

Things Truthful, Beautiful, and Forever

Jesus loved children. Not only did He enjoy their company (Mark 10:14), He invited His followers to assume their attitude:

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:2-4)

In Sacred Scripture not only children but youths of heroic faith are praised for their character and actions: a youthful David faces Goliath; a youthful Jeremiah calls the people back to God; a beautiful and youthful Esther is God's instrument to save His people.

The church's children and youth are a great blessing. A pattern of events suggests that the youth of the church want serious and substantial spirituality, i.e., teaching drawn from Sacred Scripture, the historic creeds, and the confessions of the church. Signs increase that youth outside the church are drawn by real and serious engagement of God rather than by "religious" merchandizing and entertainment. Their souls hunger for more.

Last September, for example, I witnessed a remarkable event. In Helsinki, Finland, the state church's cathedral normally draws 50 to 80 worshippers despite its capacity to seat thousands. In sharp contrast the Pyhan Sydamen Kappelissa congregation-known for its strong Scriptural and confessional stand-was filled to its capacity of 400 plus. Ninety percent of the congregation was under 50 with most under 30 and many students from the University of Helsinki.

The service with Holy Communion was structured after the historic liturgy and punctuated with flute, violin, choir, and organ music. While it was nearly two hours in length, it seemed like 45 minutes-even to one seated in the rear of the balcony with a translator! The morning was so striking that I inquired of the pastor: "What type of outreach program do you use?"

The pastor's response stressed personal contact joined to serious catechesis in the Scriptures and Christian doctrine. The pastor said: "Most of these university students come from the privileged sector of Finnish culture. They have experienced novelty, changing fashions, and changing family structures . . . some have experimented with drugs and 'different lifestyles.' They are weary of trendiness and novelty. They hunger for what is *true and permanent-beautiful, noble, and enduring.*"

These youth respond, under God's grace, to God's gifts of Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments: these gifts are *true and permanent-beautiful, noble, and enduring*. The Christian church is the one and only place where such treasures are freely available. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

If the church shapes her message to satisfy the novel and trendy, she forfeits her character and her ability to reach out in mission and invite all to share in the blessings of Christ's saving work. Whether it be the state churches of Europe or North American religiosity, acculturation and accommodation impoverish and threaten Christ's people.

Confessing Christ and heeding His voice in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is not repristination or dead traditionalism or the mere display of a conservative temperament. No, Christ, and all that He calls us to, is *true and permanent-beautiful, noble, and enduring*. His gift of baptismal identity makes every day fresh and meaningful. His Word is the bread of life. The banquet of His very body and blood is the heavenly food that satisfies the soul.

Our youth, indeed all of us, need daily nurture in these holy gifts. Our worship, our catechesis, and our lives should point to the Holy Trinity who has revealed Himself in Christ.

Concordia Theological Seminary is committed to the formation of pastors who will *personally and compassionately* feed the church's entire family with the *truthful, the beautiful, and the permanent-Christ's Word and Sacraments*.

As a confirmation hymn puts it so beautifully:

O Holy Trinity, To whom I all things owe,
Your image graciously Within my heart bestow.
Choose me, though weak and lowly, To be Your temple holy
Where praise shall rise unending For grace so condescending.
Oh, heav'nly bliss, Your own to be, O Holy Trinity!
My Maker, Now Be Nigh (LW 255, st. 4)

May God bring forth courageous generations of Davids, Jeremiahs, and Esthers to renew the church and rekindle its missionary zeal to share those gifts that are *truthful, beautiful, and forever*.

Sincerely yours, in Christ's service,

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