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#### [Encouraging Word]

#### Be ready

Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

— I Peter 3:15

hile waiting to board my flight to New York, I scanned the crowd milling around. Who would God arrange for me to sit next to? "Whoever it is Lord, help me be ready to be Your witness," I prayed. On board a few minutes later a clean-cut, middle-age gentleman took the seat next to me. We began chatting before the plane even took off, and God amazingly led the conversation to spiritual matters.

Craig, a former military man, believed in a cosmic deity and the "good teachings" of Jesus, but he wasn't sure of much else. So, he asked me about my faith. My compact, economy seat became a launch pad for some serious flair prayers. For two hours he quizzed me on Christianity, evolution versus creation, world religions, absolutes, and the integrity of Scripture. "How can you know that the personal God of the Bible really exists and that He is the only way?"

It would have been intimidating had his eyes and sincere tone not revealed the hunger of his soul. He wasn't mocking, or being argumentative. Craig didn't know what would happen when he died.

When I was young, my dad taught me an outline for sharing the foundations of my faith. Its comprehensive, yet simple format stuck with me like superglue. Now, years later and 40,000 feet up in the clouds, it was one of the things the Holy Spirit impressed me to share with Craig.

First, creation: You can't look at wildflowers, a baby, or bacteria under a microscope without acknowledging order and design. Order never comes from disorder and design implies a Designer (Psalm 19:1).

Second, conscience: Everyone has a built-in indicator of right and wrong. While many try to ignore their conscience, they can't remove it. It is God's gift to mankind, compelling us to seek Him (Romans 2:14-15).

Third, Scripture: The Bible can't just be a good book — either it is truth, as it claims, or a lie. And if it is true, as we believe, it answers all our life questions about who God is, what He has done, and why we are here.

As we discussed each point, and later the plan of salvation (with much trembling on my part), Craig became quieter, pondering the implications. When we disembarked at LaGuardia, he paused to express genuine gratefulness: "God had me sit by you for a purpose, to open my heart!"

I walked away rejoicing. By His grace, the Holy Spirit used a stammering tongue to share truth with this man. I was overwhelmingly reminded, and convicted, that you and I don't have to be degreed apologists to defend our faith and share our hope. God delights to inhabit our weakness with His glory when we humbly pray and purposefully prepare to be used. There are so many like Craig, waiting for a reason to hope. May God's grace lead us.

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#### [Sound Bites]

We take no pleasure in discord, nor are we indifferent to our danger; its extent is evident from the bitter hatred inflaming our opponents. But we cannot surrender truth that is so clear and necessary for the church.

> — Preface to the *Apology* for the Augsburg Confession

The prophecies, person, and work of Christ, His resurrection from the dead, and numerous other affirmations do have points of verification in history. ... the Christian's faith is not a leap into the dark; it is a well-placed trust in the light — the Light of the World, who is Jesus.

> — Ravi Zacharias Jesus Among Other Gods

Many spiritual seekers have legitimate questions concerning Christianity and need to pursue answers that will satisfy their heart and soul. Yet I think some seekers get to the point where they are subconsciously raising smoke screens to mask their deep-seated motivations for rejecting the faith.

> Lee Strobel The Case for Christ

The problem is not only to win souls but to save minds. If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world, you will soon discover you have not won the world. Indeed it may turn out you have actually lost the world.

— Charles Malik, The Two Tasks

# Christian apologetics in the real

# Be not afraid

"Be not afraid!" It was the rare angel who did not have to preface his proclamations with those words.

From Abraham to Mary, and no less now than then, we humans have been fearful of God's Great Commission to us. "Go and make disciples of all nations," Christ commanded us (Matthew 28:19). Sometimes we almost feel strong enough to go out into our towns, our workplaces, our schools, and our homes, and boldly show forth Christ's love with our lips and with our lives. But how long does our boldness last? It is, after all, so difficult. Our old routine awaits us, and people will scoff, laugh and think us foolish. And so, more often than not, we settle back into our comfortable lives, being Christian only when it is not too difficult.

Peter tells us, "Be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within you" (I Peter 3:15). He is telling us something specific — to be prepared to give an answer, or *apologia*, to the questions of those who doubt the truth of the Christian faith. Often we hesitate to do this — it is tempting to tell ourselves things like, "Of course the

Bible is true!" or "Of course Christianity is right!" We actually might be scared to really examine the truth of what we have been given.

Modern biblical criticism is quite alarming. Those so-called scholars, we tell ourselves, must have gotten it wrong somewhere. The same with modern science — Darwin just can't be right. And so it goes, on down the line — the claims of other religions, the doubts of atheists and agnostics, the assertions of those with different lifestyles or political beliefs, and so on and so forth. They simply must be wrong, we think to ourselves, but we shrink away from them, and hide underneath the warm canopy of churches and Bible studies. "Be not afraid!" the Bible says, and, "Make disciples of all nations!" Perhaps, we think, someone else will do it for us.

Dear brothers and sisters, too often we are afraid! Why? We have been given such a great hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. He has conquered death on the cross, and given us hope and eternal life. What have we to fear? If Christ is with us, who can be against us?

Being a Christian apologist means taking Christ at His word, and believing that the incarnation is really true — that God actually became Man, thereby becoming the Truth of *this* world,



not just the world to come. God did not limit Himself to the pages of the Bible, or the heavens above, but came down to Earth and lived and walked among us. Christ is the Way and the Life, but he is also the Truth. The incarnation means that we do not need to fear biblical criticism, modern science, liberal secularists, or anything at all in this world. Christ is the Lord of all, even where we fear He has not gone.

Being a Christian apologist means leaving our comfort zones, and going out into the world without fear. Ask yourself this: if an atheist from a modern East Coast university asked you to give a reason for the hope within you, would you know what to say? A skeptical biblical scholar? An evolutionary biologist? A homosexual? Do we even know how to talk to people? Are we prepared? Or are we too afraid?

Being a Christian apologist does not mean simply thinking up clever answers to buttress whatever we happen to believe at the moment. It means truly entering into the doubts and objections of skeptics and unbelievers. It means taking things like biblical criticism, modern science, and liberal secularism seriously; instead of merely scoffing at them and quoting a few choice Bible verses in reply. It means, in a sense, learning another language — the language of the skeptic, the atheist, the scientist, the person who feels as if she has been hurt deeply by the Church, and everyone else who we meet. We cannot simply be a church of the comfortable. Our call is to go forth into all nations, and we cannot do so as long as we remain afraid.

There are millions of people in this country dwelling in spiritual deserts, without hope and without peace. They need the gospel of Christ more than anything else in this world, and yet there are so few of us who even know how to talk to them. We have shut ourselves up in our churches and subcultures, and neglected their doubts, their fears, and their angry accusations flung at the Church. Those are really loud cries in the desert. Who will go to them? Who will love them enough to take their thoughts and their doubts seriously? "Be not afraid," the angel told us. "Be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within you." We are called to speak to these people. Let us love them enough to learn how to speak to their hearts.

Hylden, originally from Park River, N.D., is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., and currently a junior at Harvard.

# neology By Dr. Jonathan Strand logetic

Apologetics is the intellectual defense of the faith; it uses reasoning and evidence to defend the faith against intellectual attacks or argue positively for it. Many Christians have thought that there is something wrong with this, however. Many Lutheran theologians and pastors especially have thought that "doing apologetics" is actually contrary to the faith. They have thought this for two primary reasons.

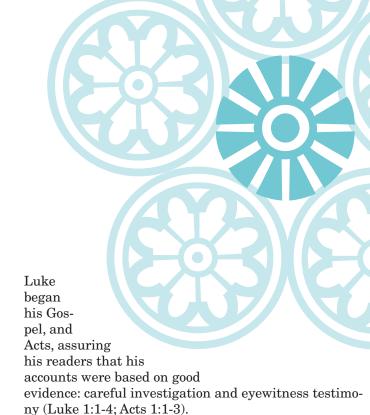
First, Scripture teaches that faith is a gift of God given through His Word. (See Ephesians 2:8; John 6:44; Philippians 1:29; James 1:18; Romans 10:17; I Peter 1:23; Luke 8:11-12.) So people do not come to faith by just considering evidence and using their natural reasoning abilities. To really "know the truth," God must (supernaturally) give us that gift. What, then, do reasoning and evidence have to do with it? We should present the gospel to people, and God gives them faith or He doesn't. (Or, perhaps, they accept the gift or they don't.)

Second, Luther said many disparaging things about reason. He seemed, in fact, to be following the apostle Paul in this regard (I Corinthians 1:17-2:16; Colossians 2:8). Luther struggled against those who rejected what Scripture plainly taught because it didn't "make sense" to them. He was adamant that we should believe the plain teachings of Scripture even when they seem contrary to our reasoning. Luther taught that reason worked quite well in the realm of the law (what God expects of us, and what the consequences are of obeying or not). But reason was out-of-its-depth when it came to the gospel; that God would suffer and die as a man to freely forgive our sins is not something our reasoning would expect.

So, good theologians concluded, reason cannot properly be used to "judge" the gospel. It has a legitimate supporting role to play in helping us understand the faith. (It is impossible to do theology at all, or even know what the faith teaches, without using reason.) But to use reason to argue for the faith is to improperly use it as a judge of the gospel. Apologetics is, therefore, inconsistent with a proper understanding of the faith.

The main problem with this line of reasoning, however, is that it flies in the face of the actual practice of the founders of the faith. The apostles, Jesus, Scripture, and God used reasoning and evidence to "back up" their claims. Paul, for example, reasoned with those who were not yet believers; he gave them evidence "proving" that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:22,29; 17:2-4,17; 18:4,19,28; 19:8; 26:22-29). In I Corinthians 15, he used reasoning and evidence to convince those with doubts about the resurrection. He argued that we can know that the dead are raised because Jesus was (vv. 16, 20). And we can know that Jesus rose from Scripture (vs. 4), from eyewitness testimony (vv. 4-9), and from their willingness to suffer and die for their message (vv. 29-32). Paul even offered a reasoned response to an intellectual objection (vs. 35ff.).

John emphasized that he and others were eyewitnesses to Jesus — thereby providing evidence that what he wrote was true (I John 1:1-4). Matthew's Gospel is an extended argument that Jesus is the Christ — presenting especially the evidence of fulfilled prophecy (1:1,16, 8; 26:63-68; 1:22-23; 2:15; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17; 21:4).

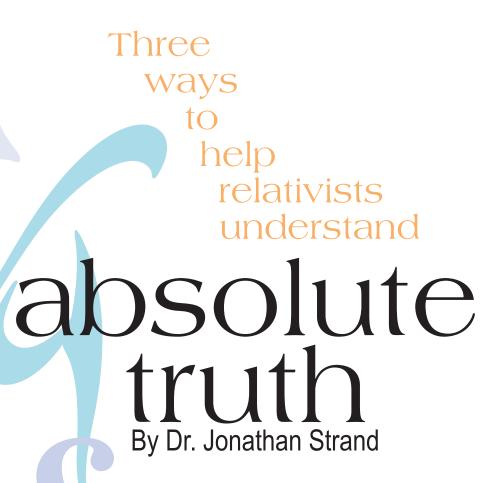


In the Gospel of John we are told that the accounts of Jesus' "miraculous signs" are included "that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ" (20:30-31). Jesus performed those miracles, and the Gospels recorded them, partly to provide us with evidence that He was who He claimed to be. He healed the paralytic to "prove" that He really could forgive sins (Mark 2:5-12). He pointed to the evidence of fulfilled prophecy, when John the Baptist had doubts (Luke 7:18-23; cf. 4:16-21). When He rose, He provided His disciples with evidence proving it (Luke 24:36-49; John 20:24-29). He even used reasoning to respond to His critics (Matthew 22:23-32; Mark 2:18-27; 3:20-30; 7:1-20; 12:13-27).

In the Old Testament, God Himself provided evidence that His prophets were speaking the truth (I Kings 18:16-39; Exodus 4:1-9).

The founders of our faith did not always use evidence and reasoning to back up their claims. They often just proclaimed the message. But many times they did use evidence and reasoning, and it's not hard to imagine why. God made us reasoning creatures; we decide what to believe on the basis of evidence. So it would be natural for God to accommodate that part of our nature and even use it to help us know the truth about Him. It would seem cruel for God to give us faith, or expect us to

See THEOLOGY, page 18



Some people believe there are no absolutes. "There is no such thing," they say, "as absolute, or objective truth; there is only relative, or subjective truth." There is no such thing as "the way things really are." There are only *various* ways things "appear to be, from various perspectives."

People often, in fact, use this as an excuse to not accept the gospel. "That may be true for you," they say, "but it isn't true for me." Since different people have different perspectives, and there is no objective truth to compare perspectives with, nobody's perspective can really be wrong (or right, for that matter). There are just different perspectives.

This view is quite inconsistent with Christianity. Christians believe that Jesus *really did* die for their sins and rise again. It's not just a matter of how we like to look at it. Those who think all truth is relative typically think they're being wise and sophisticated. But there are at least three ways we can help them see that their view cannot possibly be right.

First, ask such people to consider some examples. Ask them whether it is objectively true, or just their perspective, that they exist, or that we shouldn't torture them, or that the earth is round, or that we cannot reach Mars by jumping, or that two plus two equals four. Do they *really* exist? Would it really be wrong to torture them? Is the earth really round? Or is that just their (and others') perspective on the matter? If they say, "That's the way things really are," they've just admitted that some things are objectively, absolutely true; that's what objective, absolute truth is. They may, however, bite the bullet; they may say that those things really are [contradicting their claim] only true relative to their perspective. But their minds will be squirming within them that this cannot be right. Make them squirm some more.

Ask them, second, whether anyone's perspective on anything is ever wrong. If there is no objective truth, then no perspective can be wrong; there is no objective truth out there to be wrong about. Every perspective is as "correct" as any other. So if I believe that the people I'm talking to don't exist, or that I should torture them, or that two plus two equals a billion, or that I'm a kumquat, my perspective is just as good as theirs, or anyone else's. If they admit that some perspectives are, in fact, mistaken, then, again, there must be objective truth; perspectives can only be mistaken if they disagree with the objective truth of the matter. But, of course, your interlocutors may bite the bullet again; they may say that no perspective is ever mistaken. But their minds will be screaming within them. Make them scream louder.

Ask them, at last, whether their view itself is objectively, or only subjectively/relatively true. In other words, turn their claim on itself. When they say, "All truth is relative," are they saying that's the way things really are, or are they just saying that's their perspective on the matter? If they say that's the way things really are – i.e., if they say that their claim is objectively true – then, obviously, they've admitted that there is objective truth. (And

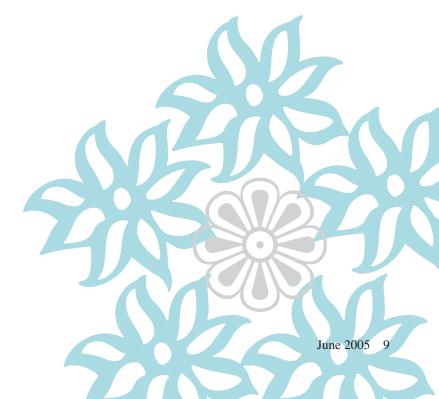
if there's one, there are surely others.) But their claim, then, would be obviously self-contradictory and nonsensical. How can it be *objectively true* that *there is no objective truth*?

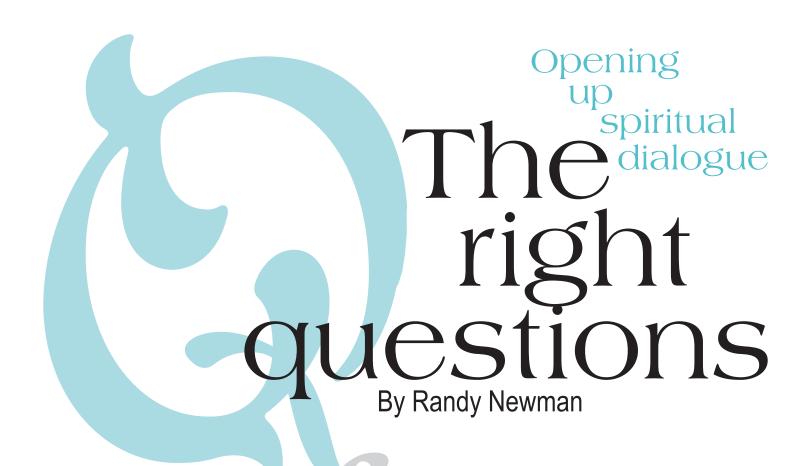
Seeing that, they're likely to opt for the other option: It is only relatively true that "all truth is relative;" it is only true from their perspective. But then they cannot really disagree with our claims to the contrary. Then our perspective — that all truth is not relative — is as least as correct as theirs. In fact, if it is only true relative to their perspective that all truth is relative, that leaves wide open the possibility that their perspective is objectively false. Their claim is then perfectly consistent with our claim that as a matter of the way things actually are, there are many objective and absolute truths.

It is, in fact, self-refuting to deny that there is such a thing as objective, absolute truth. One cannot disagree with our claim that there are objective and absolute truths without contradicting oneself. One cannot deny objective, absolute truth without assuming that that denial itself is objectively and absolutely true — thereby contradicting the denial. If you feel your mind spinning at this point, it's just a symptom of how truly incoherent this view is. It is, to use the technical term, "self-referentially incoherent."

Some people point out that our only "access" to the truth is through our perspectives. This is true. But it doesn't follow in the least from this that there isn't any objective truth out there making our various perspectives correct or incorrect. Nor does it follow that we cannot often tell the difference.

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Have you ever noticed how often our Lord answered a question with a question?

When a rich man asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded, "Why do you call me good?" (Mark 10:17-18, NIV). When religious leaders asked if it was right to pay taxes, Jesus asked whose portrait was on the coin (Matthew 22:17-20).

When the Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" Jesus said, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?" (Matthew 12:10-11).

#### Stealing thunder

A team of skeptics once confronted me at our weekly freshman Bible study. The host, in whose dorm room we were meeting, had been telling us for weeks of his roommate's antagonistic questions. This week, the roommate was there — along with a handful of like-minded friends.

The inevitable question arose. "So, I suppose you think that people who don't agree with you are going to hell!"

"Do you believe in hell?" I responded.

My antagonist had probably never seriously considered the possibility of hell. He looked puzzled. Finally, after a long silence, he said, "No, I don't believe in hell. I think it's ridiculous." I chose to echo his word choice. "Then why are you asking me such a ridiculous question?"

I wasn't trying to be a wise guy. I simply wanted him to face honestly the assumptions behind his own question.

Another questioner jumped in. "I believe in hell. Do you think everyone who disagrees with you is going there?"

Again I questioned. "Do you think anyone goes there? Is Hitler in hell?" (Hitler has turned out to be an unlikely — but helpful — ally in these kinds of discussions).

"Of course, Hitler's in hell."

"How do you think God decides who goes to heaven and who goes to hell? Does He grade on a curve?"

From there, the discussion became civil for the first time, and serious interaction about God's holiness, humanity's sinfulness, and Jesus' atoning work ensued.

Another time I had a conversation over lunch with an atheistic philosophy professor. He served as faculty advisor for the philosophy club; I was a minister for Campus Crusade for Christ. We'd cosponsored a debate about the problem of evil and were meeting to evaluate the event. After discussing how we could have publicized the event better and what topics we could address in future forums, I asked his opinion about the content of the debate.

I knew I was in way over my head; nothing I could say about the Christian view of evil could top what the brilliant philosophers had said the night before. But I wanted to see if I could get the conversation out of the philosophical realm and into the personal one. I was concerned for this man's soul.

He told me he still thought Christians failed to present a decent answer for the problem of evil. So I posed the question to him, "What is your atheistic explanation for why terrible things happen?"

He paused and then said softly, "I don't have one."

I told him this wasn't just an academic issue for me. As someone who is Jewish, I've had to wrestle with the reality of the holocaust. I again asked him if there was an atheistic way to make sense of such things as the Nazis' slaughter of 6 million of my people.

Again, his answer was a non-answer.

I told him that the Christian answer to the problem of evil may have its shortcomings. While I am not totally satisfied — either intellectually or emotionally — with what the Bible says about such things, my incomplete answer was better than no answer at all. The rest of our lunchtime was a good, respectful conversation that moved us closer to each other and — I hope — moved him closer to seeing some flaws in his worldview.

#### Questions have their advantages

Answering a question with a question has some significant advantages. It brings the questioner's assumptions to the surface. It also takes the pressure off you, the one being asked, and puts the pressure on the one doing the asking. As long as we are on the defensive, the questioners are not really wrestling with issues. They're just watching us sweat.

To be sure, there are times when a direct answer is preferable, particularly when the questioner is sincere and would benefit from a clear, biblical explanation. Yet often we need to hold back our answer and initiate genuine dialogue with a question. When your coworker asks you — with an accusatory tone - why you still believe in God in light of all the people dying of AIDS, ask him how he explains such a horrible tragedy.

When your neighbor asks you why you think Jesus is anything more than just a good moral teacher, don't take out your "Lord, liar, lunatic" explanation just yet. Ask him why he thinks Jesus was a good teacher. Has he read a lot of Jesus' teachings? Which messages impress him the most about Jesus' teaching ability? What would he say was the main message Jesus taught?

Recently, I heard a pastor urge his congregation to challenge the prevailing slogans of our day. The next time they heard someone quote, "Image is everything!" he told them they should respond, "No, it's not! The glory of God is everything!"

While I agree with his theology, I think his methodology may be flawed. I think it would be better to respond with a puzzled look and a one-word question: "Really?" A follow-up question could be "Do you really believe that?" I think many people would see

Then, a few gospel-paving questions could be added: "What do you think is everything? What would you say is the most foundational thing in life?"

Our message is too important for it to continue to fall upon deaf ears. Our good news is too good to be ignored. Our answers really are what people need to hear if we could just get them to listen. The Apostle Peter was surely right in imploring us to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (I Peter 3:15). I would just want to follow Jesus' method of doing so by answering a question with a question.

Newman is the Washington, D.C., director for research and development for Campus Crusade for Christ. He is affiliated with the Academic Initiative, which seeks to increase the prominence of the Christian worldview in all academic disciplines.

## pluralism By Pastor Steve Snipstead

Aren't all religions basically the same? After all there's only one God, and we all worship him/her in our own way. In the pluralistic atmosphere of our culture, this way of thinking about God and spiritual life is the belief of the majority.

Christians have grown accustomed to seeing and hearing this attitude in the media, but now we are encountering it in our neighborhoods and even in our churches. How do we respond?

Apologetics is the term used for a specialized kind of evangelism that answers the challenges to Christian belief and practice. It is a huge field of study, because the challenges to our faith come from every direction. Here's a strategy to respond to the idea that all religions are the same.

First consider the source. Responding to an editorial in the paper is apologetics, but you wouldn't use the same language in a letter as you would in a discussion with your neighbor. Let's say that you hear your neighbor say something like, "I just don't understand all this violence in the Middle East. We all believe in one God. Why can't we just get along?"

No matter where we begin, the attitude we have is essential. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (I Peter 3:15, NIV). Without a gentle and respectful attitude of other people and their beliefs, you will never gain a hearing for your own views.

Apologetics traditionally starts by approaching the intellect. Does the idea that all religions are the same make sense logically? You might respond to your neighbor along these lines. "I don't think all religions believe in the same god. The god of Islam, Allah, is an impersonal god who doesn't share human emotion. The God of Christianity, Yahweh, is full of



compassion, in fact the Bible even teaches that God took human form to experience our condition and help us. I don't see how they could possibly be the same God."

There are a couple of problems with the intellectual approach. One is that it can only be used by someone who knows enough about different religions to point out the theological contradictions between them. Another problem is that most people are immune to logic. Our society is irrational. You can point out a logical contradiction and it is simply shrugged off. Fortunately there are other approaches.

You could respond to your neighbor with a practical approach. "You know I've noticed something about different religions. The societies they produce are very different. Take Hinduism for example. They have a rigidly segregated society. If you are born into the untouchable caste you can only have the worst kind of jobs. That ties directly into their understanding of god. God is everything and everything is god. So both good and bad is the way it's supposed to be. If you were born poor, you must have deserved it. You are just suffering for something you did in your past life. That's why karma and reincarnation are so important in Hindu belief.

"Christianity teaches that God is separate from creation. Each of us is accountable to God for how we live our own life. Evil doesn't have to be part of God so we don't have to accept things the way they are. We can work to change things. That's why the vast majority of aid programs come from nations with a Christian tradition."

A practical approach also requires that you know something about the different religions. Chances are your neighbor doesn't know much about other religions either, so your first job will be to educate yourself and then educate your neighbor. If the job of studying doesn't appeal to you, that's OK. There are more ways of applying apologetics than giving information.

The most excellent way is through love. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (I Corinthians 13:1). Most people don't make decisions with their heads; they make them with their hearts. Jesus knew that when He told His disciples, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). You might respond to your neighbors by inviting them to church. "I'm glad you have an interest in spiritual things. Have you ever experienced Christian worship? We have a wonderful worship service at our church on Sunday mornings. Please be my guest. We would love to have you over for dinner afterward." Bringing people into contact with God through the fellowship of Christians is the second most powerful thing you can do.

And what's the first? Pray. Apologetics is essentially a spiritual battle. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). The Bible also says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7). Pray for your neighbor. Pray that the devil and pride won't keep them from the truth. Pray that they may find Christ and come to know the true God.

# deception Code By Pastor Jerry Moan

Reviewers can't seem to stop drooling over Dan Brown's incredibly popular novel, "The Da Vinci Code." Since its publication in 2003 some 25 million copies in at least 44 languages have rolled off the presses worldwide ... with little sign of letup, including plans for a 2006 film debut.

Why all the fuss over a murder mystery? It's just a novel, right? The problem is "The Da Vinci Code" is a work of *fiction* masquerading as *fact*. The story centers on Harvard professor Robert Langdon, who uncovers a 2000-year-old conspiracy through clues encoded in the famous "Last Supper" painting by Leonardo da Vinci. Brown's masterpiece is prefaced with a "fact" page which claims, among other things, that "all descriptions of ... documents ... in this novel are accurate." Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Biblical scholar, Ben Witherington, points out that although this fact page "will surely give many readers the false impression that this novel is based on sound historical research, the truth is, it is based on all sorts of conjectures — some scholarly, some not. And although

the book claims to be based on historical texts, especially the Gnostic Gospels, it is not based on history. The end result is closer to pure fiction than to historical fiction."

Witherington is right. "What counts most in our postmodern culture," he says, "is the power of your rhetoric, not the accuracy of your reporting or analysis." It is "the thrill of the chase," not the thrill of the truth that has captivated our culture. It should come as no great surprise, then, that in an age of widespread biblical illiteracy and ignorance of early Christian history a thriller novel such as the "Code" would have such an impact.

So what's the concern? Perhaps you've never read the novel and have no intention to. That's a wise choice in my opinion. But you will most likely encounter individuals (Christians included) who *have* read the book and have been confused by its assertions. Aside from its objectionable language and content, what are some of the specific problems with the novel from a historical and biblical perspective? The fundamental errors are those that present a false picture of Jesus and of the Scriptures.

#### What does the novel say about the Bible?

It suggests that the Word of God is unreliable — that "the Bible is a product of man ... Not of God." It proposes that "man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions." Finally, it asserts that "history has never had a definitive version of the book." (p. 231). This is a clear denial of the inspiration of Scripture — "All Scripture is God-breathed," (II Timothy 3:16, NIV) — and that "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21).

It wrongly asserts that the canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are not the earliest Gospels. Instead, the so-called Gnostic Gospels (such as the Gospel of Philip or of Mary) are said to precede them. There is no credible evidence that these Gnostic writings existed before late in the second century AD.

A further blatant historical error is the suggestion that "the Bible as we know it today was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great" (p. 231). What an absolute misrepresentation of the facts — to propose that Constantine somehow determined the canon by his connection with the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Nor is it accurate to affirm that Constantine sought to unify the whole empire under one religious banner (p. 232).

Such errors in regard to the Bible naturally lead to false notions about its contents.

#### What does the novel say concerning Jesus?

It claims that "Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal" (p. 233). Is this the picture we find in the New Testament? Hardly. As Erwin Lutzer writes: "The Jesus of 'The Da Vinci Code' is not a savior."

The book further claims that the divinity of Jesus was not recognized until a vote of the Nicean Council (325 A.D). Pure fiction! "By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable" (p. 233). Such a bold statement can be made only by ignoring the repeated declarations of the New Testament apostles.

The "Code" asserts that Jesus was actually married to Mary Magdalene and that He had intended for Mary to lead the church. The novel supposes that Jesus would have had to be married because this was standard practice for the Jews. But how can one suggest there were no exceptions to this sort of rule in early Judaism?

The novel further suggests that Jesus and Mary had children who intermarried with the French royal line — a line that exists to the present day! It is finally "revealed" to us that the Holy Grail is not actually the chalice used in the Lord's Supper, but Mary Magdalene herself, whose body carried the royal bloodline of Jesus (p. 249).

#### Other deceptions

What about the nature of *faith*? The "Code" suggests that that historical truth doesn't matter to faith.
Robert Langdon, the hero of the book, suggests, "Every faith in the world is based on fabrication." He maintains, "That is the definition of faith — acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we

cannot prove." But Christian faith is not built on imagination. Christianity is based on documented historical events and evidence (I Corinthians 15).

What about the nature of God's character? The novel's claim is that the Bible replaces female deities with male ones. The Church has for centuries suppressed the "Sacred Feminine" or feminine aspect of God, which Brown believes was behind the Old Testament concept of Shekinah. The idea is offered that one could gain union with the God through hieros gamos, or sacred sex. Such is the blending of Gnostic and pagan heresy woven throughout the "Code."

What about the nature of *salvation?* Clearly, it's not about grace. It's much closer to the Gnostic idea of finding God in your own way. It is no accident that the heroine of this book is named Sophie Neveu — suggesting the idea of "new wisdom." This new wisdom is simply the revival of an old lie that seeks a perverted salvation through an act of sexual expression.

The "Code" represents a further postmodern attempt at rewriting history and redefining the Christian faith. It stands as a challenge to us: "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:21-22).



Moan is a teacher at both AFLTS and AFLBS, Plymouth, Minn. For further resources on this topic, please see **RESOURCES**, page 22.

#### **Elections**

#### Members of the Free Lutheran Youth Nominating Committee and the AFLC

Youth Board have been working together to assemble a ballot for the Free Lutheran Youth Committee. The

board will consist of a president, two vice presidents, a secretary, and devotional life counselor. The voting for the board will take place in July at the FLY Convention, with each position having a term limit of two consecutive terms. An additional name for both the president and devotional life secretary are under review.

#### **President**



Paul Kneeland

Paul Kneeland is the young adult coordinator at **Abiding Savior** Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. He graduated from AFLBS in 1985 and has since worked in vouth ministries. He has also served

14 years as a member of the Youth Board.

#### Secretary



**Betsy Parsley** 

Betsy Parsley is completing her junior year at Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S.D., where she is studying nursing. She graduated from AFLBS in 2002 and is also active in helping with the

youth group at Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls.



Kayla Russum

Kayla Russum, Lake Stevens, Wash., graduated from California State University, Fresno, in 2002 and AFLBS in 2004. A member of Elim Free Lutheran, she helps with Wednesday night minis-

tries, is a Sunday school teacher, and serves on the church's youth board and worship team.

#### Vice President (choose two)



**Brett Boe** 

Brett Boe is a 2004 graduate of AFLBS. He attends Joliet Junior College and is a member of Helmar Lutheran in Newark, Ill., where he works as an assistant with the youth group. Brett

desires to enter the ministry and hopes to attend AFLTS.



**Matt Nelson** 

Matt Nelson is a 2003 AFLBS graduate and is currently attending Northwestern College, majoring in ministry. He has worked with several churches and currently serves at Good Shepherd

Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn.



Michelle Satren

Michelle Satren graduated from AFLBS in 2001 and Northwestern College in 2003 with a degree in youth ministry. She serves as vouth director at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis and has participated in

youth ministry in several other AFLC churches.



Jesse Kneeland

Jesse Kneeland, a 2002 graduate of AFLBS, is the director of student and young adult ministries at Maranatha Free Lutheran. Glyndon, Minn.

#### **Devotional Life Secretary**



Karisa Finstrom serves as the children and youth ministries director at St. John's Free Lutheran, Duluth, Minn. She is also involved with the AFLC's student missions pro-

gram. Karisa Finstrom





#### women's missionary federation

Final ratification is needed this year for a portion of the revised constitution that was

presented and voted upon in the past two years at our annual WMF Convention. The portion, concerning new officer positions, needs approval by two-thirds of those present and voting at the convention. The recommended amendments presented are to article V, sections 2 and 5.

The proposed amendments read:
Section 2: Officers in the WMF
shall be a President, a First Vice President, a Second Vice President, a Third
Vice President, a Communication Secretary, a Recording Secretary and a Treasurer.

Section 5: Officers shall be elected for a term of three years. All officers may be eligible for re-election but no officer shall hold the same office for more than two successive terms. The President, Third Vice President and Communications Secretary shall be elected one year; the First Vice President and the Recording Secretary the following year; the Second Vice President and the Treasurer the third year. Newly elected officers shall officially assume their duties at the first regular National Board meeting following their election.

These amendments will also affect the by-laws, as these positions are defined under Article IV. The suggestions would be as follows:

#### **Article IV, Section 3**

It now reads:

The Second Vice-President shall in the absence of the President and/or the Vice President assume the duties of the said office, and shall perform such other duties as the President or the National Board may designate.

Change to:

The Second Vice-President and Third Vice President, in that order, shall, in the absence of the President and/or the Vice President, assume the duties of the said office, and shall perform such other duties as the President or the National Board may designate.

#### Article IV, Section 4

It now reads:

The Secretary shall record minutes of all the meetings held by the National Board and the Advisory Committee. She shall insure that the National WMF adheres to its constitution and by-laws and be custodian of the archives.

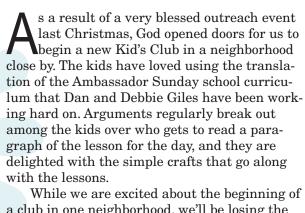
Change to:

The Recording Secretary shall record minutes of all the meetings held by the National Board and the Advisory Committee and be custodian of the archives. The Communication Secretary shall handle the communication for the WMF Day with the host WMF for the Conference. The Secretaries shall insure that the National WMF adheres to its constitution and by-laws and shall perform such other duties as the President or the National Board may designate.

By Dawn Johnson www.aflcwomen.org

#### [World Missions]

# News from Jerez, Mexico



While we are excited about the beginning of a club in one neighborhood, we'll be losing the leaders of a club in another neighborhood. We have so appreciated the ministry partnership of Pastor Ricardo Varela and his family these last two years, but it appears that God is calling them back to Aguascalientes the end of June. They will be greatly missed and we pray God's richest blessings on them as they continue their ministry about two hour's drive south of us.

We were all excited to see the launching of the new website for our church here in Mexico. Dan and Debbie did a great job of putting it together, and we are all indebted to Pastor Brian Davidson who came down with the last PIMO group and helped work out some kinks in the site. We trust that God will use it for His glory as more people become aware of it. Check it out for yourself at www.ayudasespirituales.org.

By Pastor Todd Schierkolk
 Jerez, Mexico

#### THEOLOGY, from page 7

believe, *contrary* to the rational part of our nature. Without reasons and evidence, our minds can be painfully divided. So God may use reason and evidence to accommodate and use that part of our nature, and to alleviate the intellectual pain we would experience otherwise.

God also works through natural means, like the written or spoken Word. The Word can (and often does, in Scripture) come in the form of a reasoned argument; it can include evidence (I Corinthians 15). So God can give us the gift of faith partly through the natural means of reasoning and evidence. God can also use reasoning and evidence to remove our intellectual excuses (Romans 1:18-20). Jesus did this repeatedly. This is a function of the law, where Luther thought reason functioned quite well.

Since the founders of the Christian faith "did apologetics," it's hard for me to believe that apologetics is

somehow contrary to the Christian faith. Surely this idea is more likely a result of some misunderstanding. In fact, if we aren't willing to give people reasons why they should believe, we're surely not doing a good job of giving "an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have" (I Peter 3:15; cf., Jude 3; Titus 1:9). We're certainly not following the examples set for us in Scripture.

If we follow these Scriptural examples we won't always be arguing for the faith. Often we will just proclaim the message. Often people already have enough reason to believe, and what is bothering them or standing in the way of their believing is not an intellectual matter. It's more often an unwillingness to part with their sins. So giving people reasons and evidence can be pointless (Matthew 7:6). But sometimes believers have doubts, and nonbelievers are reluctant to believe because their intellect tells them not to. And sometimes people need to be

"called" on their intellectual excuses. For such people, in such situations, we should provide them with reasons and evidence.

But what about those Scriptural teachings which seem "contrary to reason?" Sometimes we have good reason to believe what seems unreasonable. Physicists do this all the time; they believe things that seem quite contrary to reason when considered by themselves. But they believe those things because they have good evidence that those things are true. That is what Luther did. Once we're convinced (by reasoning or anything else) that Scripture is inspired by God, we have good reason to believe its seemingly unreasonable teachings. It is not at all contrary to reason to think that there are truths about God that our reasoning abilities cannot comprehend.

Strand is a professor of philosophy at Concordia University, Edmonton, Alberta.



Pastor Al Pinno (second from left) was elected as president of the AFLC Canada during the annual conference in April. Pictured with Pinno are (from left) AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee, Dorothy Pinno, and outgoing president Pastor Gene and Sylvia Sundby.

## Youth Ministries cuts director's position to three-quarter time

#### Financial support sought to fund position

AFLC Youth Ministries needs your help. We come to you because caring people are informed people. Members of the AFLC Youth Board, through prayer and discernment, have reluctantly had to cut back Director Kevin Olson's position from full-time to three-fourths time, effective July 1.

Suffice it to say our financial giving has been good, but our fixed expenses have increased. Since its inception in 1996, the position of Youth Ministries director has been full-time, largely because AFLC schools had supplemented the position up to one-fourth of the salary. That option does not exist at the present. Two years ago we took on full financial responsibility for this position. Since that time we have been facing a growing deficit.

Kevin Olson is a man of God who has a passion for youths and a heart to reach the lost. He has just returned with his family from a teaching and mission sabbatical in Tanzania.

Our greatest desire is to keep our director at full-time, as the needs for youth ministry are greater than ever before! Instead of having to face cutbacks, we wish we were moving forward. With your prayers and faithful stewardship, we seek to turn this crisis around. Would vou. like Aaron and Hur who held Moses' hands' high when the Israelites faced the Amalekites (Exodus 17), assist in supporting Youth Ministries to bring our director to fulltime status? With God's help and your prayerful response, may His will be done!

> Alan Arneson AFLC Youth Board Chairman Fosston, Minn.

### From Colorado to Brazil in 2006

Don't forget to make plans for two upcoming events:

The Free Lutheran Youth Convention is scheduled for July 4-9 at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colo. Visit www.aflc.org/youth for more information.

The AFLC Brazil will celebrate 40 years in January 2006. Anyone interested in joining a group to tour mission work in Brazil may contact Pastor Jonathan Unverzagt at (608) 781-5821 for more information.

#### [ABCDEFG]

#### What does it mean?

AFLC: The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, a fellowship of independent congregations, who have chosen to be interdependent for the purpose of accomplishing service in the Kingdom of God that cannot best be done alone. Founded in 1962 with headquarters at Plymouth, Minn.

AFLBS: The Association Free Lutheran Bible School, a two-year Bible school founded in 1966 by the AFLC with campus located in Plymouth, Minn.

AFLTS: The Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary sometimes called the Free Lutheran Seminary (FLS). Founded in 1964, shares campus with AFLBS in Plymouth, Minn.

**WMF:** The Women's Missionary Federation was organized in 1962 and supports AFLC missionary endeavors.

#### Egeland church founded 80 years ago

geland Lutheran Church is located in the countryside of Egeland Township, S.D. The building is on the site of the former Lindaas Church, an interdenominational congregation whose building was destroyed by a tornado in 1925. Egeland Lutheran congregation was founded that year, built the present church building, and affiliated with the Lutheran Free Church (LFC). The original bell from the Lindaas Church was found in a nearby creek after the tornado, and is still in use in the Egeland bell tower, announcing that God's family is gathered for worship there.

For many years Egeland was part of the Wallace Parish of the LFC, along with Wallace (now Calvary) and Telemarken Lutheran Free churches. Egeland affiliated with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) at the time of the 1962 merger, and in the late 1960s formed a parish partnership with Our Savior's Lutheran of Waubay, also formerly LFC. Egeland continued membership in the

ALC and the later ELCA, until 2004, but retained a living memory of LFC principles throughout this time.

When their former pastors left in early 2004, the congregation decided to explore other options more in tune with Egeland's Bible-believing heritage. Pastor Michael Peterson of Ortley Free Lutheran began preaching part-time at Egeland during Lenten Wednesdays in 2004, and full-time in July 2004. In August 2004, Egeland cast its final vote to leave the ELCA. and on Nov. 7, 2004, voted unanimously to join the AFLC. Egeland was formally welcomed into the AFLC in January 2005. That same month Egeland and Ortley Churches formalized their new parish partnership.

Egeland has been a strong supporter of Pickerel Lake Lutheran Bible Camp throughout its history, and has a very active youth group. Support is given to AFLC and other missions and benevolences, and the ladies of the Egeland WMF keep very active with Bible studies and donating quilts to various local,



national, and international relief and mission societies. An annual summer corn feed is among the events held in order to reach out to the surrounding community. The people of Egeland are very much at home with their new AFLC affiliation and partnership with Ortley Free Lutheran. Members are looking forward to what the Lord has in store in the times ahead. In the words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Visit Egeland's webpage at www. itctel.com/mnmp/egeland

Pastor Michael Peterson

#### **People and Places**

Seminarian Ron Brubakken has accepted a call to serve Roseau Free Lutheran, Roseau, Minn., and Norland Lutheran, Salol, Minn., for the summer months.

Pastor Steven Olinger, Ferndale, Wash., has been removed from the AFLC clergy roster at his request.

Pastor Douglas Wagley, Spokane, Wash., has been removed from the AFLC clergy roster at his own request, in order to affiliate with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He serves **New Vision Free Lutheran**. Spokane, which has also withdrawn from the AFLC.

Pastor Tom Olson was installed

April 24 as pastor of Faith Lutheran, Mineral Point, Wis.

Pastor Al Bedard has accepted a call to serve Salem Lutheran Church of Oxford, North Branch, Minn. He was installed on April 10.

Gordon Strunk, Bristol, Conn., a graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (ELCA), is serving a six-month internship under the AFLC Coordinating Committee at St. John's Lutheran Church, Ambridge, Pa., supervised by Pastor Paul Jecklin.

Seminarian Craig Scavo, who is completing his internship at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Springfield,

Mo., has accepted a call to serve Faith Lutheran Church, Durant, Okla., and plans to be ordained at the Annual Conference.

Seminarian Cal Willard, who is serving his internship at Canal Winchester, Ohio, has accepted a call to serve Messiah Lutheran Church, Champaign, Ill., and will be ordained at the Annual Conference.

Seminarian Dennis Norby, who is serving his internship at Dalton Parish, Dalton, Minn., has accepted a call to serve as assistant pastor of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill. He will be ordained June 24 at his home church, Faith Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill.

# Illinois church founded nearly 100 years ago

St. Paul's Lutheran voted in November to join AFLC

utheran worship services in the Gifford, Ill., community go back to 1882. A Pastor Heiniger held services every other week on Sunday afternoons in various homes, in the public school and, later, in the Christian Church in Gifford. In 1906, the group purchased the old Baptist church in Gifford and held its dedication service in October of that year.

On May 21, 1906, the group, which consisted of 16 families, was formally organized as the Evangelical Lutheran St. Paul's congregation. The congregation's first adopted constitution was formulated by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa. The present building was constructed in 1928, with one addition being added in 1960 and another in 1995.

Members of St. Paul's voted on Nov. 21, 2004, to withdraw their membership from the ELCA and become



St. Paul's Lutheran, Gifford, Ill., is served by interim Pastor David Skordahl.

a member of the AFLC. They bring with them a strong commitment to the inerrancy of the Scripture along with a baptized membership of more than 600 and a confirmed membership of between 400 and 500.

The congregation is presently in the process of calling a pastor. In the meantime, Pastor Dave Skordahl, St. Michael, Minn., serves on an interim basis.

#### People and Places

Kathryn Fruehauf, 69, the wife of Pastor David Fruehauf, New Hope, Minn., died April 21. The service was April 26 at Crystal Evangelical Free Church, New Hope, with Pastor Roger Anderson and Pastor Leland Evenson officiating.

**Geri Klug**, 72, the wife of Pastor Ray Klug, Blackduck, Minn., died April 4. The service was April 9 at Faith Lutheran, Blackduck, with Pastor Ray Klug and son, Pastor Dan Klug, officiating.

**Pastor Bill Bartlett** has resigned as pastor of Lutheran Church of the Cross, Laguna Woods, Calif., in order to become director of a new Christian high school.

Pastor Gerald Gettis has concluded his ministry at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz., for medical reasons. Pastor Oliver Olson is serving the congregation on an interim basis.

Pat Flanders, business administrator at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., has accepted the additional duties of director, a position left vacant by outgoing director Eric Westlake. Jim Keller, Wallace, S.D., has accepted the position of guest services. His wife, Lori Keller, will work part-time as administrator and AFLC camp coordinator. Westlake accepted a call to serve Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn.

**Kirk Thorson**, who will begin his senior year at AFLTS this fall, will

be the men's resident head at AFLBS.

Internships have been given to four senior seminarians.

- John Brennan was assigned to St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran, Melvin, Ill., under advisor Pastor Jan Horne.
- Nathan Jore was assigned to Bethel Free Lutheran, Minot, N.D., under advisor Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck.
- Tomasz Chmiel was assigned to Mason Drummond Parish, Mason, Wis., under advisor Pastor Frank Cherney.
- Mark Richardson was assigned to Calvary Free Lutheran, Wallace, S.D., under advisor Pastor Michael Peterson.

#### Thrivent challenge grant available to AFLC schools

\$800,000 available through GivingPlus

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans has issued a challenge to all of its GivingPlus Program participants. As program participants, AFLBS and AFLTS have signed up for the challenge to enlist a total of 227 Thrivent members to give to the schools. To meet the goal, AFLTS and AFLBS will each need to receive a gift and GivingPlus match from 227 Thrivent members. If the goal is met, each school will receive a proportionate amount of a \$800,000 challenge grant.

Will you help us take advantage of this great opportunity? Please contact the AFLBS office for a GivingPlus application or visit the Thrivent website (www.thrivent. com) and click on Fraternal Programs to obtain an on-line application or for more information. All matching gifts must be submitted to Thrivent by Dec. 1.

#### **AFLC** memorials — April

#### **AFLBS**

Adeline Skramstad, Amy Haugen, Florence Dimick, Pastor Wallace Jackson, Remund, Bernhard Nelson, Gordon Gordhamer. Luise Swanson-Jorgen-

#### **AFLTS**

Pastor Wallace Jackson, Margaret Gregerson, Geri Klug, Gunda Almlie, Pastor Christian Oswood, Clarence Gerdeen, Ida Davis, Bernhard Nelson

#### **Evangelism**

Arlitte Swenson, Howard Johnson (2), June Anderson, Pastor Wallace Jackson, Geri Klug

#### **HIS Fund**

Geri Klug

#### **Home Missions**

Arlitte Swenson

#### **Parish Education**

Arlitte Swenson, Pastor Wallace Jackson, Amy Haugen, Margery Bischoff

#### Vision

Pastor Oskar Salge, Pastor Wallace Jackson, Adeline Skramstad

#### **World Missions**

Norris Smith, Junie Mellby, Myrtle Ouren, Pastor Wallace Jackson, Amy Haugen, Tom Gray, Geri Klug, Ida Davis

#### **Youth Ministries**

Roy Torgusen

... in honor of

#### **AFLTS**

Gerald and Arla Mae Kuster Pastor and Mrs. Ranny Quanbeck

#### **AFLTS announces Summer Institute 2005 schedule**

With a theme of "Born Again to a Living Hope," the AFLTS Summer Institute has been scheduled for Aug. 1-5 on the campus of the AFLC schools in Plymouth, Minn. Courses offered include: "Studies in I Peter,"

by Pastor Phil Haugen; "Studies in Daniel," by Pastor Jerry Holmaas; "The Doctrine of the Word," by Dr. Francis Monseth; "Music and the Congregation," by Jerry Nelson; and "Theology of Law and Government,"

by Dr. John Eidsmoe.

Registration (\$15) and fees (\$16 per credit) are due by July 8. Housing is available. Contact AFLTS at (763) 544-9501 for more information and a registration form.

#### **Deception Code**

#### **RESOURCES**, from page 15

Richard Abanes, "The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code" (Harvest House, 2004).

Darrell Bock, "Breaking the Da Vinci Code" (Thomas Nelson, 2004).

Hank Hanegraaff and Paul Maier, "The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?" (Tyndale House, 2004).

James Garlow and Peter Jones, "Cracking Da Vinci's Code" (Cook, 2004).

Erwin Lutzer, "The Da Vinci Deception" (Tyndale House, 2004).

Ben Witherington, III, "The Gospel Code: Novel Claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci" (IVP, 2004).

#### **Association of Free Lutheran Congregations**

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (4 months) - January 1 - April 30, 2005

| FUND             | TOTAL<br>Subsidy | REC'D IN<br>APRIL | TOTAL REC'D<br>TO DATE | % TOTAL   |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| General Fund*    | \$387,377        | \$40,667          | \$153,371              | 40        |
| Youth Ministries | 56,062           | 7,167             | 19.314                 |           |
| Parish Education | 81,988           | 6,025             | 25,297                 | 31        |
| Seminary         | 156,804          | 25,504            | 72,699                 | 46        |
| Bible School     | 269,308          | 29,069            | 95,458                 | 35        |
| Home Missions    | 277,870          | 23,748            | 87,271                 | 31        |
| World Missions   | 262,377          | 25,907            | 83,200                 | 32        |
| Personal Support | 368,688          | 35,353            | 129,623                | 35        |
| TOTALS           | \$1,860,474      | \$169,691         | \$578,962              | <b>32</b> |
| TOTALS 2004      | \$1,739,460      | \$178,751         | \$586,912              | 34        |
| Goal 33%         |                  | , ,               |                        |           |

The Evangelism Department received \$10,051 in April.

Please contact individual departments for more information on projects.

<sup>\*</sup> Includes Evangelism totals

#### [Editorial]

# Fighting by faith

his month the AFLC Annual Conference returns to a place of special significance in the history of the AFLC. It was the early 1960s. Valley City, N.D., had one Lutheran Free church in town and one in the country. The proposed merger of the LFC with other Lutheran church bodies to form the Ameri-



**Craig Johnson** 

can Lutheran Church was a topic of much discussion. Serving in Valley City at the time was Pastor Fritiof Monseth, father of the current dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary, Dr. Francis Monseth. Pastor

Monseth opposed the merger and became vice president of the AFLC when it was formed in 1962. The town church, First Lutheran, had consistently voted against the merger. Members of the church council and a significant minority, however, strongly favored the merger. On Aug. 18, 1963, members of the council padlocked the church doors to prevent Pastor Monseth from conducting worship services. They took legal steps to evict him from the parsonage.

A court eventually ruled in favor of the minority who supported the merger. They declared that the LFC had become a synod and conference decisions were binding on local congregations. The majority ended up losing their building.

They didn't lose their faith, however. The country church, Zion Free Lutheran, was one of the first AFLC congregations. The people who had been locked out of their

church building formed a new congregation, Grace Free Lutheran. God has blessed the congregations and now, more than 40 years later, the work continues on.

In 1986 I served part of my seminary internship in Valley City. It was a blessed privilege and a great experience. The attitude of those people who had been locked out of their building in 1963 taught me a lot.

When the topic of the merger days came up they talked more about those who acted in a godly manner and helped them than about those who hurt them. They talked more about what they gained than about what they lost. They lost a building but they gained an increased understanding of how God can bring His people through difficult trials.

The events of the early '60s were not as big a topic of conversation in 1986 as a person might expect. It had been 20 years, but some people, who have had far less traumatic things happen to them, are still talking about it many decades later. The folks in Valley City seemed to be following the example of Paul: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on ..." (Philippians 3:13-14, NIV).

Instead of dwelling on the wrongs people have done to us in the past, we're to focus on the good God is doing today and the plans He has for the future. Instead of being obsessed with how we've been hurt, we're to be consumed with thankfulness for how we've been saved by Christ.

Remembering how those who have gone before us related to those they differed with would serve us well as we return to Valley City this month. We will have How we conduct ourselves when those differences arise is an indication of our closeness to Christ.

differing opinions on some matters. How we conduct ourselves when those differences arise is an indication of our closeness to Christ.

One issue on which there will most likely be different opinions is a resolution brought up last year to be discussed this year. It would amend the AFLC Rules of Work so that no individual could serve more than two consecutive terms as president or vice president. No such limit on terms currently exists, although there are requirements on the percentage of votes needed for re-election.

Those in favor of the change stress the demands of the jobs and the benefit of having a variety of people involved in leadership. It would also free people in those positions from wrestling with how long to remain in office.

Those opposed to the change assert that the term limit is too short a time for a person to effectively learn and adjust to a new position. It is felt the conference should be free to elect whomever they want to the positions.

Both sides have valid concerns. May we have a good discussion that is done in a manner that honors Christ.

#### THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

#### [Something to Share]

## become

t wasn't until a few years ago that I began to understand exactly who it was that I was becoming. I'm not sure if it was a chance look in the mirror that triggered this discovery or a subtle inflection of my voice, or simply a growing awareness that I was the daughter of a particular woman, with particular mannerisms, particular values, and certainly, particular tastes. But regardless of the cause, I eventually came to realize what every daughter must come to realize in time: I was turning into my mother.

I have to confess, though, I'm not sure why this came as such a shock at the time. Growing up, there were surely signs forewarning this. A friend or family member sometimes commented on my dark hair, my gentle smile, or even my skinny legs — features of my mother I had come to own. And my growing love for literature and disposition to spend time alone must have suggested some growing similarity. But it wasn't until, as an adult, I knelt on the ground and dug my fingers into the soil of my flower bed that the truth became clear — my mother, the gardener, this was who I had become.

All those years growing up I had

watched my mother tend her gardens, working the soil, pulling weeds, planting and watering, and had seen the beautiful patches of flowers that decorated our yard. The gardens were beautiful yet modest. No elaborate waterfalls or cascading landscapes, but simple, lovely patches of color and form. I remember they caused more than one passerby to stop and look.

It took me some time to understand this favorite pastime, the satisfaction that days spent tending the soil would elicit growth in weeks to come. And the pleasures of digging, pulling, arranging, watering — repetitive chores that actually relax and force my mind to rest and renew. After years of watching my mother tend to her gardens, I am beginning to understand the love that fuels this passion, but even more so, to understand that this woman I love is exactly who I want to become.

Now with my own yard and plenty of dirt to turn, I seem to work with a spade in one hand and phone in the other, ready to give Mom a call when a pressing question arises or the first tulip of the year opens in May. I call her up to come sit on my porch and chat about questions of life. She doesn't have all the answers

— and often doesn't offer any at all. But she listens. And she prays. And her roots go down deep in love.

The psalmist writes that the righteous shall be like "trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season" (Psalm 1:3). I am coming to realize how blessed I am to have a mother and father rooted deep in faith, and the care they have taken to grow their daughters in this same tradition echoes this blessing. "You, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name" (Psalm 61:5).

One of my girlfriends recently shared with me some of her mother's frequent words to her. As the two part from a visit, her mother often reminds her, "Be a credit to me!" And that is what I hope I can be. Since childhood, my mother has been teaching me how to grow flowers, and in the same manner, to grow faith. Like a tree planted by streams of water, and like my mother, a woman rooted firmly in Christ — I am learning — this is the kind of woman I want to be.

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