

Programmed For A Computerized World

By: Richard Lauersdorf

Item - Teenagers are responsible for close to 50% of all out-of-wedlock births and 3% of all abortions. Would these percentages mean more if we were told that in 1979 there were five hundred ninety seven thousand eight hundred out-of-wedlock babies born in our nation (Jefferson County Union 10/25/81) and also that since nine men dressed in black robes met in Washington in 1973 and so sagely decided when human life begins, that about ten million abortions are estimated to have occurred?

Item - The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of unmarried couples living together tripled during the 70's to 1.56 million and that 20% of these are under the age of 25. And we have our share of that 20% in our quiet midwestern town, including one high school senior (Milwaukee Journal 10/25/81).

Item - Forty metric tons of cocaine will be shipped to our country during this year. Suppose that all the international dealers who supply the drug in the U.S. market, not even including retailers, were to merge into one corporation; do you know that the corporation would rank 7th in the our country, between Ford Motor Co., at \$37 billion in revenue and Gulf Oil at 26.5 billion? Do you also know that 20% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 used cocaine in 1979, twice the number of those who used it in 1977 (*Time* magazine 7/16/81)? Also the latest survey shows one out or nine high school seniors is a daily user of marijuana. In my confirmation class four out of twenty three indicated they were in contact with people who used drugs and one said he knew where he could get some. And that's small town U.S.A. (Lakeside Lutheran Eye)

Item - *U.S. News and World Report* (8/10/81) revealed Americans spend one dollar out of every eight on leisure, for a yearly total of \$244 billion, up 321% since 1965. There's good many a teen age dollar in that total, including the 170 phonograph records or tapes which the average U. S. teenager buys.

Item - A recent Gallup Poll showed that one quarter of the teenagers in our country have never read the Bible (Watertown Daily Times 10/2/81).

Now I'm not trying to overwhelm you with statistics. If I were, I would brim many more like the statistics concerning the consumption of alcoholic beverages by teenagers, or the percentage of crimes committed by teenagers, and so on, but that's not the point. The point is that teenagers in our country are being programmed. A pattern is being laid out for them; sets of instructions are being written, and you know whose fingers are on the keys. You know who the programmer is and from where he comes. If you have any doubts, use your nose because the sulphur fumes of hell give him away. Call the programmer what you will, paste on him fancy titles and pretty him up as modern education and society have done, but he's still the same arch-foe of the Christian. He's still the same unholy triple alliance, which we know as the devil, the world, and our flesh, of whom the Scripture warns repeatedly and whom we've waged against ever since sin darkened Eden's door.

Am I exaggerating? Is this programming of our country's teens by the world really so serious? Others seem to think so and sometimes in strange places. Daniel Henninger, writing recently in the *Wall Street Journal* summed it up this way, "What all this comes don to is that over some 15 years, the elite groups who set the tone of a nation's moral culture inside its schools, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, TV programs, and so forth had convinced themselves that they were replacing an unhealthy, constricting system of moral Puritanism with a more humane, enriching system of nonjudgmental ethics."

What's the result? The disease called Humanism - you know that philosophy which is ego-tripping to the nth degree, the philosophy which has man jumping up and down and saying, "I'm number one. I'm the one who achieves, I'm the one to please. I'm the one who decrees. And I'm the one who will take the bows, too, please." Coupled with humanism is its first cousin, materialism. The "me first" philosophy leads to greedy hearts and grasping hands. Possessions, pleasure, power, popularity can never be had in large enough measure to slake the thirst of this monster. The "me first" attitude of humanism has another close relative, the kissing cousin known as immorality. Write songs about it and glorify it as love, coin new expressions for it like the new morality, label it as the liberty to decide for yourself what is right or wrong for you in a given situation, yet regardless what kind of new and fancy wrapping you put around it, it's still the same old garbage called greed.

It's still sinful man saying, "Me first", and showing it by the way he treats his fellow human being like an orange out of which he will squeeze what he wants and which he then will discard.

Humanism, materialism, immorality, permissiveness, situation ethics, disobedience, on and on the list goes as we look over the program which the world has in mind for our teenagers. What's the answer? Is it to throw up our hands in despair and to throw down the towel in defeat? To echo fatalistically the words of the 18th century Schiller, "Man originates in the muck. He walks around for a while in the muck. He makes muck. And he ends up in muck." Or should we adopt the attitude of a more modern philosopher who advised, tongue-in-cheek, "Adolescence is a time when children should be put in a barrel and fed through an opening in the barrel? (Bless, *Counseling with Teenagers*, p. 19, Fortress Press) Or should we make some sort of private zoo for them where we can keep them in a simulated environment and monitor their safe growth? That's hardly the right solution either. Remember how Jesus prayed for His own in His priestly prayer on Maundy Thursday evening? He said to His Father, "My prayer is not that You take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 1:15).

But there is an answer. Thank God, there is an answer. Our youth are to be programmed, not by the world, but by the Word. And since I have before me today, instead of teenagers, those who are to have a very real part in programming them by the Word I want to apply that thought to you teachers. You teachers need to be programmed by the Word. What does that Word tell you, what does it lay out for you, how would it program you to teach those teens in a computerized world?

To be programmed by the Word means first of all to be reminded what we are. It can happen that we forget what we once were and what we still are. It can happen that we slip into an exaggerated sense of our own importance, one which thinks that the Lord is lucky to have us and the church luckier still. If so, then it's time to lift the lid a little from the kettle of the heart and take a whiff of what bubbles inside. The smell of sin's stew a-cooking is hardly something to come home to. Also it's true as the hymnwriter tells us that when we try to be, upright and just and true to Thee, the Lord, we are sinners still. Why God doesn't pinch his nose shut in disgust and heave the whole rotten mess out, we'll never understand. Such a love that loved us in spite of what we were and still so often are, such a love which not only felt, but then acted is beyond earthly understanding. In heaven first will we fully understand and truly appreciate what divine love had done for us; of how Christ hung in poverty, stripped even of His clothing on Calvary's cross that we might have heaven's riches and wear glorious raiment; of how He, weary unto death, plunged into hell's depths that we might come weary to Him and find heaven's rests of how He wore a crown of thorns on His head that we might wear a crown of glory instead. This important truth we dare never forget. Sinners we were, sinners we still are, but by God's grace we are heaven bound, not hell bent.

And that's not all. The Lord of love who has covered all our sins by His grace takes us even a gigantic step farther. He's put the message of His love into our hands. He's said to you and me, and again why to you and me is hard to understand, but to you and me in His grace He's said, "I want you. I call you. I appoint you to teach my love to others." Those are heaven's riches which He's placed into our human hands, salvation's jewels which He's deposited into our shaky safekeeping, angel's work which He's given our feeble knees to do. If we ever forget this astonishing fact, we don't belong anyplace in the Christian ministry or anywhere near a Lutheran high school.

Men and women of our Lutheran High Schools, remember that you are where you are because you were called by a gracious God. Not a single one of you is merely hired, not a single one of you dare say, "I'm just holding down a job." The very fact that you stand in your classroom is God's grace. You are His choice for that particular corner of His kingdom and that particular phase of His work. You are there not because of any merit or worthiness on your part, but because He lovingly and graciously called you. Remember that fact and be humbled by it. Remember it also and be encouraged. When your work wears you down, when your tasks become tiring, when you feel more failure than success, don't reach for the panic button, but instead remember He who calls also enables and He who positions also powers for the task. Remember His call to you and find new courage for the way.

To be programmed by the Word means secondly to be reminded what those teenagers before us are. They are more than acne and braces, more than loud voices and louder music. They are more than people who think they know all they need to know and yet don't know what they want, more than people who don't want to be told anything and yet need to be told almost everything. They are more than growing bodies which can be at one and the same time obstinate, inconsiderate, and difficult to work with. To those hardy souls brave enough to try and teach them, I quickly and sincerely take my hat off in admiration. But let's remember what they really are. They are precious children of the heavenly Father, souls bought and paid for by the blood of the Crucified, souls which He now has placed into our care. To be programmed by the Word means that we regard each of these young adults not just as a statistic on our records, but as souls in our care, that we regard each class we hold, not just as so many minutes strung together, but a golden opportunity to lead our children closer to the Shepherd, that we regard the work of teaching each of them as not just some position, but a sacred privilege second to none and so serious that an accounting will be required of us.

Those youth are to have life, the life of faith and hope in their Redeemer, and they are to have it in abundance. Oh, that the Lord would write in bold letters the value of those souls and the importance of our work with them on our hearts with His own lifeblood. Then when the crafty Seducer spirits us way to some mountain top and spreads before us the riches of higher honor and better wages to be found in other jobs, we'll be able to tell him, "Get thee behind me Satan." Then when the sly Liar tries to hatch the worms of discontent and greed in our hearts with his whispering about long hours and short wages, about the automobiles and snowmobiles, the investment plans and vacation retreats which seem to afford and which we might think we ought to have too, we'll be able to answer Him, "Having food and raiment we are therewith content." Friends, the Master who himself had nowhere to lay His head did not call us to lay our heads on plenty's plump pillow. He has however called us to the most important calling on earth, He has commissioned us to serve under Him in helping souls reach eternity and he has promised that He will care for us as we go faithfully about our important work. Now let faith's energy not be squandered on such trifles, but spend in carrying out our high calling.

To be programmed by the Word means thirdly to be reminded what our tools are. Did you ever wonder why God chose such weaklings like us to carry on His sacred work, why He's placed His precious Word into such weak fingers? It can hardly be that He's indifferent to the damage we may do both to His Word and to His flock. Must it not rather be that He wants to draw attention to His Word, that He wants to prove that success is found not in those who serve, but in that with which they serve, namely His Holy Word? That Holy Word with its message of God's grace in Christ has to be the power behind all our teaching. No, that doesn't mean that a biology teacher throws away his biology book nor an English teacher his Shakespeare. Everything we teach we teach to the best of our ability and with all the knowledge we can muster. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux once put it, "It ill becomes a spouse of the Word to be stupid." Our Divine Call is not excuse to be mediocre in method or meager in knowledge, but rather a challenge to know the most and do the best. Yet behind it all and permeating it all has to be that blessed Word of God. Without that Word in all our classes, our schools would be little more than public high schools with daily devotions added and a subject called religion tacked onto the curriculum.

Last week the *Milwaukee Sentinel* with its article on plans to rebuild a desert railroad which Lawrence of Arabia and his fierce raiders once destroyed reminded me of how Lawrence brought several Arab leaders to Paris after the war had ended to represent their interests at the Paris Peace Conference. Those sons of the desert were filled with astonishment at the sights of Paris, but nothing intrigued them quite as much as the running water in their hotel rooms. In the desert water was a luxury and here in their rooms it seemed to be free and never ending, at the turning of a tap. When it was time for those Arabs to leave Paris, Lawrence found them removing those faucets, believing that those magic instruments would give them water at will in their native Arabia. Only with great difficulty did he finally convince them that those faucets were no good if detached from the water supply. "No good if detached" describes the teacher who is too busy to have his own daily devotions, who seldom bothers to use the Bible's influence in his subject matter. How can we teach the Word if we don't study the Word? How can we live the Word if we don't live in the Word? God give us all a holy and insatiable hunger for His Lord. God make us Bible Christians who eat and drink, live in and absorb the Holy Scriptures,

and the children who sit before us will benefit richly. God make us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the Spirit giveth life (2 Cor. 3:6).

God also programs us by His Word that we trust His Gospel to give life. Does it happen to you as I'll have to confess it does to me that you catch yourself week after week professing faith in God -Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and then live as if he weren't really alive or at best hardly all powerful? That you hear and proclaim His Word and then act as if those divine truths weren't really all that important? That you look at a schedule full of problems and become disheartened because you think you have to handle them all alone? That you look at your work and become upset because you don't see any visible results, forgetting that the shovel and the hoe, the seed package and watering can belong in your hand, but the sprouting and growing come from God's almighty hand? Then it's to the Word, my friends, to that Gospel which alone can give life to me and those before me. Preach it joyfully, trust it confidently, await God's harvest expectantly.

To be programmed by the Word means last of all to remember whom we serve. When Yogi Berra was a young catcher with the old New York Yankees, in one game he hit a ball safely into right field, but just shuffled along so that he only reached first base instead of second. The next batter forced Yogi at second. Then came fly ball followed by the third out. No run was scored. When Yogi reached the dugout, the manager asked him if he was feeling all right. "Sure," the catcher replied, "I feel fine." "Then why didn't you run out the hit and reach second so that you could have scored," the manager replied. "If you're going to be a Yankee, play like one."

If we're going to serve the Lord of glory who has bought us with His life's blood as the price, then let's act that way. When we are tempted to hesitate or falter, when we become lackadaisical or lazy, let's remember whom we serve. Let's remember how He was nailed down for us so that we hesitate less to be tied down in work for Him. Let's remember how drops of blood rolled off His brow so that we hesitate less to perspire in work for Him. Let's remember how He carried the burden of the cross so that we hesitate less to shoulder any burden of working for Him. Let the example of His love inspire us and propel us forward. Our best effort is still not enough when it comes to the Savior we serve and the Gospel we share.

In a world which seeks to run its evil program on our youth as well as on us, one compelling concern must occupy our minds. By God's grace we have the sign of the cross both upon our forehead and our breast, but how far have we driven it into our daily lives and how far have we carried it into our classroom lives. That question we ministers of God must daily answer. Would to God none of us fail Christ, His Church, his cause. Would to God all of us are programmed by the Word