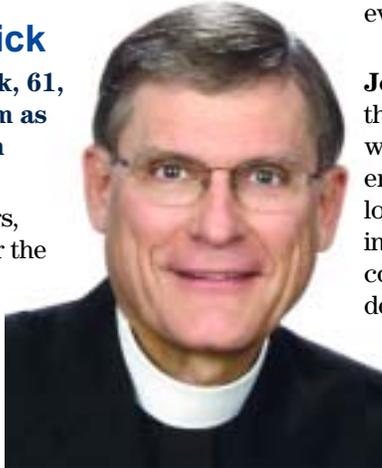
During the past three years, I have articulated a vision for the LCMS: **One Mission, One Message, One People.** These words address the most critical challenges facing our Synod.

• **One Mission—To Seek the Lost for Christ.**

“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Is. 49:6). The One Mission Christ has given, seeking those who are lost eternally without faith in Christ (Luke 19:10), must receive our highest priority. The eternal destiny of billions of people for whom Christ died is at stake! We have been strong leaders in mission around the world for more than a century, yet our Synod’s vital signs have weakened the past 30 years. Reaching non-Christians in a non-religious, multi-cultural world is our mission mandate from God, and it can be accomplished only by His grace and power. Continuation of *Ablaze!* and “Igniting Congregations” will encourage and resource lay leaders, members, pastors and educators for faithful, bold and courageous mission endeavors!

Congregations, districts, entities, institutions, auxiliaries and partner churches of the Synod share the joys and responsibilities of mission. It is critical that resources be aligned and coordinated, faithful leaders prepared through higher education, and Christ’s love demonstrated through human care. Providing adequate funding, accountability and coordination of these vital aspects of our work together must be addressed by synodical leaders, working together collegially and cooperatively!

• **One Message—Jesus Christ is the Savior of the World.** “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must



be saved” (Acts 4:12). We must maintain our strong confession of this fundamental truth, especially in an age of relativism and pluralism. We believe, teach and confess that “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice.” The glue that holds us together and defines us as Confessional Lutherans is the authority of Holy Scripture and the centrality of the Gospel. Both the preservation and the proclamation of this **One Message** are critical to our existence as a Synod and form the sole bases on which our mission and ministry are to be conducted. Faithful preaching and teaching, with patient, evangelical, ecclesiastical supervision, are crucial!

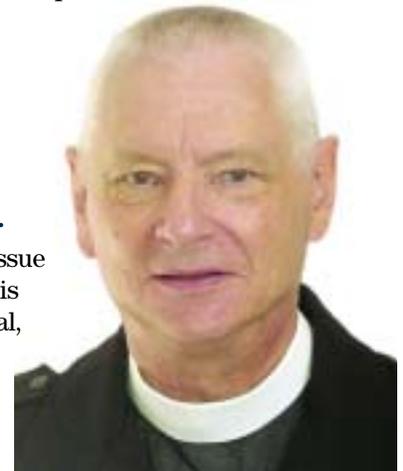
• **One People—United by God’s Love in Christ Jesus.** “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Sharing the Gospel with the unbelieving world requires that we come together as **One People**, in a spirit of humility and Christian love. As we face difficult issues in church and world, keeping our covenants of love will foster authentic harmony, collegial trust and genuine integrity in the LCMS. Pastoral decisions must be faithfully made and respectfully honored. We need to rediscover what it means to live together as a Synod and take steps to “stop the fighting” (Mission 21st Century Task Force Report).

Prayerfully and carefully we can address and resolve disagreements in doctrine and practice through extensive Scriptural and Confessional study. The Word of God and the Synod’s collective understanding of what it teaches on matters of faith and life must always be in harmony. Continuation and expansion of theological convocations initiated this past triennium will promote God-given unity. Pastors and lay leaders, with assistance from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and the Council of Presidents, will play a key role in helping our Synod live in peace, not in pieces!

Kurt E. Marquart

Dr. Kurt E. Marquart, 69, is associate professor of systematic theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

I. The single most crucial issue facing our Synod, in my view, is the progressive loss of spiritual, doctrinal unity. There is, for instance, the acceptance of evolution by some within the Concordia University System, and there is the neo-Pentecostalism of “Renewal in Missouri.” There is much confusion on the nature of the Gospel ministry. At one extreme there is the temporary “licensing” of ill-trained persons for



“Word and Sacrament ministry,” contrary to Augsburg Confession XIV. At the other, there is a clericalist elitism in the spirit of J.A.A. Grabau and Wilhelm Loehe, who opposed first LCMS President C.F.W. Walther’s position that the Gospel-preaching ministry is indeed a divine institution, but is “owned” by and accountable to Christ’s church or congregation. Interestingly enough, Loehe himself admitted that Walther’s position on church and ministry was exactly that of the great Reformer, Martin Luther! We desperately need to find our way back to that golden middle way of the Holy Scriptures and our Reformation heritage, which is in fact the historic and official position of our Synod.

A great obstacle to the honest facing of issues is the new doctrine put forward by the Commission on Constitutional Matters, in connection with the David Benke/Yankee Stadium case, that prior approval by one’s “ecclesiastical supervisor” exempts one from disciplinary action on Biblical and Confessional grounds. This is an intolerable return to pre-Reformation thinking. Our Confessions insist that no one may “allow the authority of any person to count for more than the Word” (“Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope”). Christians have the right and duty to appeal to the Word of God in all matters of dispute, and this right may not be squelched bureaucratically (see Gal. 2:11–21).

“Missions” may not be used as an excuse to sweep inconvenient issues of doctrine under the carpet. Our Synod will once again be a growing and genuinely missionary church if, by the grace of God, it returns to its true confession and stops trying to run in many contradictory directions at once, according to the wisdom of this world. Genuine healing can come only in and with the God-given truth, never in opposition or evasion of it!

II. We need to return to a churchly, theological way of thinking, rather than a bureaucratic one. To this end, it may be helpful to ask the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, in consultation with the two seminary faculties, to spell out the major theological problems facing our Synod, and to suggest suitable remedies. Or, if the official bodies are bureaucratically paralyzed, a special commission or task force of those clearly committed to our Synod’s official Biblical confession may need to be appointed. If necessary, a special convention of the Synod could be held just for the purpose of restoring doctrinal unity.

There are, of course, no quick or easy solutions. Any serious efforts to restore true unity to our Synod must be accompanied by fervent prayer to the Lord of the Church, who alone can grant the undeserved gift of unity in His holy truth. Such efforts must also involve earnest, fraternal and collegial consultation with all concerned, and not simply high-handed orders, decrees or ultimatums. If at all possible, persons of the wrong

persuasion must be won over, in faith and love. Division and exclusion are not starting points, but regrettable measures of last resort.

Daniel Preus

Rev. Daniel Preus, 55, is completing his first term as first vice president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

What would you like our church to look like five, 10 and 25 years from now?

I see a church that is vibrant in mission. I see a joyful church that is committed to the resolution of conflict through the study of God’s Word. I see a church open to those who hurt and suffer. I see a church in which every congregation is treasured, no matter how small or large. I see the trust in each other growing through our commitment to God’s Word. I see a united church that has made a heartfelt response to the opportunities and even difficulties placed before her.

This future will be ours when we remember that “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). The future of the LCMS is intimately connected to faithfulness to God’s Word as the people of God work together in harmony to spread the Gospel. I am optimistic about our Synod’s future. I believe we will recommit ourselves to work together in the Lord’s kingdom, trusting that God’s Word will do what it promises, “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose” (Is. 55:11).

In years past, our Synod was united under the Word of God—and the Synod grew dramatically. Souls were saved. Heaven was populated. The LCMS grew faster than any other Lutheran church body in America. We were “Synod.” We “walked together” in the unity of our confession and our commitment to missions and education. We began colleges in every corner of the country to provide young people a Biblical Lutheran education. I believe that even better days are ahead.

Three things will foster peace and unity in Christ.

1. We trust God to bring peace and unity based on His Word. In my 20 years of congregational ministry, I was blessed over and over again to see God’s people attain unity through the study of God’s Word together. With unity came growth in membership, worship attendance, communion attendance and Bible class attendance. We resolved important issues through the Word. Unity and peace came from God, who can do the same for the Synod today. God’s Word does not return empty!



2. Our past points us into the future. As director of Concordia Historical Institute, I came to treasure our history. “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). Sin is still sin—but God’s Grace is still God’s grace. The world knows the LCMS as a church that stands on the truth of the Gospel. By God’s grace, we have come through many trials stronger than we were before. That heritage will continue as we “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) in a world that is starved for the truth about Christ.

3. We continue to work together. The word “synod” means walking together. We will listen to each other in love and patience. We will be slow to judge and quick to repent and forgive. We will treat each other with honor and respect. We will accept each other, support our God-given leaders, listen to those who disagree and trust that Christ is the head of His church. We will move beyond the bickering of left and right. Twenty years of pastoral ministry taught me what brings peace and unity: The Holy Spirit, working through the Word, creates a church in which God’s children walk together, living a life of repentance and forgiveness.

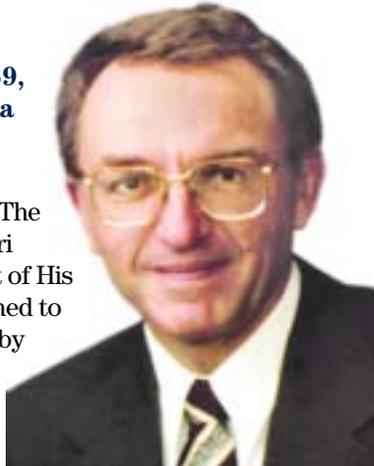
Together we thank God for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. May He grant us the wisdom to see what a gift she is as we see Jesus at the center of all that we believe and do and know that He creates what He promises: “Peace be with you” (John 20:21).

Dean O. Wenthe

Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, 59,
is president of Concordia
Theological Seminary,
Fort Wayne, Ind.

The greatest treasure of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is God’s gracious gift of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Joined to His death and resurrection by Holy Baptism, guided by His voice through the Holy Scriptures, and nourished by His very body and blood in the Lord’s Supper: every member of our church has been *blessed beyond belief. Christ’s perfect life, atoning death and glorious resurrection have taken us from darkness to light, from death to life.*

What is our greatest challenge? Quite simply to receive *these gifts* with thanksgiving and go forth into the world to share these gracious gifts with every human being, whether in our own backyard or at the ends of the earth. Our worship, our confession of the Triune God, our lives lived in Him: they will, by His grace, call each of us to



share the saving Gospel at home and abroad through the church’s missionary witness. But how can we do it? Fundamentally, we must abandon any trust in our own capacities and place ourselves in the service of Him who loved us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8).

Love for Christ and His gifts *is contagious. Our people, by God’s grace, love the Lord. Let us as a church be known first and foremost by what we love.* Let us confess the Savior whom we love with courage, charity and Scriptural clarity. This is God’s power to refresh and renew the church.

The challenge, of course, is wisely and faithfully to adopt specific strategies that will enable the church to display the beauty and wonder of God’s grace in Christ. The following are offered for the church’s consideration:

- Restore the light of the Gospel by clear proclamation at home and abroad of the crucified Christ *as the only way to salvation in God’s mercy.*
- Renew God’s people by fresh engagement and study of Sacred Scripture and catechesis in the Lutheran Confessions.
- Permit the healing power of Jesus’ voice in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to *unite us as a people.*
- By God’s grace demonstrate our unity in Christ by *acts of charity* towards all people, especially *in acts of human care for all human need.*
- Enhance *the contribution of godly women* by focused support of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, deaconess programs, and other women’s organizations.
- Revive our commitment to *parochial education* by honoring our consecrated male and female parochial teachers.
- Convene a symposium of *lay business people* to analyze the Synod’s fiscal challenges and propose solutions.
- Renew our support of educational excellence by drawing upon the *seminaries’ and universities’ faculties* to analyze and guide the church through our challenging culture and providing adequate financial means for these institutions.
- Engage *our youth* afresh in the adventure of Christian witness and living.
- Accent *the Christian family* as God’s gift for the nurture and practice of the faith.
- Without apology, support *the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage* as the most satisfying and fulfilling way to live.

As we trust in Christ and His gifts, we know that the future of the church is bright for *it is His future. May we show the world that future by being known first and foremost as a church whose love for Christ is clear, compassionate, courageous, and by His grace contagious.*

ABLAZE! BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING ...

The words of the LORD to Abram in Genesis 12: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

We know that promise of God was fulfilled in a special way at the birth of Jesus, whose genealogical record, beginning with Abraham, is written in Matthew's gospel. Indeed, the people of the world who accept God's grace in Jesus are richly blessed, eternally, through Christ's life, suffering, death and resurrection.

In another very real sense, the people of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have also been blessed to be a blessing. This reality is imprinted upon my life and heart

As the LCMS leads the way in the worldwide mission endeavor known as Ablaze!, partner churches around the world... are becoming more and more excited about their own role in reaching 100 million people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ by 2017...!

in many ways, at many times, none greater or more powerful than every time I encounter people who have been brought to faith through the work of LCMS World Mission.

Most recently, I visited four LCMS partner churches in Africa. The Free Evangelical-Lutheran Synod in South Africa and the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, as their

names reflect, are located in South Africa. The other two are The Lutheran Church of Nigeria and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana. All have received encouragement, support, fiscal and human resources from our Synod.

The Sunday worship services in Nigeria and Ghana will be long remembered. In Accra, Ghana, we worshiped for three hours at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. One week earlier, we participated in a five-hour service in Obot Idim, Nigeria. That's right ... *five hours!* With nearly 2,000 people in attendance, in 90-plus degree temperature, with equal humidity and no air conditioning, only a few left early!

These churches in Ghana and Nigeria are the direct result of work begun 50–65 years ago by LCMS missionaries. Work in Ghana began in the 1950s. Twenty years earlier, our Synod's mission board sent missionaries to Nigeria, to the remote village of Obot Idim. Since that time, the churches in both Ghana and Nigeria have grown, matured and developed into partner churches of the LCMS.

In Nigeria, our partner church supports a Lutheran high school, seminary, Lutheran Hour Ministries-related radio ministry, national church headquarters and numerous congregations in and around Obot Idim. In Ghana, Christian education provides a foothold for the Gospel in several locations, with as many as 900 students enrolled at St. Paul Lutheran School in Accra.

One day we visited the cemetery in Obot Idim in which lie the mortal remains of LCMS missionaries and their family members, including numerous young children. Their encounters with malaria and other



fatal diseases, far away from the safety, security and medicinal remedies of their U.S. homeland, resulted in great personal sacrifice, including the loss of their own lives and the lives of those they loved most dearly.

As the LCMS leads the way in the worldwide mission endeavor known as *Ablaze!*, partner churches around the world, including the four in Africa mentioned above, are becoming more and more excited about their own role in reaching 100 million people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation! It is my prayer that by the power of the Holy Spirit, this endeavor will result in the blessing of eternal life being received by many through the free gift of faith in Jesus Christ, by God's grace.

Your individual role in sharing God's undeserved love with people who do not know Christ, with your lips and by your life, is critical for the reception by many of the blessing promised by God to Abraham, fulfilled in the person of Jesus, and shared by LCMS missionaries around the world for more than a century. For it is most certainly true that you and I, like those before us, are blessed to be a blessing!

Jerry Kieschnick

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

John 3:16–17

e-mail: president@lcms.org

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