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Reformed Tendencies in Certain American Lutheran Churches.

The subject is one that would properly call for an extended treatise. Reserving a more detailed discussion for a later date, the writer here would submit in the form of extracts from the official organs of several Lutheran bodies evidence of a strong Reformed leaven now working in the Synods responsible for these periodicals.

In the *Lutheran Church Quarterly* of July, 1930, Prof. A. G. Voigt of the United Lutheran seminary at Columbia, S. C., reviews Dr. Ferm's book *What Is Lutheranism?* He cites as one of the crucial questions which the contributors to this volume were asked to consider the following: "What is meant by the 'Word of God'?" Professor Voigt then continues: "Luther sang: *Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn*, and the Church which bears his name has ever sung it after him. Shall what has been understood by the Word of God since Luther, not to go back further, be perpetuated, or shall it, in the light of new intellectual constellations, be exchanged for something else more accordant to ideas current in this new day? Certainly this is a big question, a vital question. It should be faced with intellectual candor and considered with a conscience towards God as well as towards modern science. A living Church should not be merely content with a traditional answer to such questions." We fear Professor Voigt desires to suggest that we must consult not only the Scriptures, but also modern science when seeking the answer to the question, "What is the Word of God?"

Dr. Geo. M. Stephenson, who teaches history at the University of Minnesota and is a member of the Augustana Synod, reviews the same book in the *Lutheran Companion* of June 21. "All contributors admit that the confessions are fallible," says Professor Stephenson, "but a layman gives up in despair when 'Missouri' delivers itself of the following: 'A wholesale declaration that one accepts the Lutheran Confessions "as far as" they agree with the Scriptures not only throws suspicion on these confessions, but also opens the door to doctrinal latitudinarianism and insincerity.' "There is no reason why any Lutheran in view of the *-isma* and vagaries of our times should think of revising the creed and doctrinal attitude of his Church. . . . ' But some Lutherans (or at least they call themselves Lutheran) do.' This is Ferm speaking: 'The doctrine of the complete inerrancy of the Bible, upon which historic Lutheranism has built up a system of orthodoxy, can hardly, without a loss of intellectual integrity and vitality, be to-day maintained in the light of the historical method of understanding the Scriptures.' He cites specific official declarations of Lutheranism that are no longer tenable. He even admits that Luther's position on the Eucharist may be fairly challenged as

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 a necessarily true Biblical exegesis. . . . In the opinion of the reviewer the logical argument of Ferm is the most convincing and satisfying. He reveals a more profound ecumenical spirit and is untrammelled by symbols and ecclesiasticism."

Returning to the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, we find a collective review of a number of recent publications treating the Atonement. The attitude of the writer (Rev. Theo. K. Finck) is simply, frankly modernistic, as is clear from the following extracts: "No one, I think, who cares to dismiss all bias from his mind can doubt that the historical Jesus did not live and act with our atonement ideas guiding Him. If He had had any suspicion that the rich man, for instance, would suffer eternal misery in not following Him, Jesus would certainly have told him so plainly." "Paul took a remarkably fine way to say what he felt; we can appreciate the greatness even of his logic without demanding that it be forced into the minds of a generation which thinks in different terms." Rev. Finck assumes the following to have been the origin of the gospel according to John: "Here was some one, doubtless the Apostle John, who was intimately associated with Jesus and received His great religious secret. He told the story of [? to?] a friend who thought in terms of Gnostic (or some other) philosophy, and that person received the religious secret. Together (let us say) they projected our gospel of John, the apostle furnishing the remarkably accurate reminiscences of Jesus, the former philosopher trying to express the message of Jesus' life in the noblest, most expressive terminology he knew. Now, obviously, if such may have been the origin of the Fourth Gospel, we neither have to read the Johannine circle of ideas into Jesus' own lips, nor dare we discard the Johanninism as useless." Luther's own teaching of the Atonement is traced to the experience of the Reformer in his mighty wrestling with the problem of sin. He thus, says Rev. Finck, classifies with other great religious geniuses who "bequeath to their followers a burdensome sense of sin as a terrific reality; and their followers innocently spend the next few centuries talking about the terrible sin which in the mean time has dropped out of the social horizon because the age has become somewhat unified again." Noting the effort of other writers who stress the tremendous reality of sin in contending for the reality or objectivity of the Atonement, he adds the comment: "Doubtless that is good Paulinism and good Lutheranism; but it is not Anselmian nor, I believe, inherent in the religion of Jesus Himself." Then he invites the readers of the *Lutheran Church Quarterly* to go back to Christ Himself.—"What atonement can we actually find in the historical Jesus?" he asks, and his answer is depressingly simple—an atonement that is nothing more than an exemplar of a life that was "absorbed in the idea of the way of God being the right way." The divinity of Christ, His sinlessness and

vicarious atonement are termed categories that have been "endlessly emphasized," while we have forgotten the more important truth that Jesus "was the happiest man that ever lived. He discovered at first hand, and practised, that the way to have the happiest possible life is not to repress, and struggle over, the natural instincts nor, on the other hand, to indulge them to excess, but to enjoy the instincts and appetites of life to the full, except in any respect in which such enjoyment interferes with the ability of everybody else also to enjoy them. Hence Jesus enjoyed the feasts of His day with an excellent appetite, ('gluttonous and wine-bibber,' they called Him), but could with equal ease give up every physical exercise of the sexual function because He could prosecute His work more effectively without family ties. And that style of life, which Jesus carried out so spontaneously and fully, He invites us also to live. 'Be ye followers of Me.' That is the atonement with God that He has given us." Not only does the *Quarterly* print this review, but fails to add a note challenging its subversive teachings.

Continuing in the same issue of the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, we find a review of Dean Shailer Mathews's book *The Atonement and the Social Process*. The well-known extreme radicalism of the Chicago Divinity School professor does not prevent the reviewer (Rev. C. F. Sanders, Professor at Gettysburg College) from designating him as "one of those intense Christians who seriously dislikes to see his Master discredited by obsolete trappings." Dean Mathews rejects the Atonement, lock, stock, and barrel, being grounded on the conception of God "under the form of a magnified Roman emperor." "We are still reading the New Testament under patterns made under the Roman tradition." In our modern age "only an illiterate mind can be terrorized by the fear of the devil and of hell which nerved Thomas à Kempis, Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards. . . . Justification was as definite as an acquittal in a royal court." But "these medieval notions do not belong in Jesus' teachings." Now, this thoroughly modernistic book is termed by the reviewer not only "a splendid piece of constructive thinking," but is welcomed as "a strong appeal to deliver Jesus' teaching concerning atonement from its medieval obscurantism."

In the *Lutheran* of March 6, 1930, Brunner's *Theology of Crisis* is "heartily recommended" by the reviewer, Professor Voigt. The reviewer has either failed to discover the fundamental errors of the *Theology of Crisis* (see CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, Vol. I, No. 4), or he does not regard them as sufficiently serious to stand in the way of a "heartly recommendation." The review does not contain a word of caution or criticism. On the same page of the *Lutheran*, Dr. J. H. Horine of the Lutheran seminary at Columbia, S. C., favorably reviews the *Schofield Reference Bible*, and after stating

Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 1 [1930], Iss. 1, Art. 111 that its standpoint "is traditional and not at all critical," he sums up his survey of the book as follows: "Many pages of the Biblical text are left without a word of comment. All in all, however, the material provided in this volume will be of real service to the preacher, Sunday-school teacher, and general lay reader." Even the most superficial examination of the *Schofield Reference Bible* brings out its character as an elaborate piece of propaganda for the modern (Dispensationalist) chiliasm. The layman Mr. Philip Mauro, of Boston, has written a full exposure of the unevangelical and heretical nature of Dr. Schofield's system as contained in the notes of this Bible edition. The *Lutheran* reviewer recommends it to the clergy and the general lay reader.

The same writer, in an editorial contributed to the *Lutheran* of August 1, 1929, discusses the doctrine of inspiration. Dr. Horine generalizes the idea of inspiration in a manner which leaves unanswered the fundamental question, Have we inspired men only, or have we a uniquely inspired Book, containing God's thoughts and words, and only these? Even concerning the men, inspiration is made to include more than the unique task of composing the books which make up Holy Scripture: "There had been 'inspiration' for many other servants of God besides them and long before them; and after their peculiar task was finished and there was no longer need to receive and record a single word, 'inspiration' continued and continues, by the grace of God." More plainly still: "'Inspiration' by the Holy Spirit is not to be restricted to the act of composing and recording the Holy Scriptures and is not a thing of the past only. It is also a thing of the present; and if it should cease (which God forbid!), faith itself would cease and the kingdom of God in this world." The thesis of the entire article is that inspiration was and is not limited to the Holy Scriptures.

The influence of Reformed thought in its fundamentalistic phase is as prominent in recent American Lutheran literature as the modernistic strain. We have noted recently in our reviews of *Man in the Making* by Drs. S. and M. Stine (Ohio Synod) the chiliastic views there propounded,—views that did not, however, prevent a Norwegian reviewer in the *Lutheran Church Herald* (1930, p. 357) from saying: "The book will strengthen faith by answering many questions in this our age of doubt and controversy."

The other official organ of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, *Lutheraneren*, July 3, 1929, in an article contributed by Rev. N. Lunde, complains that "even our theological seminaries have not thoroughly treated the doctrine of Christ's second advent. Luther himself has not set forth this doctrine with sufficient thoroughness, and in loyalty to Luther many are unwilling to proceed farther than he did." The writer does not fear to go beyond Luther nor beyond

the Seventeenth Article of the Augsburg Confession. He establishes a reign of a thousand years between the "first" and "second" resurrection.

Beacon Lights of Prophecy, by C. E. Lindberg, dean of Augustana Seminary at Rock Island (recently deceased), interprets both the Old and the New Testament with a chiliasm that stops just this side of actual date-setting. (See review in *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, 1930, p. 873 f.)

The *Lutheran Companion* (Augustana Synod) has within recent years contained articles setting forth in its completeness the dispensationalistic teaching. To the issue of October 26, 1929, Graham Scroggie contributes an article on "Gentilic Prophecy." There is to be a visible reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years. "It is the common belief that the kingdom predictions of the Old Testament are now being fulfilled by the spread of the Gospel and the Christianization of the world, and that the promised reign of Messiah is spiritual and not literal. Without hesitation I say that such a view is wholly inconsistent with sound principles of interpretation and cannot be defended. If words have any significance at all, Christ is coming back to this world, and coming to reign." "The millennial kingdom shall be founded on righteousness and characterized by peace; and the Messiah in that day shall be King over all the earth."

"May we not expect far-reaching changes in the near future in the lives of nations and of individuals?" asks another writer in the same paper (October 5, 1929). The reestablishment of the Jewish state and of the Mosaic worship is expected in the near future. "That Israel will return to the Holy Land and rebuild its waste places is the concurrent testimony of the prophets. Much progress has been made, especially since the war, to favor this program of rehabilitation." "The establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine will mean the removal of the Mosque of Omar, which to-day is a Mohammedan center of worship. This mosque is to the Jews the 'abomination of desolation in the Holy Place.' Their desire is to cleanse the sanctuary and establish the old Mosaic worship of the true God. When this has been done and Jerusalem and the Holy Land has been restored to the descendants of Abraham, the Jewish theocracy will again have a place in the sun" (October 26, 1929). TC

It is not my intention to make a compilation of all expressions containing modernistic and chiliastic views which have appeared in the various Lutheran organs in recent years. Enough has been quoted to justify the fear that Modernism has eaten deeply into the theology of the United Lutheran Church and that thoroughly un-Lutheran and unscriptural views dominate official teaching regarding the Last Things in that and in other bodies. The contact with Reformed churches is bearing bitter fruit.

Are we using the proper safeguards against an incursion of

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 the same tendencies into our own church-body? Do we realize that we have as much to fear from the flood of fundamentalist theology, with its platform of essential indifferentism and its perverted eschatology, as from the enticements of evolutionistic Modernism? Do we read the religious literature of our day as truly critical scholars? Are we emulating the example of our fathers in their intense devotion to the study of the Scriptures? And are we earnestly endeavoring to realize the ideal of a soundly Lutheran literature, not only scholarly in its method and presentation, but comprehensive enough to cover the entire domain of theology and to supply every practical need for the Lutheran pastor?
 THEODORE GRAEBNER.

Abhaltung einer Gemeindevisitation.

Ein Visitator hat mancherlei Gelegenheit, seines Amtes zu warten. Da wird alljährlich in seinem Kreise eine allgemeine Versammlung von Vertretern der Gemeinden gehalten, um Finanzsachen zu besprechen und zur Betreibung des Synodalwerkes überhaupt zu ermuntern. Bei dieser Versammlung ist der Visitator der Führer. Er beruft sie ein, er leitet sie und tut, was er kann, um sie recht fruchtbar zu machen. Er nimmt ferner die Konferenzen, sonderlich die Spezialkonferenzen seiner Amtsbrüder, wahr, um ein gutes Wort einzulegen. Es sollte Regel bei ihm sein, daß er auf diesen Konferenzen, wenn nicht etwa der Präses des Distrikts anwesend ist und es tut, einen Bericht abstattet. (Die Brüder haben es gern.) Aber auch bei andern Zusammenkünften, sei es, daß Amtsbrüder ihn besuchen oder daß er ihnen einen Besuch abstattet, kann er, ohne daß er eine besondere Amtsmiene aufzusteden braucht, für seine Sache als Visitator reden. Zuweilen wird ihm auch eine Aufgabe bei einem Predigerwechsel in seinem Bezirk. Nicht als ob er Vorschläge für Wiederbesetzung einer Stelle zu machen hätte; das überläßt er dem Präses des Distrikts; aber er mag vom Präses oder vom Wafanzprediger oder von der Gemeinde angegangen werden, Auskunft zu geben oder Rat zu erteilen.

So muß ein Visitator auch oft durch Briefwechsel amtlich tätig sein. Amtsbrüder oder Gemeindeglieder schreiben an ihn und erbitten sich Rat. Ja zuweilen wendet sich auch ein Gemeindeglied hinter dem Rücken des Pastors an ihn und führt eine Klage. So unlieb ihm nun das auch ist, so muß er doch antworten und Anweisung geben, wie die Sache auf geordnetem Wege zurechtzustellen ist.

Ganz besonders aber wird dem Visitator Gelegenheit, seines Amtes zu pflegen, bei den sogenannten Kirchenvisitationen. Er ist dazu berufen, zu visitieren. Daher hat er seinen Namen. Er soll, wo möglich, innerhalb eines Trienniums alle Gemeinden seines Bezirks besuchen. Wie nun eine solche Visitation zu halten sei, darauf wollen wir jetzt des genaueren eingehen.