

8-1-1943

Theological Observer. - Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

J. T. Mueller

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mueller, J. T. (1943) "Theological Observer. - Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 14 , Article 50.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol14/iss1/50>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Theological Observer

Conference of Lutheran Seminary Professors.—From June 9 to 11 Augustana Theological Seminary at Rock Island, Ill., was host to a gathering of professors teaching at Lutheran seminaries in the United States and Canada. The meeting was a free, informal conference of professional men, studying problems of a more or less technical nature, for instance, such as have to do with the curriculum and methods of instruction. Most of the Lutheran seminaries in our and the neighboring country to the north were represented. From Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Dr. Theo. Graebner and the undersigned had come. The beautiful location of Augustana College and Seminary on the bluffs of the Mississippi and the gracious hospitality of the seminary authorities made the external circumstances most delightful. Three papers were read and discussed. Dr. A. R. Wentz, president of the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, had written a paper on the subject "The Curriculum of Theological Education"; in his absence this paper was read by his colleague Dr. Hein: Dr. B. M. Christensen, president of Augsburg Seminary, read a paper on "Academic Freedom and Scientific Approach to Theology"; and the undersigned submitted a paper on "The Seminary and the Church." Sectional meetings for instructors in the various branches of theology had been arranged. Devotional addresses were delivered by Drs. Fisher, Flack, and Bodensieck. Now and then it became apparent that the representatives of Lutheranism in America are not yet in doctrinal agreement. The undersigned, however, cherishes the hope that meetings like this one, furnishing an opportunity of contact between men of different synods, will help to advance the cause of the unity which all desire. The character of the conference as a free gathering, involving no commitments as to church fellowship, is to be maintained. Next year it will assemble in Dubuque, Iowa, as the guest of Wartburg Seminary.

W. ARNDT

On Loyalty to the Scriptures and the Pure Doctrine.—When our Norwegian brethren met for their synodical convention this year, the opening sermon was preached by the Rev. A. M. Harstad. The sermon is published in the *Lutheran Sentinel* of June 12. His text was 1 Thess. 2:4. On account of the importance of the sentiments expressed in the second part of the sermon we reprint here a number of its paragraphs. Every member of the Missouri Synod will give his hearty assent to what is there stated.

"There is in everyone by nature the spirit of rebellion against the principle of Scripture alone. That our human reason should not be allowed to decide what is to be doctrine the flesh does not like. We are all prone to want to follow our own ideas. To give them up and follow Scripture alone is displeasing to the natural man.

"It would be very easy to slip into the way of wanting to please men and therefore to give up our strict adherence to Scriptural doctrine and cease to speak and warn against false doctrine. In so doing, we would probably be pleasing men and might attain to success before the world.

And we are so prone to want to make a god out of worldly success and sacrifice doctrine and principles on the altar of this god success.

"But we would not then be pleasing God. And He is the one who trieth our hearts. He is the Judge before whom we shall either stand or fall. When we have come to the end of the road and must leave this world, then the question will not be: Did he win the approval of men? but: Was he faithful to the Word of God? Did he run his course in the manner which God has pointed out? Nothing else really matters.

"We shall fulfill our God-given trust by being faithful in maintaining that with which we have been entrusted. While we know that with the world these principles for which our Synod stands will not be popular, yet with us they should be popular. While they do not win the approval of the world, yet they should win our approval. We are not to be of the world, but we are to have the Spirit of Christ.

"We shall fulfill our sacred trust by upholding the honor of the doctrine which we preach both by word and by deed. Others will be looking at us to see what kind of lives we lead. Some even say, 'Oh, you Synod people don't care how a person lives, because he is saved by grace anyway.' So they slander our doctrine of salvation by grace as leading to carelessness of life. It isn't true. The Biblical doctrine makes a person thankful to God for saving him, begets love to God and therefore a desire to live a godly life. Faith in the grace of God is the mother of every good work. We have a great responsibility to adorn the doctrine which we profess with a godly life." A.

Some Sturdy Norwegian Leaders.—From the *Lutheran Sentinel* of June 12 we reprint a few paragraphs constituting a report written by the Rev. M. H. Otto, in which three of the early Norwegian pastors of our country are characterized. These men deserve to be held in fond remembrance by our generation and to be regarded by us as exemplars of loyalty to Lutheran principles. Pastor Otto writes:

"At our recent synodical convention the devotions on three mornings were devoted to sketches on the lives of some of our Synod's fathers. The Rev. A. Strand prepared one of these on the basis of Ps. 119:3,4. The Psalmist had a zeal governed by proper knowledge. The same can be said of Herman Amber Preus, president of our Synod from 1862—1894. He preached what he believed in his heart. The person and work of Christ and the grace of God in Christ stand out in all his sermons. Times may have changed, but the principles he stood for have not. There should be the same eagerness in our work today. This hero of faith preached the Gospel in such a way, as to make any false way show itself up as undesirable. O God, make us faithful, zealous, filled with knowledge and understanding!

"On the basis of John 8:31, 32, the Rev. G. A. R. Gullixson paid tribute to the Rev. J. A. Ottesen, who spent much of his ministry serving congregations at Koshkonong, Wis. While he may not have been the captain, he could well be called the navigator of our Church in its early days. His entire ministry was connected with the history of our Synod. As a spiritual giant of keen intellect, he fought and stood for the truth of Holy Scripture. One of this sainted father's last prayers for our

Synod was this: 'God grant that our Church may ever deserve the praise that it continues in God's Word.'

"A memorial to Dr. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren was prepared by the Rev. T. N. Teigen on the basis of Rev. 2:1-7. He was a practical pastor, a thorough student of Scripture, with a ready pen. He considered our greatest glory this, that we have the pure Word of God; his greatest fear was that we might lose the truth. With every passing year he marveled that God had let His Word and truth remain with us so long. Rightly does he deserve to be called the 'Walther' of the Norwegian Synod."

A.

An Evaluation of Liberalism.—In an article appearing in the *Christian Century* the editor of that liberal journal discusses a book that has recently appeared, *A Realistic Philosophy of Religion*, by A. Campbell Garnett. He states in beginning his comments: "Many signs indicate that we are entering a period of intense controversy between Christianity and the dominant philosophy of Modernism. This philosophy, which calls itself by various names—naturalism, humanism, positivism, etc.—has brought congenial affinities with modern culture and a pronounced distaste for orthodox Christianity, which it regards as an inhibition upon the free exercises of intelligence." This description of Modernism, though not comprehensive enough, generally speaking, is pertinent. But it must be noted that Dr. Morrison uses the term to denote definitely and outspokenly antichristian positions. As to Christianity, Dr. Morrison holds that it is divided into three camps. "On the extreme right is Fundamentalism, or pseudo-orthodoxy, which opposes Modernism with a wooden and sterile literalism. On the extreme left are the humanists, who have capitulated to it. In the center are the liberals and conservatives. These may be distinguished from each other by the relative proportions in which they are, respectively, able to mix the Christian faith with modernist ingredients."

Next the editor speaks of the intense controversy he holds is in the offing. "The controversy which is now coming into the open has been precipitated by a revolt of the center. But this revolt can be understood only as it is seen to arise from the liberal side of the center, not from the conservative side. Conservatism, in contrast with Fundamentalism, has sought to maintain orthodoxy in the dignity in which historical theology has presented it. Its eyes rested mainly upon the noble past. Its traffic with Modernism has therefore been minimal." Dr. Morrison holds that in the liberal sector of the Christian center "a radical reaction is now going on against the compromise which liberal Christianity has made with the claims of Modernism. These claims are being challenged not only in the name of historical Christianity, but in the name of civilization. Many liberal thinkers have arisen who have diagnosed the disease of our civilization as primarily due to the anthropocentric character of modern culture, and have called the Church, each in his own way, back to the theocentric faith of historical Christianity. These Christian liberals have themselves come up through Modernism and can speak its language as the more static half of Christian orthodoxy cannot speak it. Scientists and philosophers who have long held aloof

from Christian theology with indulgent indifference are just now beginning to read theological books! What they find there has so aroused them that they are calling Christianity dangerous!" In this connection Dr. Morrison expresses himself on the origin and development of liberalism: "There are three main factors which have produced Christian liberalism: the biological doctrine of evolution, the higher criticism of the Bible, and the psychology of religion. To the first two, orthodoxy, led by liberalism, has long since made a satisfactory adjustment. And liberalism had led Christian thought far on the way to a similar adjustment with psychology when the present revolt against the claims of psychology arose within the ranks of liberalism itself. Psychology has tended strongly to displace history in Christian thinking, and the instinctive protest of Christian faith was inevitable. For it has been the very genius of Christianity from its beginning that it has conceived itself as a historical religion, that is, as a revelation of the meaning of history once for all made in history."

Dr. Morrison points out that the book which he reviews is intended to explain and defend the Christian religion "on the basis of the psychology of religion without benefit of any revelation in history."

The new book, according to the reviewer, tries to go back to the very foundations of religion. It states, as many recent investigators have done, that religion arises in moral experience. Dr. Morrison objects that "the Church and revelation" are ignored. We have quoted rather copiously to give our readers a little insight into the modes of thinking and arguing followed by Modernists. After all, the religion which they adopt and cultivate is that of the human mind, of reason, which speculates and applauds itself on its profundities. Dr. Morrison's own position is not far different, because, though he speaks of revelation as an important factor, what he has in mind is not the Scripture as the Word of God, but "God's action in history." Christians have always taught that God reveals Himself in history, but they have, wherever they remained loyal to the old moorings, added that the supreme revelation of God is given us in Christ and in the inerrant Word. A.

Dr. Buttrick of the Federal Council.—There is no doubt that the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America is gaining rapidly in strength and influence. It claims to represent American Protestantism. It controls largely the appointment of Protestant chaplains. It regulates the radio in its Protestant aspect, Dr. H. E. Fosdick and Dr. R. W. Sockman being the official Protestant radio speakers. In 1939 Dr. G. A. Buttrick was elected to the presidency of the Federal Council. Dr. Buttrick is pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York. He is a signer of the infamous Auburn Affirmation and a member of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. In 1938 he gave the anniversary address before the 150th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. As he spoke, his very popular book *The Christian Fact and Modern Doubt* was on sale in the vestibule of Convention Hall, Philadelphia. *The Christian Beacon* (April 8, 1943), mentioning these facts, produces in the same issue some excerpts showing Dr. Buttrick's undisguised infidelity. Writing on the authority of the Bible, he says: "It [the Bible] comprises myths by which the stories of

Mount Olympus or the City of Asgard are cast in shade, tales more gallant than those of Arthur's Court, songs that are the music of the soul, dramas that might be a Sophocles' despair." (Italics ours.) Or: "But as long as historical criticism is deemed invalid and every 'apocalypse' is the direct 'word of God,' the doomsters will plague us. What minister visiting a college campus but has found religion discredited by bibliolatry? Genesis is the 'word of God,' the argument runs, but the indubitable findings of science make Genesis seem absurd: so religion is a dream and an anachronism. Not all churches yet give clear guidance." Or: "Literal infallibility of Scripture is a fortress impossible to defend: there is treason in the camp. Probably few people who claim to 'believe every word of the Bible' really mean it. *That avowal held to its last logic would risk a trip to the insane asylum.*" (Italics by *Christian Beacon*.) Touching on the imputation of Adam's guilt to his descendants, Dr. Buttrick remarks: "Such a God . . . had earned the verdict of the French sceptic: 'Your God is my devil.'" We shall not continue to enumerate the rank blasphemies of this unbeliever, but certainly the American Council of Christian Churches is right when it insists that the Federal Council, led by such unbelievers as Buttrick, Fosdick, Sockman, and others, has no right to represent Protestantism in America and has no right to usurp the privilege of the Protestant radio hour to disseminate its unbelief and has no right to control the appointment of Army and Navy chaplains. Let those who condemn the adherents of the American Council of Christian Churches as too vocal only contemplate how much more vocal infidelity, as represented by the Federal Council, is in our country and how surely it will go on and on to deceive unwary Christians unless it is exposed in its ungodly attitude and heinous infidelity.

J. T. M.

The American Scientific Affiliation.—*The Calvin Forum* (May, 1943) reports editorially on the status of the American Scientific Affiliation, of which, we are sure, our readers will read with great joy. The following is said about its organization: "Through the week of September 2, 1941, there met in Chicago a group of five men of standing in their respective branches of science. Four of them are professors in recognized institutions of higher learning, and the fifth was on the faculty of the largest university of the country until recently, when he entered the industrial field. Two of them are heads of their departments. They are typical college professors; in addition, they are wholehearted Christians. They met to discuss some problems common to them all." The "A. S. A." booklet, from which this is taken, further declares: "Nineteenth- and twentieth-century science has brought forth some remarkable evidence substantiating the reliability of the Holy Scriptures. This same science has also brought in a destructive materialistic philosophy, which is leaving a scar upon our civilization. An excellent method of combating the latter is to make known the former, and to this task this new organization of Christian men of science brings its rigorous thinking, specialized training, and humble faith." Explaining the objective of the group more fully, the editor writes: "One of the five men mentioned in the preceding paragraphs was Dr. J. P. Van Haitzma of Calvin College; the others hailed from California, Massachusetts, and

Pennsylvania. Their discussions concerned the faith of students subjected to materialistic campus influences and the unscientific defense of the Bible often found in books and pamphlets produced by well-meaning Christian authors. How to help these students and authors, was the question considered. Suggested plans for future activity were: to publish a handbook for college students, to review Christian books on science, to conduct a scientific summer school for Christian workers and educators, to write literature on scientific subjects and to spread accurate literature." Membership is restricted to such persons as are scientifically qualified and subscribe to the creed of the organization, which reads: "I believe in the whole Bible, as originally given, to be the inspired word of God, the only unerring guide of faith and conduct. Since God is the Author of this Book as well as the Creator and Sustainer of the physical world about us, I cannot conceive of discrepancies between statements in the Bible and the real facts of science. Accordingly, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, my Savior, for strength, I pledge myself as a member of this organization to the furtherance of its task." National meetings were to be held annually, but on January 1, 1943, the chairman, F. Alton Everest, wrote to the members and prospective members that "the war has temporarily changed the original emphasis of national conventions with auxiliary regional meetings to regional meetings with no national conventions." Eight such regional meetings have been held since the time of organization; five in California, two in Chicago, and one in Boston. The article says in conclusion: "The organization is young, and the war has interfered with some of its original plans, but the leaders are men of devotion, energy, and enthusiasm. No doubt, we shall hear more from this affiliation." Just now when the world war with its many earnest lessons and serious problems is making thousands receptive to listening to the truth who otherwise never would have troubled themselves about spiritual values, the affiliation will find much opportunity to do effective witnessing work. May its endeavors be crowned with success. The spirit of the organization, judged by its creed, certainly is most excellent. J. T. M.

Peace Negotiations and the Church.—Very properly our press and our statesmen are directing the thoughts of our people and those of other nations to the discussions which will have to come when the last gun of the war has been fired and the peace treaty is to be drawn up. In some quarters the thought has been voiced strongly that at the table where the delegates of the various nations will be seated to confer on the terms of peace treaty spokesmen of the Church should be given a place and an opportunity for offering suggestions. People who express such a thought undoubtedly mean well, but in our view the course which they advocate is entirely erroneous. In the *Living Church* (Episcopal) a lengthy editorial deals with the topic "The Church at the Peace Conference," and the sentiments expressed there are so sane that we must not withhold at least some of the salient paragraphs from our readers.

"It seems to us that a delegation at the peace conference specifically labeled 'Christian Churches,' whether its members were advisers or delegates, . . . could do no good, and might do much harm. In the first

place, what weight could be assigned to the opinions of such a delegation? If it were defending its own material and practical interests (such as, let us say, title to church property which had been seized by the enemy), it would, no doubt, speak with the full authority of the bodies it represented. If, on the other hand, it attempted to go into political questions, there is grave doubt whether it could possibly represent the membership of the churches. Political, economic, and social questions, while they are closely related to Christian principles, cannot be answered merely by reference thereto; and there are almost as many opinions within the Church as outside it about each problem in these spheres. The church delegation, if it attempted to advocate concrete proposals of a political nature, would find itself loudly disclaimed by leading church people outside its membership. Indeed, it is quite possible that the delegation itself would be unable to agree to much of anything and would cut a sorry figure among the more worldly negotiators who know what they want and can marshal support to get it."

After pointing to the difficulty which will confront the peace conference on account of the conflicting claims of Poland and Russia, the editorial continues, "What purpose would a church delegation serve in such an assembly? Would it be there to associate the Church with compromised and expedient decisions based on the power of the nation offering them? Or would its function be to keep silence in controversial issues, merely protesting when flagrant injustice is attempted, and perhaps walking out and withdrawing the mantle of religion which it had too hastily thrown over the affairs of nations? It seems likely, from the ethical point of view, that the peace will be not unlike the peace of 1919 — although, from the practical point of view, we hope that it will be much stronger. Justice will be done in some quarters; in others, injustice. In some matters it will be quite impossible to establish a normal justice. A religious delegation, it seems to us, could only work mischief in such an assembly. It could not prevent injustice, partly because much of it will not look like injustice at the time, but chiefly because the Christian trumpet gives forth an uncertain sound in political matters and hard-headed statesmen will not pay any attention to it. Because of the absolute character of the Church's message on right and wrong, the delegation would either have to use the prestige of the Church to countenance wrong or condemn the conference *in toto* and thus, perhaps, wreck the embryonic order of nations before it had a chance to develop."

We hope the Church will not forget the saying of Jesus addressed to Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Let the Church adhere to its function, the preaching of the Word. It will have to exert its influence at the peace conference indirectly, bringing people to Christ and putting Christian principles into their hearts so that, when they are called upon to act as political leaders, the ideals which they will follow will be as much as possible in keeping with the great tenets of justice and love laid down in the Holy Scriptures. A.

The Returned Soldiers. — Under the caption "When the Heroes Come Home" the *Christian Century* publishes an editorial which one cannot but read with alarm. The editor says: "Reflective churchmen must have

read with apprehension reports which came out of Detroit last week. There the psychiatrists of the nation heard Army and Navy doctors tell their annual convention what the war has done to men in service, and particularly to the men who were in action on New Guinea and Guadalcanal. Even from the abridged accounts carried by the Associated Press it is evident that the American troops who have been in action in the South Pacific have passed through an experience which has had devastating psychological effects such as the nation had not begun to imagine. The medical men who have had to care for these veterans of jungle warfare tell of airmen mentally unbalanced by the tasks assigned them of 'strafing' defenseless ground troops. They tell of soldiers, specially chosen and toughened for these campaigns, behaving like madmen on the hospital ships bringing them back to this country. After six months of complete rest, the doctors say, some of them may again be fit for limited military duty. 'But,' according to the A.P., 'it is now considered doubtful that any of them can go back into the kind of action they faced.' Heroes returning from the front did not want to talk much after the last war. Apparently those returning from this war can't talk much; that way madness lies."

It is a sad topic, but our pastors have to face it because some of their parishioners, now serving in the armed forces, may when they return be in the condition of psychological disintegration described here. If anywhere, it is in these cases that a pastor's wisdom will be taxed to the utmost.

A.

Brief Items. — "The commercial wedding and the stunt marriage are so far outside the meaning of the solemnization of holy matrimony that the priest gains respect for the Church by turning his back on them." (From an editorial in the *Living Church*, Episcopalian weekly.)

According to the Catholic census, giving the strength of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, Alaska, and Hawaii for 1942, the number of adherents of that Church at the close of last year was 22,945,247, a gain of 389,005 (almost 2 per cent) over the census figures for 1941. The report says that of the accessions 86,905, that is, about 20 per cent, represent conversions and that this number of converts to be gained in one year is the largest in the history of the Church in the United States.

To help our readers in evaluating religious news items, we here state briefly once more that there are now three larger Protestant federations: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America; the American Council of Christian Churches; and the National Association of Evangelicals. The latter Association is accused by Fundamentalists of being unwilling to take a stand against the Federal Council.

A Federal court in California dismissed a suit to revoke the voting rights of certain California Japanese. The charge of the man who brought the suit was that "dishonesty, deceit, and hypocrisy are racial characteristics of the Japanese." When an appeal was taken, the decision of the lower court was upheld by the Circuit Court and the United States Supreme Court.

A.