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Theological Observer — Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

Insistence on Purity of Doctrine.—The readers of the **CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY** are asked to read carefully the following paragraph which deals with the attitude of the Lutheran reformers:

"It was not political considerations nor sentimental piety that made them so insistent on the fact that they were not establishing a new Church but reforming and purifying the old. For them the Church was not a Platonic dream nor a doctrine let down from heaven, but a practical part of our justification, as she ministers the Word, through which that justification reaches us. And the Word itself was not an intellectual theorem but spirit and life, something which imparts God's grace and which is a heavenly treasure that must be kept pure and undefiled, uncorrupted, and free from aught that would augment or diminish it. The pure teaching (the *reine Lehre*) is an essential thing for the soul, for the mission of the Church, for the salvation of the world. Without that the work of the Church can only be inefficient and partial. Every error, great or small, is an impediment and a festering sore that must produce sickness in the body of Christ and that, if it spreads, may produce complete destruction and death. The integrity of the Church's teaching and its spiritual continuity with that of the apostles is essential at all times."

This paragraph was not written by Dr. Walther, but by Dr. John C. Mattes, member of the faculty of the A. L. C. seminary in Dubuque, in a lecture having the title "Where do We Stand?" The first instalment of this lecture, the part from which the words quoted are taken, is printed in the July number of the *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*. We shall look forward with interest to the succeeding instalments. The lecture was delivered at the Luther Academy held in Dubuque, Iowa, 1939. If the spirit manifested by Dr. J. C. Mattes pervades the whole American Lutheran Church, it should not be difficult for this body and the Missouri Synod ultimately to establish fellowship. We quote one more paragraph:

"Often, however, this leaven of false teaching is intruded when there is too close association with errorists under the pretext of love, broad-mindedness, and liberality. Sentimentality has always been the ally of infidelity. In our own day, as then, it shows itself particularly in the attitude towards fellowship in the communion with those in error. So Luther cries out indignantly: 'Don't talk to me about love or friendship where there is curtailing of faith or of the Word; that is not love, because the Word brings eternal life, the grace of God, and all the heavenly treasures.'"

A.

The Methodist Superchurch.—Commenting on the General Conference of the Methodist Church in Atlantic City (April 24—May 6), the *Lutheran* (May 22) writes: "The Methodists came home from Atlantic City for the same reason a lot of other people do: they ran short of money. It's expensive to bring together 711 delegates from all parts of this country and 65 from overseas. The conference discovered that

funds collected to pay the bills were \$40,000 less than estimated expenses. So adjournment at the earliest possible hour was eagerly sought. This may be a clew to the question of the superchurch. The newly united Methodist Church is really big, the biggest thing in American Protestantism. In all, it has a membership of nearly 8,000,000. And the Methodist Church has laid out for itself a big program of work and has done a fine piece of engineering in setting up machinery to do the work. Will it pay? Will a big church, with the power of massed membership and a \$10,000,000 budget, carry the Christian Gospel to mankind far better than a lot of small church groups? Probably the big way is the American way and best adapted to the twentieth century. But this way is going to pile up some overhead expense."

The questions here suggested are considered by a writer in the *Watchman-Examiner* (June 13), who in his article assigns reasons why the Baptists should *not* join in with the present-day major church-union movements. He of course approaches the problem from the distinctive Baptist viewpoint, to which we do not agree. Granted that true unity in doctrine and practice could be accomplished, what more splendid thing could there be than a large Christian Church, consisting of millions that work together shoulder to shoulder for the promotion of Christ's kingdom? And a large Church need not be one with a huge overhead expense; in fact, it could considerably reduce its general expense account. But the Methodists, in uniting the three constituent bodies into one superchurch, were not at all minded to secure unity in faith and practice. The union, as dissenting conservative Methodists now are pointing out, was a victory for the Modernists and a suppression of traditional orthodox Methodism. The analysis given in the *Watchman-Examiner* is therefore worth considering. It says: "The whole movement [of church union among the Reformed sects] is based on a wrong conception of the Church, that is, on a falsehood. It conceives of the Church as an organic catholic institution, when it is not that at all. . . . Again, this movement is based on a false conception of what the Church should do. It aims at the union of all churches, so there will be a greater power and pomp so as to move the world to action. Today many are trying to copy the world and particularly that monstrous pagan ecclesiastical system known as Roman Catholicism. But even the Roman Catholics have not been so successful in eliminating the evils a united church is supposed to eliminate. The plan finally looks to an ecclesiastical organization to give us what the Spirit of God alone can give." The writer manifestly has sensed the incongruity of building up a superchurch in which the inner, spiritual union is wanting. In the end the large overhead expense, which drove the Methodists home from their General Conference, matters very little. What matters is that, after all, this huge church-body as such does not intend "to carry the Christian Gospel to mankind." Its purpose is political and social, but not evangelistic. The Atlantic City Conference, for example, declared that President Roosevelt should recall his representative to the Pope; that European countries should make a negotiated peace, that a federation of nations should be established, and that under no conditions should

the churches allow themselves to be used for promoting war. Evidently the Methodist superchurch no longer knows what the Christian Church on earth is for; that is the pity of it, and that ought to be said, just as did the Baptist writer in the *Watchman-Examiner*. J. T. M.

The Stones Cry Out.— Ernest Gordon, in the *Sunday-school Times* (May 18, 1940), has this to report: "Dr. Ingholt has opened up the city of Hama in Syria and confirmed the statement of the Old Testament that in 720 B. C. the Assyrian King Sargon burned that strongly fortified town. Among the interesting finds was pottery from China, which shows that the 'land of *Sinim*' (Is. 49:12) was nearer to the consciousness of this region than might be supposed. This should be placed beside the fact that Sir Flinders Petrie found *Irish gold* ornaments in Gaza. So did the Far East and the Far West meet in the Near East in that early time. A medicine chest was also found with the inscription 'Persistence is the key of success.'" — "The Australian explorer Musil has discovered an ancient copper mine fourteen miles southwest of Uz, where Job lived, and says it is the only one east of Jordan. The patriarch may have had this one in mind when he wrote: 'Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone,' (Job 28:2; and let us not forget that the word brass here signifies copper.)" — "In the slave quarters of a luxurious villa in Herculaneum has been found a cross of wood, sixty by forty centimeters, affixed to a wall and naturally charred. As this city was destroyed by fire from Vesuvius in A. D. 79, this is the earliest cross ever discovered. The fact that it was the possession of *slaves* is a commentary on Paul's words in 1 Cor. 1:28: 'Base things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen.'" Indeed, the stones crying out are still confirming the truth of the Bible. J. T. M.

Brief Items.— A report of the annual conference of the Lutheran Free Church held in La Crosse, Wis., early this summer makes mention of statements uttered at the convention which have more of a sectarian than a Lutheran ring. The president of the Church, Dr. T. O. Burntvedt, said in his message to the delegates: "We need to return to God individually and collectively. The folly of leaving God out of national life and international relationships is tragically demonstrated in the present world conflict." What we arrive at when it is attempted to make the state Christian one sees in studying the history of the Middle Ages. Christians should manifest their Christianity to a higher degree than they do, we admit, but let us not think that Christianity must be made the state religion. The convention reiterated its "uncompromising stand against the nefarious liquor traffic" — a declaration which has an ominous sound. How difficult it is for people to realize that the Church's business simply is to preach the Gospel!

The Presbyterian Church of the U. S. A. lost a prominent member in the death of Dr. Russel Paynter, who died July 26, 46 years old. From 1930—1938 he had been pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Mo., from where he removed to a pastorate in Philadelphia. While he was a Fundamentalist, his chiliastic teachings did not permit him fully to espouse the cause of Dr. Machen. A.