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Present-Day Problems of Lutheranism

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hier soll nur Calob angeführt werden, der doch gewiß der bedeutendste Vorkämpfer der Orthodoxie war. Als Speners *Pia Desideria* erschienen, schrieb Calob dennoch an Spener: „Eure *Desideria* sind auch die meinigen, und da Eure Kirche von den Frömmigkeitsübungen eine solche Frucht hat, wie der Ruf berichtet, so nehme ich keinen Anstand, solche *examina pietatis* auch andern zu empfehlen, wie ich denn auch noch kürzlich mit Anführung des Beispiels und Erfolgs Eurer Kirche im öffentlichen Gottesdienst die Patrone der Kirche zu ihrer Nachahmung ermahnt habe mit dem Wunsche, daß sie mit Nutzen fortgesetzt und die hier und da per accidens sich anschließenden Mißbräuche abgestellt werden.“

Nein, der Hauptgrund, warum es Allein-Prediger in größerer Anzahl gab, war ein anderer. Es war derselbe Grund, der im allergrößten Maße dafür verantwortlich war, daß es in der Kirche zum Teil so stand, wie Spener es in seinen *Pia Desideria* schildert: Der weltliche Stand lebt zumeist in Sünden und Wollüsten; die noch Eifer für Religion zeigen, tun es vielfach mehr „aus Absicht eines politischen Interesses“ als aus Liebe zur Wahrheit; der geistliche Stand ist ganz verderbt; es fehlt die Selbstverleugnung; jeder sucht das Seine; und der Hausstand ist versunken in Trunksucht und Prozeßsucht; man erkennt nicht, daß Eigentumsbesitz auch Pflichten mit sich bringt; man sucht Absolution ohne Buße usw. Der Hauptgrund ist wieder das Kirchenregiment. Weil dieses war, was es war, gab es wenig oder gar keine rechte Kirchenzucht. Und das ist ein neues Kapitel. The o. Ho yer.

(Fortsetzung folgt.)

Present-Day Problems of Lutheranism.

As viewed by the Lutheran World Convention.

The Lutheran World Convention devoted the greater part of its sessions to the reading and discussion of reports on important problems confronting the Lutheran Church to-day. Unfortunately, for lack of time, the open discussion was frequently reduced to a minimum, so that it was difficult to ascertain what the majority of the delegates thought about the subjects in question.

The first great problem treated was "Lutheranism and the Religious Crisis of our Time." To us it seemed to be *the* most important topic. Bishop Max von Bonsdorff of Finland opened the session devoted to this question by reading an essay prepared by his Finnish colleague, Archbishop Kaila (who could not attend the convention). Dr. Kaila finds that a religious crisis is always closely connected with a world crisis (*Kulturkampf*) and that both mark a turning-point in the course of an evolution. The materialistic philosophy before the war, with the rise of the socialistic belief in human good-

ness and the evolutionary doctrine, which exerted such a great influence upon modern theology, has proved to be a total failure, because it defied all human reason and common sense and denied the most evident realities of life: man's sin and his helplessness. Since the World War this failure of the "optimistic" conception of the world and humanity has brought about a new turn in philosophy and theology, which tends to go to the other extreme and bears all the earmarks of pessimism and fatalism. The war revealed again the evil instincts of man. Spengler is the spokesman of after-war philosophy, with his fatalistic prophecy of the death of the Western civilization ("*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*"). The so-called "Theology of Crisis" (Barth-Brunner), too, shows up a similar pessimism, stressing as it does the immense abyss which separates creation from its Creator and denying all good in man. This theology again points, as it should, to Christ as the only possible Mediator between God and men and calls all churches back to the theology of the Reformation; but, alas! also to the theology of Calvin with its predestinarian doctrine. Religious life during this crisis is marked by a strong revivalistic movement, which has affected also the Lutheran churches: Methodism and especially the new Oxford Movement. The essayist dwelt especially on the latter and pointed out that this movement lays entirely too much stress on the religious self-activity of man and upon man's part in his own conversion and that of his fellow-men by advocating special religious exercises: "surrender," "sharing," "mutual confession," "guidance." It seems to think that, even though sin has been forgiven by God through Christ Jesus, all is not yet well with the sinner. Dr. Kaila advocates, in the midst of this crisis, a firm reespousal of the Pauline-Lutheran teaching concerning the justification and the conversion of sinners without the slightest cooperation of man. . . . We fully enjoyed this essay. It would have gained in strength if the archbishop had established in unmistakable terms the *clear* distinction between objective and subjective justification. . . . It is to be noted that Bishop von Bonsdorff, who read the paper, later on made the statement that, though in general he shares the views expressed in the essay, he personally thinks that, "since the Oxford movement has brought some new life into many Lutheran churches, we must greet this movement with great sympathy." "*Was wuenschen wir denn mehr? Wir sollten nicht Gegner dieser Bewegung sein aus konfessionellen Gruenden!*" This makes us wonder who really represents the true spirit of the Lutheran Church in Finland, its archbishop or Bishop von Bonsdorff. When we hear that since 1927 the Finnish Church has established communion fellowship with the Anglican Church on the grounds that "no doctrinal differences do exist between them" and that it still desires to maintain this union and even to work for

still closer relationship, we do not doubt that the bulk of this Church has not as yet come to a deep realization of the needs of the Lutheran Church "in the religious crisis of our time."

Bishop Schoeffel of Hamburg was the second important speaker on the program, for the same topic. He offered a very thought-stimulating and substantial essay. The speaker maintained that there is a *religious crisis*, but not a crisis of *true Christianity*. Christianity is not a religion, but a revelation of God to men. "Religion" is a human creation, an attempt on the part of man to wipe out the boundary which exists between man and God, between the to-day and the hereafter. Religions bear a national character and cannot be transmitted from one people to another. The all-important question is whether Christianity is a religion or not; if it is, then it is doomed to perish, it can no longer claim to be universal; then Rosenberg is right when he says that Christianity is Oriental and unfit for the Aryan race. But Christianity is the assurance that *it is not* a religion. In the course of history, especially in modern times, Christianity has in many instances become "religious" because unfaithful to its true teaching of justification by grace (Catholicism, un-Lutheran "Lutheranism," etc.). Only *true Lutheranism*, which knows and teaches that God reveals Himself as a merciful God and that it is impossible to be saved by human merit, can therefore stand the test; for therein Lutheranism distinguishes itself from "religion." (For this reason true Lutheranism always stands alone and aloof from "religious" circles. Roman Catholicism hates Lutheranism, whereas it is friendly toward all kinds of "religions.") We must courageously uphold this true Lutheranism, and cleanse the Lutheran Church of all "religious" tendencies, that is, of all purely human doctrines and influences. Religions are *always* involved in a crisis; Christianity has been *drawn* into the modern religious crisis because it tended to become "a religion." The religious crisis cannot affect *true Christianity*; it has never experienced a crisis, but a reformation. Lutheranism must clearly set forth the essential difference existing between revelation and "religions"; yea, it must *oppose* revelation to religion. Neither the Old nor the New Testament has anything to do with religion. We must avoid all attempts to force "Christian ethics" upon a nation. We must confess our faith in an absolute revelation of divine authority, our faith in the deity of Christ, the reality of miracles, of resurrection, the divine institutions of the creation, our faith in the miraculous virtue of the Sacraments, "not as symbols of the mystic union between God and men, but as the place where this mystic union becomes a reality." Thus spoke Bishop Schoeffel. May we add that world Lutheranism must translate the *affirmation* of these necessities into *reality*, not content itself with merely stating them, but begin a real *action* toward the

definite cleansing of the Church and the sweeping out of the old leaven. The *Bekennnisfront* in Germany, to which Bishop Schoeffel belongs, has as yet done nothing at all in the way of discipline of doctrine. It still does suffer in its ranks a host of men to whom Scripture remains the old happy hunting-ground and who seem to know nothing of verbal inspiration and similar fundamental principles of true Lutheranism. Nor did the Lutheran World Convention work for a purging of Lutheran churches; for it listened with tolerance to men of the type of Pasteur Appia, *Inspecteur Ecclésiastique* of Paris, the next speaker on the same topic. M. Appia is hereabouts well known as a Modernist and a typical union man. He remained true to his reputation before the convention; for as a remedy for the religious crisis of our times he advocated, with all the clearness and power at his command, a "Lutheranism which may at last cast away all the shackles of an old-fashioned confessionalism and fabricate a closer union with the Reformed bodies." He found that "the Eisenach and Copenhagen conventions had been *much too Lutheran* and that it were high time now for the third convention to hazard itself into deeper water." Since no discussion followed this eloquent cry in the desert, we cannot say what impression it made upon the assembly. At any rate, we have not heard of any protest or remonstrance. We believe that, as long as an organization like the Lutheran World Convention does not take serious steps in the way of demanding of the various bodies holding or seeking membership some serious house-cleaning in their midst, the much-heralded return of world Lutheranism to a pure and strict confessional attitude will be found wanting. If Lutheranism wishes to sit again at the feet of the great Reformer, let it begin to learn from him the very first lesson, namely, the courage to refuse the fraternal hand to all those who consistently make light of God's Word and Scriptural teaching, and to say to them: "*Ihr habt einen andern Geist als wir.*" That is the only way which leads out of the religious crisis.

The Tuesday sessions were devoted to the discussion of the second great question: "Lutheranism and Inner Missions at the Present Time." We could not attend the morning session. An important paper was read in the afternoon, however, by Dr. Reu of the American Lutheran Church on "The Church and the Social Problem." Summing up the social difficulties of our age, which no longer affect the laboring classes only, but all the divine institutions: matrimony, family, Church and State, involving the entire question concerning the relation of the individual to the entire human society, Dr. Reu sought to answer the question: What is the attitude the Church must take towards the "social problem"? The Church, he said, is especially qualified and divinely equipped to contribute toward

a solution. She dare not remain silent over against the materialistic and selfish attitude of human society. She has a divine mission to raise her voice against philosophies of the Marx and Lenin kind. Furthermore, she has the *right* to speak in behalf of the unprivileged classes (Dr. Reu cited the example of Luther writing to the city counselors, princes, and noblemen of Germany, putting his finger on definite sore spots and abuses: usury, etc.). But like Luther the Church to-day must continue to avoid all interference with state authorities and abstain from formulating detailed proposals to the legislatures. Just what measures are to be taken concerns the state government alone. The Church can but uphold and proclaim certain principles of social justice. We heartily agree with all this on one condition, which can never be stressed too much, *viz.*, that the Church must constantly be awake to the fact that even in its legitimate work and activity for social welfare her main strength lies in her message to the *individual* heart and that in the first and last analysis her *only* aim and purpose in this world is the salvation and protection of the *individual* soul.

"Lutheranism and the Heathen Missions at the Present Time" was the third important question dealt with during the Lutheran World Convention. Here we gained the impression that the general opinion of the conference, though condemning the ill-famed "Laymen's Report" known as "Rethinking Missions," yet seemed to be very much in favor of the views voiced at the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council (some of the delegates even advocated a close cooperation with this council), condemning the policy of strongly confessional churches to urge their confessional particularities upon the converts in mission-fields. We did agree with the speakers at the convention when they said that our Foreign Missions should strive toward an absolutely independent "indigenous Church," which should accept the confessions of the home Church of its *own* accord, without pressure exerted by the missionary, without his playing the role of a dictator. It is our opinion, too, that, "if non-Christian lands are to be won for Christ, it must be through the Christians of those lands." And most of all we share the opinion that "God cannot use us to help the younger [heathen] churches to rise to a level higher than our own at home" and "that it is in the sending churches that the issues must first be clarified" (we quote Rev. Astrup Larsen of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America); this is especially true as regards purity of doctrine and discipline. But it was to be noted throughout most of the essays and reports read to the convention that the desire for "indigenous, autonomous churches," left to themselves for inner development, makes much too light of the Confessions of our Church, as though the foreign Christians could get along without them, as though our Confessions were

merely of historical interest, and as though the faith of the Hindu or Chinese Christian need not necessarily coincide with these Confessions. When Rev. Larsen pointed to the National Lutheran Church of China as a model for the "indigenous Church" which is to be developed in mission-fields, we were not much encouraged by this example. This Church is formed by the union of ten synods representing six nationalities. It would be true indeed that "nothing essentially Lutheran need be lost by the National Lutheran Church in China in taking over peculiar elements from the sending churches and adapting them to the racial genius of the Chinese people" if — if the "peculiar elements" in question concerned only differences in outward customs, rites, ceremonies, liturgies, mode of government, etc. But what if there are differences in doctrinal questions and Scriptural practise? By the union of conservative and liberal elements the "indigenous" Lutheran Church of China has gained nothing except the spirit of doctrinal indifference, un-Lutheran syncretism, and anti-Scriptural tolerance, as becomes only too evident when one reads the *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Lutheran Church in China, 1934* (God's Word and the Bible are made to be two different concepts; conversion is something different from faith; such and similar errors abound in its pages). It suffices, too, to listen to the words of Dr. Svenson, missionary of that Church, who summed up the needs of the Lutheran Church at home and in the mission-fields as follows: "We need an awakening; there is too much form, too much learning, too much theology; we need life." Certainly we need life, but it cannot come through the channels of that sectarian hypersensual revivalism, accompanied by tongue-speaking and nervous prostration as it is practised by the National Chinese Church and considered by Dr. Svenson so beautiful and wonderful. Much less can we be in accord with an "indigenous Church" of the kind advocated by Dr. Gurubotham of India, who pleaded for a union of all Christian missions, for abandoning all confessional particularities and retaining only those teachings wherein all denominations agree. The speaker felt that "one should not try to argue Hindu Christians into accepting *such things* as the Unaltered Augsburg Confession or the Small Catechism." "Let us liberate the Hindu Christians from these 'heritages.'" It is true that Dr. Gurubotham, according to the explanations made to the convention by Dr. Ihmels, is only a Hindu layman and medical worker and therefore "unqualified to know what are the needs of Christian mission-work"; and Rev. Larsen felt that M. Gurubotham "goes too far"; but again he said "that he can well understand him"; and why not? He himself holds that, although we should not surrender our Lutheran Confessions, we must nevertheless cooperate with other denominations to a certain extent. He pleaded for a greater interest of the Lutheran Church in interdenomi-

national missionary conferences, such as the Edinburgh Conference or the Jerusalem Meeting. He said: "Lutheran participation in the work of these agencies has not been as general and whole-hearted as it might have been. There are those who criticize us for allowing 'principles' to keep us separate in normal times, but casting our principles aside and appealing, for example, to the International Missionary Council when emergencies arise." We say: Why not let this be a warning to all hereafter to be true to the principles of the Lutheran Church and more than ever to avoid all fraternal contact with those whose spirit is not ours? Lutherans cannot be more friendly or conciliatory towards erring denominations on the mission-field than they are at home. We much preferred the report of a Danish Lutheran missionary in Japan — we have forgotten his name — who courageously defended the truth that "Lutheranism is suitable for, and can be comprehended in its fulness by, any individual of any race, including the mystic doctrines concerning the Sacraments, not omitting the Scriptural teaching of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. He asked: "If we are real Lutherans, *convinced* of the truth of our faith, what else could we teach them? If I were convinced that the teachings of the Baptist Church were more 'suitable to the temperament and the racial genius of the Japanese,' I could not myself remain a Lutheran another day. It is true, unity in ceremonies and institutions is not necessary; unity in faith and doctrine suffices; but *this* unity *must* exist! If any one wishes to cooperate with us or join us, let him rally to our teachings." It was a pleasure to hear this voice among the chorus of discordant opinions. And again, we wonder how the above-mentioned missionary to the Japanese felt when an American colleague of his (working in the same organization, in Japan), the Rev. J. Winther, speaking on the youth problem in Foreign Missions, mentioned as one of the chief obstacles to effective work among the youth "a too theological, too bookish, a *too conservative* religion."

This leads us to the discussion of another important problem viewed by the Lutheran World Convention, "Lutheranism and the Coming Generation," in a series of ten-minute talks. Dr. Ryden of the Augustana Synod opened the series: Youth, in the midst of the general confusion of the modern world, needs the Church, and the Church needs the help of its young people. Youth has an opportunity and asks for it. It is up to the Church to mobilize its forces and direct them into useful channels. The period after confirmation is just as important as that before; for then the real struggles begin. Dr. Ryden advocated a program of youth organization similar to that of the great leagues within American Lutheranism and especially mentioned the example of the Walther League. We ceased to agree with the speaker when he declared that "youth is impatient with

hair-splitting theological differences" and that "we ought to cease discovering differences and look to what extent we agree with the other communions in order to present a united front against a hostile world."

Dr. Trexler of the Synod of New York added no new suggestion, but briefly recalled that the Church has always been "the Church of the young," the great figures of Christianity having generally been young men at the time of their greatest success (Jesus, the apostles, Luther, Wesley, Moody, etc.). He called upon the churches to follow the example of Luther, "who made the newly invented printing-press work overtime," and to use to the utmost all modern inventions for the purpose of spreading the message of the Cross.

The spokesman of Estonian Lutheranism affirmed that the attitude of the youth in his country demonstrates the fact that the new generation will have nothing to do with Lutheranism unless the latter possesses, and holds firmly to, the truth. Youth insists on Lutheranism in its original form, standing squarely on the Confessions. It demands an authoritative religion and therefore the reaffirmation of the old Lutheran principles: *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*. The Estonian bishop advocated a return to the Small Catechism, "which contains everything that modern youth needs." We of course were delighted, but could not fail to notice the lack of harmony in the churches represented at the Lutheran World Convention. Next we heard a young delegate from Germany, who spoke similarly to the Estonian bishop. He, too, held that the younger generation, in Germany at least, demands authority and is sickened by the speculative theology and liberalistic thinking of yesterday. Lutheranism which has become untrue to itself through Liberalism is to-day doomed to silence and contempt. If the Lutheran message wishes to be heard, it must demand obedience to the authority of Scriptural doctrine and agreement with the Lutheran Confessions. We were pleased to hear at last also one representative of the Parisian clergy affirm as *the* need of present-day Lutheranism, if it wishes to keep its youth in the fold, the abandoning of all *unionistic* practises. He deplored that there were still many pastors who showed too much fondness for things that are not Lutheran. All depends on the pastor; youth will reflect the color of its pastor. We should like to share the optimism of that young friend, who believes that the movement toward renewed and faithful confessionalism in French Lutheran circles will come out victorious. What it needs is more than words — action!

From Norway came a different tune. The Norwegian delegate showed a great deal of sympathy for the Oxford Movement as a means of doing effective work among the younger generation estranged from its Church. Lutheranism, he says, is a religion of tolerance and must

search and strive for a large union of churches. Furthermore, it should not only preach a hereafter, but participate in the establishment of a kingdom of God on earth, where peace and social justice reign; then it will regain the respect and the cooperation of the coming generation. . . . We refrain from any comment.

Konsistorialrat Dietrich of Poland was the last essayist to speak on the subject. His views were altogether opposed to those of the previous speaker, though he did not say so directly. According to his opinion the Church must teach youth the Second Article of our faith so strongly that it may become deeply rooted in their hearts, no matter whether it will prove to be a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. Modern youth, without distinction of race or nationality, needs *nothing new* in theology; what it needs is the old, unwavering Lutheran faith. For the sake of completeness we mention the opinion of Missionary Winther of Japan, who warned against a "too conservative and too theological a religion" in our work among the youth of our day.—I wonder what lessons the delegates of the Lutheran World Convention took home for application in their work among the young people of their Church. There was a great choice of suggestions, some good, some very bad. One thing they could not take home, and that is the conviction that Lutheranism throughout the world is absolutely united in spirit and in truth and that all Lutherans entertain the same high ideals and have the same aspirations.

If the Lutheran World Convention were but a *free* conference of Lutherans seeking to establish true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, such a convention would merit our heartiest approval. But since it chooses to be and remain an organization with an official membership, where one finds fraternal cooperation and recognition, solidary action, and Communion fellowship; since it admits church-bodies on a simple presentation of the confessional paragraph in its constitution,—and which Lutheran body in the world, no matter how great its doctrinal corruption and laxity, does not possess a satisfactory paragraph of that kind?—we continue to withhold our approval.

I have passed over another important topic discussed at the convention on Thursday morning: "Lutheranism and the Present World Crisis," since I was absent on that morning, not wishing to give up my children's instruction classes. Professor Sasse of Erlangen read an essay on that topic. A very interesting private discussion with Professor Sasse later on did not make up for what I missed.

Paris, France.

F. KREISS.