

Communion, Responsibility, Accountability

Responding as a Lutheran Communion
to Neoliberal Globalization

Documentation No. 50

December 2004

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on behalf of

The Lutheran World Federation—A Communion of Churches
Department for Theology and Studies
Office for the Church and Social Issues

“Let the Children Come”

A Baptismal Sermon¹

René Krüger

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs (Mk 10:14).

Brothers and sisters,

We live in a society marked by contradictions. While we worship eternal youth and have created a dazzling commercial world focusing on children and adolescents, there is also a peculiarly careless attitude toward youth, that formative stage of life requiring such sensitivity. There are endless examples of this carelessness.

One of the most tragic phenomena of the modern world are the so-called street children. The reasons for this phenomenon are industrialization, migration from rural to urban areas, the disintegration of the family unit, child neglect, unemployment, increased crime and the exploitation of beggar children. Daily, this situation is further aggravated by the international neoliberal socio-economic model benefiting a few while impoverishing many. The sad phenomenon of street children is a shameful stain on our society and one of its most terrible features. Through no fault of their own, these children are thrown out of their homes and deprived of a good education, happiness, health, and above all their parents', siblings' and grandparents' love. They are deprived of the opportunity to be brought up in an environment where they can get to know Jesus and form part of a Christian community. Being isolated from God in this way is catastrophic, because it denies children a solid foundation on which to build their lives. This is an extremely important point, because if many people are indifferent to religion and neglect the gospel and Christian values, people might get the impression that faith and the church are secondary, that they are neither essential nor vital, and that nothing matters.

These truly infanticidal tendencies have serious repercussions on the entire younger generation and today, at every Baptism, we look for an answer in the words of Jesus:

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

What does that mean? How can we obey this command when much in society tempts us to do the same, to become indifferent to everything, to allow people to do as they like, with no commitment to anything positive or an interest in anything of substance?

But this is precisely the key. We must overcome inertia, widespread indifference and the tendency of society to isolate and exclude. We must encourage ourselves and others to go against the flow. We must oppose this model which had promised to alleviate poverty, but has merely produced a greater number of poor people on every continent, more street children, who are marginalized, starving and dying. To go against the flow alone is very difficult; we can easily get tired and give up. This is one of the reasons why we need the faith community, the church.

Twenty centuries ago, the first followers of Jesus, the first Christian church, understood exactly that: they needed to form a community that went against the flow. They understood that they needed to challenge many things that were clearly wrong and had direct, harmful effects on people's lives. They knew that they could not intervene in everything, but that they needed very carefully to evaluate everything around them.

The first Christians endeavored to create a different life, one built on their faith in Jesus. They knew that Jesus had risked and given his life for them. They also knew that the sacrifice had been worthwhile, and that God had confirmed this by raising Jesus from the dead.

Their faith encouraged them to be critical of their environment, to evaluate everything happening around them with good judgment, to embrace good and to challenge evil. It inspired them to live differently and not to go with the flow. From the testimonies of many sincere and honest Roman and Greek authors, who lamented the countless evils of their time, we know that their society was truly wretched and harmful.

This idea of a different life continues to be valid today. If we have faith in Jesus and dedicate ourselves to the ideal of God's kingdom, it is possible, even today, to challenge any harmful or deadly current in our society. It is possible to live differently; it is possible to work toward something different. We must strive for change so that the children who are born, whom we baptize and who grow up can live protected by love and not under the constant threat of violence or isolated from the beautiful things in life, excluded from what they need to survive.

Baptizing children is a great commitment. Parents, godparents and the whole community commit themselves to protecting the child, to Christian

discipline and love. We say to the children: we love you; we will always be there for you and support you. We will put into practice what God is doing for you in your Baptism: drawing you into the body of Christ's church.

We will protect you from the consequences of this shameful system that has been imposed on our societies and that devastates so many people. We will guide you and show you the way with prayer and through our own example. We will talk to you about Jesus, so that you come to know him as your Lord and the Lord of us all. We will guide you in your faith.

We will show you that Jesus is against death, destruction, exclusion and marginalization. We do not want forgotten what God began in your life today. We do not want this delicate little plant that has begun to grow today to wither. We want you to be blessed in your earthly and eternal life, and we have made a commitment to putting your life above our own so that this may be so. We do not want to be responsible for having prevented you from coming to Jesus.

We also tell you that we are not perfect, but that we need God's help and guidance in our daily lives.

In some respects children can teach us many things, and we must learn to be like them. I am not talking about their presumed innocence, because we know very well that they are neither innocent, nor that they possess any kind of special goodness. I am talking about their dependence, their openness, their willingness to let themselves be guided. They have total trust in their parents and are devoted to them, because without them, they are completely helpless. This is a metaphor, a symbol, for our own dependence on God. That is what Jesus taught us with the enigmatic words:

For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Amen.