

“The Fruit of the Womb is a Reward”
Vine and Branches Conference
Lutheran Church of Our Savior
Windom, Minnesota
April 13, 2013

I am honored to be invited to speak to you today on the blessings of children. To be pro-marriage is to be pro-children. To be pro-life is to be pro-children. It is common among us to isolate topics from one another and to avoid certain topics as being just a bit too personal. Among conservative, Bible-believing Christians there is widespread consensus that marriage is the lifelong union of one man with one woman. The very idea of marriage between a man and a man or a woman and a woman is impossible. It's not just morally wrong. It's absurd. There is also widespread agreement that the unborn child is a human being who should be protected from violence. The very idea that the unborn baby is merely a product of pregnancy with no more right to remain within his mother's body than an infected and inflamed appendix is barbaric, heartless, and utterly immoral. Decent Christians defend traditional marriage. They defend the rights of the living but unborn.

And they plan if and when they will have children. They regard family planning as basic to responsible Christian stewardship. In days gone by unwanted children were called unwanted children. Nowadays they are called unplanned pregnancies as if family planning is the universal practice of parents everywhere. We plan the purchase of a car or a house. We plan our retirement. We plan our children. This is a given, not only among those who reject God's word and the standards of God's law, but among those who consider themselves to be pro-life, pro-marriage, Bible-believing Christians.

There are a variety of approaches we could take to the question of family planning. We could consider the encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*. Produced in 1968, it sets forth the carefully reasoned position of the Roman Catholic Church on contraception and birth control. It is laden with much Roman Catholic baggage that we Lutherans would find objectionable. For example, it repeatedly appeals to the authority of the Roman Catholic

magisterium or hierarchy. Lutherans believe that the Holy Scriptures are the sole standard by which all teachings in the Church must be judged. We do not appeal to human authority to establish the correct teaching of doctrine and morals.

Furthermore, in placing and thoroughly addressing contraception within the broader moral teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, *Humanae Vitae* incorporates the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit into its teaching on this subject. The Roman Catholic understanding of natural law is predicated on the assumption that the divine law, aided by grace, is doable. We Lutherans believe that the divine law always accuses, even the holiest Christians. Making the law doable is grounded in legalism. Thus, legalism permeates its arguments on contraception.

Still, this Roman Catholic document has much of value to offer the discerning reader.

Rome argues from natural law that it is against God's will to disconnect sexual intercourse from its procreative purpose. The Roman Catholic Church does not forbid birth control. It forbids contraception. It distinguishes between natural family planning where the couple may abstain from sexual intimacy during that time of the month when the woman is most likely to conceive and artificial means of birth control such as a barrier method, a pill, or other methods that prevent conception. I encourage Lutherans who are critical of the pope's teaching on birth control to read the official document that sets forth what the pope and his church actually teach on the subject. I suspect that few have.

If we wanted to avoid the legalistic natural law reasoning of the Roman Catholic magisterium of celibate men who have no responsibility to provide for wives and children, we could approach the matter of family planning from the more modern and scientific vantage point of demographic "experts" who have advocated birth control for the sake of humanity. The problem with that is that the "experts" have been shown to be spectacularly inaccurate in their doomsday forecasts. Consider, for example, Paul Ehrlich's bestselling, [The Population Bomb](#), published the same year as *Humanae Vitae*, in which he

advocated radical measures to contain a population growth that he warned would result in mass starvation within a decade. Today we are witnessing exactly the opposite of what he predicted. America is barely replacing its population and Europe is in fast decline. The cultural clash between post-Christian Europeans and West Asian Muslim immigrants that has caused social and political upheaval throughout the continent is a direct result of Europe's refusal to reproduce, requiring the mass importation of labor from abroad. Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn about family planning from the social scientists is that social science isn't science.

Rome's approach to family planning must fit within Rome's approach to moral theology. An essential feature of Rome's teaching on moral theology is that the law must be doable. If it isn't, there goes free will. When free will is gone their entire moral system collapses of its own weight. Legalistic systems are not created out of devotion to the law. They are designed to make the requirements of the law accessible to those committed to following it. You can follow Rome's rules on contraception.

Most Protestants, on the other hand, have pretty much abandoned the idea that birth control is a moral issue, though some enjoy a bit of moralistic posturing about how overpopulation is a threat to the planet. Having long ago abandoned the natural law argument in favor of the quack notions of pseudo-science, Protestants are left with no moral compass when it comes to the question of family planning. When I was at the seminary, the older professors cautioned us young students about imposing a legalistic burden when it came to questions of birth control and family planning. With all due respect, they were living in the past. The fundamental shift away from a moral framework on matters of birth control had occurred long before I entered the seminary in 1975.

My topic today is, "The Fruit of the Womb is a Reward." God blesses us with children. Children are not a curse. They are a blessing. Moses records that God created man, male and female, in his image, "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" The blessing with which God blessed them in the beginning was the fruitful womb. What this means is that children are a blessing from God. The Bible says so. Children are not a

blessing in the way that wine is a blessing. Wine may be a blessing because it “makes glad the heart of men” (Psalm 104:15) but it may not be a blessing because “at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper.” (Proverbs 23:32) Children are not a blessing in the same way that money, power, and other transient goods are blessings. These can also be curses. Children are not curses. They are a blessing from God because of the inherent value of a human being, created in God’s image, redeemed by Christ’s blood, and fit to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit in baptism. Wine, wealth, power, and even wisdom are all doubled edged blessings that can also become curses. A child is a gift from God. Children are not burdens to be avoided. They are gifts to be received with thanksgiving.

The fruit of the womb is a reward. Where does this topic fit within the Catechism? Let us think catechetically like Lutherans. Most Protestants have no catechism and no clear teaching on the topic of procreation other than that the parents of prospective children are the ones who should decide whether or not children will be conceived and brought into this world. Family planning is the default position. It is assumed.

The Roman Catholics place this topic squarely within the Sixth Commandment. A popular college textbook for Roman Catholics from the 1950’s, College Moral Theology, introduces its consideration of the Sixth Commandment with the statement: “The Sixth Commandment prescribes that sex pleasure in human beings be directed toward the orderly propagation of the race.” This does make a certain amount of sense inasmuch as it is by means of sexual intercourse that children are conceived. Clearly, sexual intimacy and the propagation of the race are joined together. One reason that homosexual “marriage” is an absurdity is that such a so called “marriage” cannot possibly bear the fruit of marriage.

God gives us children through means. The means by which he gives us children should be respected. To treat matters of sexual activity as purely personal decisions to be governed by personal desires is both selfish and foolhardy. We should not deny or ignore the God-ordained bond between sexual intimacy and procreation. We all know where babies come from. The act of love by which God creates new life is an act that God has placed within

the life long marital bond between one man and one woman. It makes good sense.

Here we see that the Sixth Commandment serves the Fourth Commandment. What is needed for a good upbringing by a loving father and mother corresponds to what is needed for a good marriage between a man and a woman. The God who makes babies and cares for them is the God who has established conjugal love and parental responsibilities. The activities that fall under the Fourth Commandment and the Sixth Commandment go together. It is certainly appropriate that we consider the matter of family planning in connection with these two commandments.

But I would suggest that this approach is inadequate. As we consider the biblical truth that a fruitful womb is a gift and blessing from our Father in heaven, we are not considering the Sixth Commandment, the Fourth Commandment, or any other commandment. We aren't considering what we must or must not do. We are considering what God does and what God gives. Here is how we confess this in the Catechism:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

How God makes me and preserves me and provides me with all that I need to support this body and life is joined to how God, through his commandments, governs marriage and the family. The means by which God creates us and provides for us are not incidental. The commandments and the Creed go together. But the critical fact is that it is God himself who is doing the creating and what God creates is good because he creates it.

This is so despite our sin. Original sin means that we are corrupt. The essence of our humanity is not sin. God became one of us without becoming a sinner. We do not despise God's creation because of its corruption. The eternal Son of the Father assumed flesh and blood in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He did so, not because God despised his fallen creation, but because he loved us even when we were sinners. The creation of children in God's image and the redemption of children by God's blood and the sanctification of children by water and the Spirit mean that the topic before us – The Fruit of the Womb is a Reward – is firmly grounded in the Creed.

God chooses. We are chosen. We do not receive our worth from the choice of men and women. We receive our worth from God's choice. We do not come from the animals. We come from God. Let the evolutionists argue biology against us and, if you want to, go out and gather together biologists and physicists and mathematicians to refute them. We can argue from the observable material world – the testable, scientifically verifiable world – who is right and who is wrong. I have no doubt that we will win the argument. I have that much confidence in the scientific method. But what have we proven when we have debunked a materialistic argument with evidence from the material world? We still haven't demonstrated the true value of a human being, have we?

Similarly, when we have shown from natural law the bond between conjugal love and procreation, all we have demonstrated is what anybody with eyes can see. Fornication, sodomy, adultery, homosexuality, and baser sins can be shown to be sins without thereby proving the value of a human life. Neither the Sixth Commandment nor the Fourth Commandment is a sufficient foundation for our pro-children position. Both commandments can be violated without diminishing the value of human life.

The conception and birth of a baby is a good thing even when its circumstances are drenched in lust, irresponsibility, folly, and reckless sin. More and more of the children born in America today are born of fornication. The word "bastard" has lost its meaning. The disintegration of marriage is a sign of a cultural decline and appears to be accelerating. But the value of a

human life isn't determined by cultural mores. Children are blessings from God, not because their parents want them, but because God does. God decides what a blessing is. After all, he is the one who blesses.

If the humanity of the child comes from the decision of the parents, it stands to reason that the mother should have the right to kill it. If she decides against its humanity it isn't human. As such, it has no right to live. But if the child's humanity comes from God and not from the father and mother, then a child is a gift.

We need to make this crystal clear. The life that God creates in the womb through the agency of a man and a woman is always a blessing even when the man and the woman are not married to each other. The humanity of the child is not determined by his mother or father. God is the Author of life. We sing in the Venite:

Oh come, let us worship and bow down:
Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.
For he is our God:
And we are the people of his pasture
And the sheep of his hand.

The Psalmist writes:

For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.

And in Your book they all were written,

The days fashioned for me,

When as yet there were none of them. (Psalm 139)

What we do as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters does not and cannot make us who and what we are. God does. He has authority over our lives because he is our Creator. As Job confessed:

Your hands have made me and fashioned me,

An intricate unity;

Yet You would destroy me.

Remember, I pray, that You have made me like clay.

And will You turn me into dust again?

Did You not pour me out like milk,

And curdle me like cheese,

Clothe me with skin and flesh,

And knit me together with bones and sinews?

You have granted me life and favor,

And Your care has preserved my spirit. (Job 10:8-12)

There are many reasons why people don't believe that children are blessings from God. They can be subsumed under two general headings: consumerism and feminism. When combined, they constitute an effective assault on children. Let us begin by looking at consumerism.

In an economy that depends on the mass marketing of consumer goods it is necessary that these goods be valued by potential buyers. Value is a relative thing. We choose between this and that. A free market economy works

because it doesn't rely on coercion or incompetent price-setting by a central authority but rather on the many voluntary choices of free agents who are willing to give this for that. The freer the choices the more efficient the pricing mechanism and the smoother the economy runs. Three cheers for free market capitalism! We choose the value of the commodities we buy. If the price is too high, we don't buy it. If the price is too low, we don't sell it. The invisible hand, not an ideologically blinded clique of coercive utopians, determines prices.

But what is the price of a human life? We are not redeemed by gold or silver, but by the holy precious blood and the innocent suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Do we have a monetary value? If so, we have become a commodity that is for sale.

But surely no one seriously thinks of a child as a commodity! Oh yes, they do! They most certainly do! It is one thing to favor the free market economy for its own sake; it is quite another to define the human being in economic, that is, materialistic measurements. But that's a principle of the family planning ethic. It is grounded in materialism. When the quality of life is determined by one's ability to amass more and more stuff one really must do some cost benefit analysis and decide whether or not the birth of another child is worth it. This is precisely what is going on. The existence of a human being becomes a human choice like the purchase of this house or that car. Should we buy this on credit or should we go without? What kind of cable television are we willing to pay for? When can we afford to have a child?

More and more stuff that we don't presently have but that we can potentially have becomes the driving force in peoples' lives. More and more stuff costs money. Children cost money. The value of life and the enjoyment of life are determined by money because we need more and more of the stuff that makes life worth living.

That this is a shallow and meaningless life that leaves one empty in the end does not mean that it isn't very appealing. Its appeal is immediate gratification. This clouds the judgment of the most pious Christians. The cigarette smoker knows that he'd be better off not smoking. He also knows

that the discomfort of nicotine withdrawal is now and the benefits of quitting smoking are later. So he smokes and thinks about quitting sometime down the road. Just so, the Christian couple knows that children are a blessing from God. They also know that there are things that they would like to have now. They look at the child that might be born as a threat to their lifestyle, not as a blessing from God. Victims of the consumerist propaganda, they have been lured into valuing perishable commodities more than human beings.

As powerful a force as consumerism is, it is not a sufficient reason, by itself, for the transformation of values in our culture. The feminist creed, a curiosity a generation ago, has become social dogma for a large portion of our country. Feminism is hard to define succinctly in a manner acceptable to all. Most definitions will speak in generalities about social, political, and economic equality. This is often bound up in a left of center political ideology if for no other reason than that only a sufficiently empowered government will be able to make the changes necessary for feminism to achieve the equality it seeks. Some of the legal causes of early feminism would not be objectionable to most of us. They promoted such things as women's rights to own property, enter into contracts, or otherwise to engage in business and commercial activities. More pertinent to our discussion today is the feminist teaching concerning a woman's reproductive rights. Reproductive rights are defined as access to contraception and abortion. You are familiar with the slogans. A woman has the right to do what she chooses with her own body. We could argue that that's not the issue in abortion inasmuch as abortion doesn't kill the woman's body; it kills the body within her body. But there is a more fundamental point. The right of a woman to do what she chooses with her own body is grounded in a practical atheism. There is no Creator who chooses to create. The doctrine of reproductive rights is incompatible with Christianity, not primarily because it gives a woman the right to have her unborn child killed, but primarily because it makes men and women into gods and goddesses and dethrones the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The account in St. Luke's Gospel of Gabriel's visit to Mary wonderfully illustrates for us the Christian response to feminism and their dogma of reproductive rights. God sent Gabriel to Mary. He told her that she was blessed and had found favor with God. He then told her that she would

become the mother of God. He gave her no command. But he didn't give her any choice, either. It wasn't an imposition. It was blessing and favor. Read the text! There isn't a hint of coercion or command or anything else smacking of legal obligation. It was pure gift.

But on Mary's side, there was no choice. There was assent. There was obedience. There was faith. But she was not the one who chose whether or not she would become the mother of God. God was. God elevates womanhood as womanhood by means of motherhood. When Mary becomes the mother of God motherhood is sanctified above any other vocation a woman can have. St. Luke tells us that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when she said to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Mary responds to these Spirit-filled words by saying, "For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed." The God in her womb is our brother, our representative under the law, our substitute as the sacrificial offering to take away the sin of the world, our intercessor before the throne of grace, who sends the Holy Spirit to us from the Father who calls, gather, enlightens, and sanctifies us as his Church on earth. In Mary Christian motherhood is sanctified.

Consumerism and feminism combine to make man, male and female, into God. Children are regarded as commodities that may not be worth the price. A woman is taught that she can by her own choosing obtain a status greater than what God gives her in motherhood. Motherhood is denigrated because it becomes a merely human activity. Severed from its source of dignity in God, it is cheapened.

If children are a blessing from God as the Bible says they are, the bearing of children is an honor God bestows. If the fruitful womb is a reward from God, the conceiving, bearing, and nurturing of children is something to be desired, extolled, protected, and enshrined in custom, law, and expressions of piety. It is from this Christian perspective that we must examine feminism and its claims.

Both men and women embrace the feminist creed and both men and women oppose it. The dogmas of feminism are for both men and women. A woman's

reproductive rights quite obviously militate against a man's paternal responsibilities. Countless legal battles that are dramatized in books, movies, and television, illustrate for us how the manufacture of new rights in conformity with the teachings of feminism has exacerbated the difficulties facing minor children. When childbearing and nurturing has become a second class vocation it is children who suffer the greatest harm.

Feminism is not about the rights of women. It is not about autonomy as opposed to tyranny. In fact, feminism strips women of their dignity and freedom. Feminism is a secular creed grounded in materialism. By denying motherhood as the greatest good, it attacks marriage as well, inasmuch as marriage has always existed for the benefit of children. It was inevitable that feminism would lead to same sex "marriage." Once we liberate ourselves from participation in God's creative activity we ensure the loss of any concept of natural law.

The home and the family are fundamental both as social institutions and as the God-ordained place where life is created, sustained, and blessed. The attack on motherhood is the attack on the home. The promise of liberation for women has given us abortion on demand, illegitimacy, pornography, and the increasing power of a soulless state determined to provide what used to be provided by fathers and mothers in the home.

Feminism has tremendous influence over the church of our day, even on those who don't regard themselves as feminists. The default position has been moving steadily to the left for the past couple of generations. As the dignity of the domestic estate has declined, the ideological war against patriarchy has intensified, making Christian men and women defensive about fulfilling their God-given vocations.

The authority of the Holy Scriptures is set aside as patriarchy is dismissed as merely the social convention of the day, thus negating everything the Bible says about the relationship between men and women in the home and in the church. The feminist dogma attacks patriarchy as inherently exploitative and abusive to women. In the Bible patriarchy is assumed as the God-given arrangement of human affairs.

The rise of materialism and feminism has been spurred by the adoption of the evolutionary dogma that we descended from the animals. From that comes a denial of the historicity of the creation account in Genesis. From that comes a dismissal of the teaching of Genesis concerning the relationship between a man and a woman. The suitability of the woman for the man and the complementary roles they assume in marriage gives way to a socially and legally imposed sameness. From the equality of the sexes comes “marriage equality,” that is, the sanctification of serial sodomy.

The biggest losers are the children. As commodities they are measured by their cost. Their worth is the worth imputed to them by those who chose to bring them into this world. Since God did not create them God does not govern them. Since God does not govern them they grow up without any fear of God. Since they grow up without fear of God they live lives that bring pain and misery to their parents. Since they bring pain, they aren’t regarded as blessings, but burdens. Since they are burdens, and expensive burdens at that, fathers and mothers agree to hire others to raise them. The children are placed in orphanages called “Day Care Centers” so that both parents can do what the consumerist feminist family must focus their attention on doing: making money.

Day care providers may be as self-giving as Mother Theresa and as pious as the Virgin Mary, but they are not the children’s mothers. As such, they cannot discipline the children as a mother. It’s not a lack of love, knowledge, piety, or any other virtue. It’s the lack of a relationship established by God himself. This relationship cannot be delegated.

Authority can be delegated. Martin Luther makes it clear in the Large Catechism under the Fourth Commandment that it is from the parental estate that all human authority is derived. Authority is not the same as a relationship. A relationship cannot be delegated. It is precisely in the relationship that the mother shines and no one can approach her in the value of what she does.

The mother and the father go together. They are married to each other. That this is not always the case does not mean that it is not the best for the children. The father is the head of the home even as he is the head of the wife. As the husband gives himself up for his wife and as the wife submits to her husband this relationship forms the context in which the children are raised. The children see their identity in their father. They bear his name. So does their mother. He is their representative to the world.

He is the primary teacher of the children. This is made clear in both the Old and the New Testaments. When God gives his law as recorded in Deuteronomy, he speaks to the husbands and fathers, telling them in Deuteronomy 6:7 to teach his word diligently to their children. In Ephesians 6:4 the Apostle Paul tells the fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This doesn't at all suggest that the mothers are not to teach their children. Rather, it is to ground the responsibility of teaching and rearing children where the family is identified and defined by God.

The bureaucratization of schools, businesses, and even the church strikes out at families, imposing their structures, regulations, and schedules upon us as if our children belong to others to govern and control and mold. Parents assume their own incompetence to do what God has commanded them to do. They've been bullied, conned, distracted, and psyched out. They bow meekly before the bureaucracy, obediently submitting to its demands.

Years ago, when I had children attending the local high school in East Grand Forks, Minnesota, we would receive a "Contract" from the school each year that we were expected to sign. It contained mostly common sense rules for parents, students, and teachers to improve the quality of the education for the high school students. Parents, students, teachers, and the principal were expected to sign it. After dealing with this issue for a couple of years, I decided to write a letter to address it. Here is what I wrote:

September 4, 2002

Dear Friends:

We think that you deserve an explanation as to why we will not be able to sign the Parent/Guardian Agreement portion of the East Grand Forks Elementary Schools Student/Teacher/Parent/Principal Contract.

We believe that the duty of teaching children belongs to the parents of the children. It is our responsibility to educate our children because God gave them to us and placed them under our care. Therefore, when we send our children to a school we are delegating to that school and to its teachers the authority and responsibility to teach our children on our behalf. We have been pleased with the education our children have received in the East Grand Forks school system.

Implicit in the Contract that we are asked to sign is the understanding that the school is not carrying out duties delegated to it by the parents, but that the school actually has a teaching/oversight responsibility for the parents themselves. The school presumes to ask the parents to carry out certain parental responsibilities and to sign a "Contract" that they will do so. This is highly inappropriate. Parents are not answerable to the school for how we raise our children. The school is answerable to the parents for how they teach our children. We would like to emphasize that we have no complaints in this regard. However, there is a principle involved here, a principle of deep religious conviction that would be violated were we to sign the Contract that we are asked to sign.

Since this matter comes up every year in every class we thought it would be helpful to you if we prepared this brief explanation why we have not and will not sign the Contract. Thanks so much for understanding. Naturally, we pledge to you our support as you teach our children. Much of what the Contract contains are good common sense suggestions. We don't object to the sentiments expressed in it. We object rather to the fact that the school asks

parents to sign it. We believe that it is not the school's proper place to do so.

Sincerely,

Rev. Rolf Preus _____

Mrs. Dorothy Preus _____

In talking to other parents of high school children in that school district, I found some parents who chafed a bit at signing, but no one who refused to do so. They did not think it was their option not to.

One of the reasons why children are not regarded as blessing from God is that their parents are confused about their own duties to their children and feel inadequate to the task. What is the most precious knowledge there is? Is it not the knowledge of the Savior, Jesus Christ? Is it not the Catechism in which we learn God's law, his gospel, how to pray, and the means of grace? Yet how many mothers and fathers actually teach the Catechism to their children? I've been teaching children the Catechism for about thirty five years now and I can attest to the fact that most parents don't.

When young parents choose a congregation to attend, what do they look for? Do they look for the pure marks of the Church by which their souls and their children's souls will be fed by the pure gospel and sacraments of Christ? Or do they look for a Sunday school or youth program or Christian day school? If one were to suggest that neither Sunday schools, nor Christian day schools, nor vacation Bible schools, nor youth groups, nor any other auxiliary organization of the church established to serve the young people is necessary it would sound like heresy. But none of this is necessary. Even when they do good work they are not necessary. How do I know this? Because the Bible says nothing about them!

The Bible talks about parents. Fathers are duty bound to teach God's word to their children. In the case of the pastor Timothy, who is known chiefly by the fact that two of St. Paul's epistles bear his name, his father was apparently not

a believer. He hadn't bothered getting him circumcised, which would indicate that Timothy was not raised in the faith by his father. But he was raised in the faith. St. Paul commends the faith of both Timothy's mother and grandmother. We who regard the Bible as normative for family faith and life do not need lectures from self-appointed family experts about the needs of non-traditional families. The Bible is full of non-traditional families. All children need the same things: they need God's word, they need love and discipline, and they need proper care and protection. Above all, they need the gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the obedience, suffering, and death of Jesus. God has entrusted all of this to mothers and fathers because God values the children he had made and doesn't consign them to the tender mercies of a legalistic bureaucracy.

When Paul says that he wants the younger widows to "marry, bear children, [and] manage the house," (1 Timothy 5:14) he assumes that marriage, children, and managing the home belong together. That there are times that women cannot conceive does not mean that children do not belong to marriage. The fact that barrenness in the Scriptures is consistently portrayed as a burden to bear and never as a blessing of which to boast is sufficient biblical proof that God blesses us with children because he loves us.

Why are children not recognized as blessings from God? Besides consumerism and feminism, a major reason is that what the Bible teaches us concerning the nurture of children in God's word by their parents is ignored. Children do bring us pain. God says they are blessings but they don't always appear to be.

Let me illustrate. Some people dislike the rhythmic chorale. I guarantee you: there is only one reason why anyone would dislike the rhythmic chorales. It's because they don't know any better. It's not the fault of the chorale. They are without a doubt the most beautiful Christian music you have ever heard and the texts are some of the finest, most gospel-laden, theologically rich and rewarding of any Christian poetry ever written. But here is what happens. Organists will butcher them. There is no other word for it. They will play the rhythmic chorale according to the standards that obtain with the more schmaltzy revivalistic hymnody that invades our Lutheran churches from the

sects. They drag them out and slow them down and make it a painful chore to sing them. Thus, a powerful, dignified, and lovely hymn that uplifts the soul to God becomes a dreary funeral dirge that never ends.

So the children who are objectively blessings from our gracious Father become pains we must endure for our own good until the last one graduates from high school and leaves us in peace. The rhythmic chorales must be played properly. When they are, they shine! They are so much better than the sappy schmaltz that brings tears to the eyes of religious sentimentalists. And children must be disciplined properly. To discipline means to teach, not to punish. To teach children properly is to talk theology to them at home, bring them to church every Sunday, sing good hymns with them, yes, including the great Lutheran chorales, and make them memorize their Catechism.

The blessing of a baby being born is, for us Christians, seen most clearly in the birth of Jesus our Savior. We come to appreciate our own children as wonderful gifts from God as we give to them the gospel of Jesus. When the children grow up going to church every Sunday and knowing that the gospel they hear in the Divine Service is not confined to the Divine Service; when they grow up knowing that the discussion of God's word at home, around the dinner table, and whenever the family is together is not an awkward or artificial sort of thing, but rather as natural as breathing and eating and drinking; when they see from their parents that the forgiveness of sins is not just a doctrine to which we give lip service, but the defining truth by which the family lives and thrives; then the children grow up learning how precious children are. They don't need the gospel of self-esteem when they know the love of God in Christ. That gives them their worth, their identity, and their future.