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## Theological Observer. - Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

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**Theological Observer — Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches**


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**At the Foot of the Cross.**—Under this heading Rev. F. R. Webber sends us the following appealing report with the request that it be given space in the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY. The article is valuable because it stimulates interest in our work among our young men in the service of our country and strikingly emphasizes a few truths which we are apt to forget only too easily. Pastor Webber writes:

"One evening in June a group of young men in uniform were gathered informally in the basement of a parish house. They were not there to bowl nor to play billiards, although a good bowling alley and billiard tables were but a few feet away. The subject under discussion was a special little chapel for the service men. They themselves, not the pastors with them, brought up the subject. These were our own Lutheran boys.

"One Sunday in July a dozen or so Lutheran soldiers and seamen sat around a long table in a New York restaurant. One of their first remarks was, 'When are we going to get our little chapel?'

"One Sunday evening in July a young soldier from one of our congregations sat for an hour with a pastor, urging that such a chapel be fitted out. 'We have a non-denominational chapel at our fort, and you'd be surprised the number of boys of all denominations who use it for private devotions.'

"These three incidents took place at our new Parish Center of Synod's Army and Navy Commission. The location of this center is 316 West 46th Street, just a block off Times Square. There, close to the crossroads of the world, and in the amusement center of our nation, these lads spent their time of leave, not in visiting Broadway burlesques and near-by cinemas, but speaking in behalf of a little chapel all their own, in some secluded corner of the handsome five-story white-stone parish house where our New York Lutheran Parish Center is housed.

"'We fellows are giving everything,' said one fine young man. 'There is a troop movement overseas in numbers that nobody outside the Army and Navy realize. If our Church only knew the size of this troop movement, they'd be astonished. Whatever we do for these fellows here in New York City may be the last contact with our Lutheran Church that many of them will ever have.'

"Social agencies assert that war means a let-down in morals for both sexes. That may be true in many cases. It is equally true that many of our young men from the Christian day schools and confirmation classes think of their religion in such times as these. When within sight of the port of debarkation, they want the Gospel and the Sacraments.

"Of the many boys who visit our center weekly, the first question is usually, 'May I announce for Holy Communion?' They want their own little chapel, where, as soon as the sermon is over, they may retire



for the special Service Men's Communion, which is held weekly because so many of them are here but a Sunday or two. They want a little corner in the parish house, a peaceful Bethel, where they may drop in for private meditation and prayer, or where the padre (the soldier's slang for a clergyman) may pray with them.

"If war brings out the worst in some men, it brings out the best in others. Many a tired old pastor, and many an overworked parochial schoolteacher would have a new song of gladness in his heart could he but sit for one week in any of our various service centers and observe that the seed that he had sown is bearing fruit. Not all our boys, by any means, seek only free theater tickets, dances, and sight-seeing trips when in a big city. Many of them, mindful of the instruction of Christian parents, pastor and teacher, give up the precious hours of their leave seeking a Church where the Gospel and the Sacrament may be found."

J. T. M.

**The Meeting at Columbus, May 15, 1942.**— On account of the importance of this meeting, our journal, though its readers have seen accounts of it elsewhere (we are thinking, for instance, of the interesting, objectively written report from the pen of Dr. W. G. Polack, which appeared in the June 9, 1942, issue of the *Lutheran Witness*), must reprint at least the resolutions which were adopted and submit some of the comments of Lutheran editors. At a meeting of the National Lutheran Council, held March 13, it had been resolved to hold another meeting on May 15, in which all the Lutheran bodies of our country would be invited to participate. On May 14 the special committee of the National Lutheran Council (the same men who had convened in Chicago March 13) had been in session and drafted resolutions which might be submitted to the meeting of May 15. On the latter date five members of the Missouri Synod were in attendance: President Behnken, Vice-Presidents Grueber and Barth, Director of Publicity Rev. L. Meyer, and Dr. W. G. Polack, the latter in an unofficial capacity as reporter for the *Lutheran Witness*. From President Brenner of the Wisconsin Synod a communication had come in which participation was declined because according to the conviction of his church body "co-operation, even only in externals, should not as a means to an end precede the establishment of true unity between two bodies, but should follow as the result and the expression of a Scriptural unity previously established."

The resolutions which had been drawn up and adopted by the National Lutheran Council Committee on May 14 and which were submitted to the Missouri Synod representatives for approval on May 15 are the following:

"Recognition of the seriousness of the present crisis in world affairs has prompted the National Lutheran Council to issue the call for this meeting. We believe that there is providential meaning in the universal distress and perplexity of mankind, and that these constitute a definite challenge to the church to rise to the opportunities for service created by existing conditions.

"We are convinced, however, that the Lutherans of America cannot meet their common responsibilities in the face of the present crisis



without uniting their resources, and that the divine Head of the church is solemnly calling us to unselfish sacrifice and unified effort to meet the serious problems which confront us.

"As specific proposals to meet the great needs of the hour, we advocate, therefore, the following measures:

"1. In accordance with the objectives set forth in the resolution unanimously adopted by the National Lutheran Council at its last annual meeting in regard to an American Lutheran Federation or Convention, we suggest as highly desirable the enlargement of the scope of the American Lutheran Conference, so that its constituency may become representative of the Lutheran Church in America. Pending this consummation, we recommend that the National Lutheran Council sponsor from time to time free general conferences for consultation in regard to our mutual Lutheran problems and opportunities for service, with an invitation to all Lutheran bodies to participate.

"2. In addition to the present work of the National Lutheran Council, which includes the Departments of Statistics, Publicity, Welfare Work, and Service Commission, we propose an expanded program to include closer co-ordination of its work with the activities of other existing Lutheran groups, such as the Lutheran Mission Council of America, the Lutheran Foreign Missions Conference, and the American Section of the Lutheran World Convention.

"We also recommend that the National Lutheran Council, in keeping with Article II of the Governing Regulations of the Council, undertake a study of a program of future expansion, including such projects as work among various racial groups; ministry to the deaf, dumb, and blind; publication and dissemination of Christian literature; service to students at non-Lutheran institutions; disaster relief service; portions of the work done by the Lutheran World Convention; some critical elements of the foreign mission problems; and other emergency tasks where common action is demanded."

When the Missouri Synod representatives stated that the program outlined in these resolutions was not acceptable to them, that they, however, would like to see committees appointed through whose agency co-operation in purely external affairs might be considered and facilitated, the following resolutions were adopted:

"Resolved that we have heard with regret that the Missouri Synod is not prepared to co-operate in a general Lutheran conference or convention as proposed at this meeting, and cannot at this time accept the National Lutheran Council as its agency in meeting our common responsibilities. In view, however, of President Behnken's statement that there are without question matters of purely external character in which co-operation is possible and desirable, and that in regard to any specific instances of possible co-operation, the Missouri Synod would welcome the appointment of a committee of the National Lutheran Council to meet with a committee of the Missouri Synod for the consideration of questions involved; be it resolved that we express our hope that committees may be set up for the consideration of specific instances of such co-operation in purely external matters."



Speaking of the Columbus meeting, Dr. E. W. Schramm, editor of the *Lutheran Standard*, writes, "As we sat in this memorable meeting, we thought of a portion of God's Word that is becoming increasingly meaningful and precious to us: the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians, describing the diversity of gifts which the one and the same Spirit divides to each one and to each church body severally even as He will. On the basis of that precious Word of God we say to all the Lutheran church bodies in America: We need one another. The Missouri Synod should be in the proposed Lutheran alliance for the sake of its sister synods and for its own sake. Despite its disloyalty to the Word of God in certain important respects, for example, in its refusal of prayer fellowship to fellow Lutherans—treating us as though we were Unitarians—and in its running the risk of allowing souls to go to the devil rather than recommending them to the spiritual care and fellowship of a Lutheran congregation of another synod; despite unwitting disloyalties, the rest of us Lutherans, who also have our unwitting disloyalties and human frailties, need the Scripture-loving Missouri Synod in the larger, more devoted Lutheran Church of the future. At present the Lutheran Church is not moving like a mighty army. 'No army goes to battle with a resolution on its banners.' We Lutherans of America will not make our best contribution to the life of America and of the world until we pass from the conferring and resolving stage into a real *Lutheran action stage*."

In the *Lutheran Companion* the editor, Dr. E. E. Ryden, who is the president of the American Lutheran Conference, says, "Not so happy have been the negotiations with the bodies of the Synodical Conference, which is made up principally of the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod. The latter body refused unequivocally to meet with other Lutherans at the First Columbus Conference in January, 1941, and it repeated that refusal when invited to send representatives to the Second Columbus Conference. The Missouri Synod, on the other hand, not only sent delegates to Columbus a year ago, but agreed to a measure of co-ordination of work among the service men and also to give some support to the efforts to save the Lutheran orphaned missions.

"It was this initial gesture of friendship and understanding that led to the hope that the Missouri Synod would be willing now to enter more fully into closer relations with other Lutheran groups. That hope, however, was effectively killed when the representatives of Missouri gave their answer at Columbus on May 15. As Dr. Bersell says in his 'Perspectives,' 'The door was shut by the presidential hand and the key was turned.'

"However, the decision of the Missouri Synod may not prove to be as irrevocable as it has appeared to be at the first glance. In the dark and trying days that lie before us as a Church, it will become increasingly evident to every Lutheran group that it will need the help and support that can come only through unified action. This is as true of the Missouri Synod as of any other general body. That many prominent leaders of the Missouri Synod are keenly conscious of this fact has been indicated not only in private utterances but also in articles and



editorials in the Missouri press that have been unusual for their frankness. They have made it clear that it is folly to believe that a group even as large and powerful as the Missouri Synod will be able to solve its problems independent of other American Lutherans, and we are convinced that future developments in America and the world will more than justify their judgment."

Manifestly, it is impossible to consider here all the issues raised by the resolutions which were adopted and the comments which have been quoted above. The Missouri Synod delegates, so it would seem to one on the outside, were at a disadvantage because they were not present when the resolutions for which their approval was sought were framed. Their decisions on the questions which confronted them had to be reached quickly. With respect to the Wisconsin Synod we believe that the brethren whom we love and honor for their intense desire to be faithful to the revealed truth could without showing disloyalty to the sacred Scriptures have joined in the deliberations at Columbus and expressed themselves willing to co-operate in *externis*. When the question is asked why the Missouri Synod representatives were unwilling to go a step beyond a declaration of willingness to co-operate in purely external matters, it must not be forgotten that one of the bodies asking our Synod to join it and other bodies in a Lutheran conference, the Norwegian Free Church, has openly ridiculed and flouted the doctrine of verbal inspiration, and that another inviting body, the large United Lutheran Church of America, tolerates in its midst the open denial of this doctrine. Would it be proper for Missouri to establish fraternal fellowship with people who tread under foot what it holds sacred? If at Columbus this distressing state of affairs had been recognized and some plan had been adopted through which, prior to the forming of a larger conference, the evil condition might have been remedied, the case would have been different. But the premise on which the resolutions were based was that there exists a sufficient unity for the inauguration of the comprehensive program that was envisaged. It was not the presidential hand of Dr. Behnken that closed the door, but the course taken by the National Lutheran Council representatives who, unwittingly to be sure, neglected to give to faithful adherence to Scripture doctrine that priority and eminence which rightfully belong to it.

A.

**The Delaware Resolutions of the Federal Council of Churches.**—The religious press has reported at length on the meeting held under the auspices of a commission of the Federal Council of Churches at Delaware, Ohio. At this meeting plans were suggested pertaining to the establishment of a just order of affairs in the world when the war is concluded. Writing in the *Presbyterian*, Dr. David De Forest Burrell submits an excellent discussion of the views voiced in the Delaware propositions. Dr. Burrell states that he agrees with the critic who called the objectives visualized at Delaware "internationalism, collectivism, and materialism." The plan proposed at Delaware includes "a world government of delegated powers." There is to be a supergovernment which is to have control of all armies and navies, there is to be a world mone-



tary system in charge of this government, and the great questions that affect all nations are to be decided by it. Dr. Burrell asks quite pertinently, "Who would guarantee the integrity, unselfishness, and wisdom of the members of such a supergovernment? For what purposes would its vast armaments be employed; where would they be kept; and how would they guarantee international justice and humanity except by force? Who would guarantee the wisdom, justice, and humanity of the world-government in its other functions—social, educational, economic, and moral?" He points out that the League of Nations collapsed because not all its members wholeheartedly supported it but had secret treaties with one or the other nation. He continues, "Therein we discern one of the vital weaknesses of internationalism. These brethren in their conference, in all sincerity, propose to the world a scheme based on the assumption of human perfection, while this is in reality a world still inhabited by sinful men, selfish, proud, greedy, cruel, false. It is difficult enough to secure a fairly decent government within the bounds of a single nation; but a world-government—who is sufficient for these things? No man, no group of men. And if military power be the controlling force in the world-government, it is quite obvious that Dr. Robinson is correct in calling the proposal 'pacifism gone belligerent; the Sermon on the Mount with teeth in it; and the Gospel at the point of a gun.'"

With regard to the suggestions pertaining to the economic evil, Dr. Burrell holds that they are revolutionary and based on the view voiced by one of the speakers at Delaware that "collectivism is coming, whether we like it or not." If a socialistic system were adopted, Dr. Burrell asks, "who would dare to guarantee that in that case there would come an end to greed and cruelty and selfishness and injustice?" Dr. Burrell strikes the right note when in one of the concluding paragraphs he says, "In short, brethren, the defects in our political, social, and economic system have grown so portentous not because the system is fundamentally wrong, but chiefly because the Church of Christ in America has failed to appraise Christ adequately and earnestly to sinful men. And the Church has failed Christ here because she has not half believed in Him. If Jesus was a mere social reformer, as some have been preaching, then there is no hope for society. For—I say it in all reverence—not even a spotless social reformer could lift an unregenerate world into newness of life. But if Jesus be the Savior that some of us believe and know Him to be, then there is a very certain and sure hope for this sinful humanity. This is the conviction on which our beloved Church was founded; and it is time for us to return to it." To the above we ought to add that it is a delusion to think that ever here on earth there will be a time when conditions will be as tranquil and peaceful as the social gospel people think they can make them to be. The prophecies of the last times definitely state that conditions will grow worse as the end draws nearer. But let us remember that the Gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, "and then the end will come."

A.



**Unionism.**—In *The American Lutheran* (April, 1942) Rev. F. R. Webber writes under this heading: "Unionism in our circles means pulpit and altar fellowship with those who teach otherwise than we do. One of the strangest communications that reached us came a few days ago on a post card, where a man who ought to know better charges that the writer of these lines (we quote) 'according to your own report not only inspected church buildings, but also took part in services in England.' The italics are his. He demands a printed apology. Such rubbish is hardly worth mentioning. We leave it to the reader as to whether any such statement ever appeared in print. Lest there be any others who have the same idea, permit us to make it clear that Mr. Joseph Pedlar is a Lutheran of the Missouri Synod, and the services in question, while often held in buildings owned by others, have always been Lutheran and nothing else. Mr. Pedlar has never at any time united in union services with people of other faiths. The same is true of the writer of these lines. Never at any time, either in America or in any other country, have we taken part, either directly or indirectly, in anything which by any stretch of the imagination can be considered unionistic. There has been too much of this reading between the lines and inserting things that are wholly out of keeping with the facts."

This stern rebuke of a hasty, unfounded accusation, we believe, is well deserved. Let the principles of 1 Cor. 13 not be neglected!

J. T. M.

**Convention News.**—Both the Northern Presbyterian and the Northern Baptist Conventions refused to accede to the request that they adopt resolutions enthusiastically endorsing the war in which our country is engaged. This attitude, so different from what we witnessed during the last war, may be due to the vogue of pacifist sentiment. We wish we could interpret it as a sign that the "social gospel" is losing its grip on non-Lutheran Protestants and that the true function of the Church, the preaching of redemption through the blood of Christ, is being recognized.

