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Theological Observer. - Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

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Theological Observer

What About Church Unity?—Under this heading Ernest Gordon in the *Sunday School Times* (May 11, 1946) quotes the following timely and important advice to churches now considering organic church unity: "In *What About Church Unity?* (Atlantic Monthly, January, 1946) Canon Bell makes a searching analysis of the matter. "There are two fissures in Protestantism, one horizontal (denominationalism) and the other vertical. The agitators for church union concern themselves with the first only, which is the less important. Christians can get along well enough in their present denominational relationships, but the Church is riven vertically by fundamental differences in belief, a theological divergence of the first magnitude.' It has to do with 'basic questions about man, about God, about the existence or non-existence of the supernatural, about whether Jesus Christ is only an excellent human sage or God-made man for man's salvation from man's incurable folly and weakness of will.' 'If you bring the denominations together in one [without bringing about an agreement on these points and others], you but prepare for conflict on larger battlefields.' Mr. T. S. Eliot has said that 'the deepest cleavage in human life is between those who believe in revelation and those who deny it.' In all the major denominations this chasm is apparent. Those who control the denominational machines and the Federal Council are, on the whole, on the side of denial. They give lip service to inspiration, but define it away. To Neo-Unitarians, impressed with man's greatness, Canon Bell says, in a fine passage: 'Because the race is what inherently it is, man gets nowhere much [in religious philosophy] by way of progress in time. He tears down what his fathers built and builds again what his children will reduce to rubble. His history moves in cycles of development and decay. Fiercely gazing into the future for meaning, he rides on a merry-go-round which takes him over and over again to where he was before. This is what the Bible teaches. The traditional Christian is of the opinion that it [this] is what the study of history also reveals. Since there is no significance for man in terms of progress, since man cannot solve his problem by pulling at his own bootstraps, even such admirable bootstraps as science provides, man must and can be saved from futility only by the intervention of God. Christianity is a religion of redemption.'" J.T.M.

Dr. Bersell on Lutheran Union.—In his address at the recent convention of the Augustana Synod Dr. Bersell, president of that body, stated that the "door of the establishment of a Lutheran federation of churches stands open today," and he added that although "selfish interests, racial traditions, parochial loyalties, provincial prejudices, and theological hairsplittings hinder us from entering now, I dare prophesy that it shall not be for long." The

factors which Dr. Bersell enumerates may be real and potent. We are thinking especially of his reference to theological hair-splittings. That there is such a thing and that here and there in the Lutheran Church in America people engage in it, cannot be denied. But it must be stated definitely that not all the theological controversies which are going on these days belong to the category of theological hairsplitting. There is the question of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. The great majority of Lutherans hold the Scriptures are inerrant. Some theologians say that such a position concerning the Scriptures is untenable. Can anybody say that in debating the question whether the Scriptures are inerrant or not, we are merely splitting hair? It is a vital question, and if we are not altogether mistaken, this question forms the ridge which constitutes the dividing line between Modernism and Conservatism. Whatever a person may think of a number of other questions that are debated, here, at any rate, one cannot say that mere empty straw is being threshed and that the debaters are simply fighting windmills. A.

Will Separation of Church and State Survive?—On this question a writer in the *Watchman-Examiner* voices the conviction that separation of Church and State is doomed unless the people who see what a great boon this separation constitutes are willing to defend it. It is a sentiment that needs to be stressed. The writer, William B. Adams of Washington, D. C., concludes with these words, "This doctrine is imbedded in American tradition. Jefferson, who is probably the best interpreter of this tradition, has given us a concrete example in the founding of the University of Virginia. He maintained that it is the purpose of the State to provide free secular education. He also maintained that the various religious groups should come to the border of the campus, establish their denominational schools, and provide care for sectarian education. But all secular education could be obtained under the direction of the State at his university. This doctrine has been the basis of American life from that day until now. Every other doctrine is foreign, un-American, and un-Christian." The last epithet may be too strong. If the writer means to say that the New Testament does not favor a mixing of Church and State, he is right. A.

Religious Conditions in the Russian Zone in Germany.—A staff reporter of the *Protestant Voice* writes as follows on conditions in the zone occupied by the Russians in Germany:

"God is being 'quarantined' in the Russian-occupied zone of Germany. At the present rate, the district will end as a mere communist-dominated colony of the Soviet Union. Religion is outlawed, except inside the churches. The Germans are allowed to attend services. That is the extent to which they may go. They are not permitted to carry the principles of their religious faith into public life. All public institutions are being forced systematically into the Marxian mold.

"The Communist 'Quislings' of Moscow are rapidly getting control of all civil affairs.

"While it is true that, as a rule, church life in the Russian zone is not interfered with at the present time, yet it is quite another story when it comes to religious activities outside of the church buildings.

"The Soviet authorities refuse permission to print religious books or to issue any kind of religious publications or periodicals. They object seriously to religious bodies organizing their own societies and holding meetings which are not a part of regular divine services of worship.

"This applies particularly to the younger generation which is absorbed completely in so-called 'anti-fascist' groups that are strictly controlled by Communist officials and provide the channel for the indoctrination of both girls and boys of every age group with Marxian ideology.

"Despite the formal agreement among the occupational powers whereby religious instruction must be imparted in the public schools if the parents request it, no such liberty is granted in the Russian zone. School teachers are selected and appointed without consultation of church authorities and most of them are hostile to Christian ideals.

"The people now residing in the Soviet zone remain virtually isolated from the rest of Germany and the outside world. One pastor told a correspondent: 'We live behind a Chinese wall. We cannot communicate with our Bishops. Our Bishops, unless they live in our zone, are unable to visit us. There is dire need of Bibles, but none are available. As radio sets were widely confiscated in the early months after the war, we cannot even listen to broadcasts that might bring solace, information, and encouragement. And, of course, the newspapers are edited entirely along Communist lines and religion is being ignored.'

"In addition to all this, there is the ghastly plight of the German refugees that pour like an endless stream into the Soviet zone from Silesia and Poland. There are over five millions of them. Very few pastors are left to care for their spiritual needs. Children who have lost their parents and wander about aimlessly receive no religious guidance whatsoever.

"To be sure, there is a crying need of relief, but private organizations are denied access to the Russian zone and the local organizations cannot cope with the task which beggars description."

A.

Chaplains Needed for Veterans' Hospitals. — On this subject *Religious News Service* submits this report:

"Gen. Omar Bradley, director of the Veterans' Administration, in a message to the 157th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. at Atlantic City, N. J., said the VA hospital load is expected to reach its peak in 1965 when 600 chaplains will probably be needed.

"Gen. Bradley said the establishment of a chaplaincy service in the VA had started a work 'which will prove to be of increasing religious value and significance.'

"In June, 1945,' he said, 'the VA was employing 11 full-time chaplains and 170 on a part-time basis. Now there are 130 full-time chaplains working in 81 hospitals under direction of a chief and four assistants.'

"It is my desire that two aspects of our relationship shall be kept in the forefront of the thinking of our chaplains and the Church,' he said. 'First, that the chaplains should always be conscious that they are ministers of the churches; second, that the Church should always be conscious that the chaplains are their representatives in a great and challenging religious ministry.'"

Some Information Concerning German Universities.—The *Theologische Zeitschrift*, published by the theological faculty of the University of Basel, in the May-June number for 1946 submits some interesting and pertinent information on library conditions at German universities. In Vienna the theological library of 40,000 volumes has remained intact. In Muenster the library of the university has to a large extent been destroyed, but the theological seminaries had removed their books, and thus they were nearly all preserved. The University of Giessen owned 75,000 volumes, of which only 40,000 are still extant. The journal mentioned furthermore informs us that the University of Giessen has ceased to exist, with the exception of a section pertaining to agriculture and forestry. While Leipzig was very heavily bombed, the university was reopened February, 1946. In Berlin the university apparently has gone into action, although the report says that the so-called ordinary professorships have not yet been filled in any one of the various theological disciplines. A.

Roman Catholics and Tolerance.—In the *Lutheran* of July 10 an article appears with the heading, "Can Catholics Be Tolerant?" We quote from the second part of the article.

"What will happen to us Protestants if it does occur? Will the principles of tolerance prevail? Will Protestants be given full liberty of practice, discussion, and propaganda? We Protestants would like to believe that, but we find it a little difficult, in view of the character of many authoritative Roman Catholic pronouncements, ranging all the way from papal encyclicals to definitive exposition of Catholic teaching in recognized authorities.

"Back in 1927, when it was practically certain that Alfred E. Smith would be the presidential candidate of the Democratic party in the following year, a controversy arose on this point. Smith's ecclesiastical mentor in this controversy was Msgr. John A. Ryan. His chief antagonist was a New York lawyer named Charles C. Marshall. Marshall protested against the presidential candidacy of a Roman Catholic, claiming that Catholics did not believe in the separation of church and state, and were not prepared to grant tolerance to other religious groups, provided they had the power

to deny it. In Smith's answer, he argued for the right of every American to choose his own religion and be free and secure in the practice of it. He said in effect: I'll be a good Catholic. You be a good Protestant. And we'll each respect and support the other. That pronouncement was hailed as a salutary and essentially American statement.

"But it was not regarded with favor in the Catholic world outside the United States. Catholic papers in Europe began to ask what kind of Catholic was this who proposed equality to Protestants? The *Syllabus of Errors* of Pius IX of 1864, and the encyclical of Leo XIII on the Christian constitution of states (*Immortale Dei*, 1881) began to be quoted. The official Roman Catholic answer in this country was that these papal pronouncements had to do with the ideal state, and had no reference to conditions in a country like America. But there remained, as there still remains, the conviction in the minds of many Protestants, that Alfred E. Smith was personally going beyond the age-old attitude of his church in his advocacy of tolerance.

"What would happen to other religious faiths, if and when Roman Catholicism came into power in the United States to such an extent as to be able to change the first amendment to the Constitution? Miller, Ryan and Boland, in their approved work, *Catholic Principles of Politics* (1940), do not dodge that question. Protestantism, they say, would be allowed the private, restricted liberty of worship, but anything like public propaganda, or equality with Roman Catholicism would be out of the question. 'Since no rational end is promoted by the dissemination of false doctrine, there exists no right in this practice. . . . Error has not the same rights as truth.'

"Of course there is always the qualification that this is a theoretical situation, and that there is little or no prospect of its being actualized. But that is not good enough. Nobody talks about a theoretical situation without envisioning the possibility of its coming to pass. Regretfully one is forced to the conclusion that, on the basis of authoritative Roman Catholic teaching, tolerance has no basis.

"It may be claimed, and it may be granted as an expedient. This is clearly stated in the classic *Immortale Dei* of Leo XIII. But Protestants may never claim it as a right. More than a hundred years ago Louis Veuillot, a prominent French Ultramontanist, said, 'When you are in the majority, we claim tolerance from you on the basis of your principles; when we are in the majority, we deny tolerance to you on the basis of our principles.' That uncompromising declaration of the Roman Catholic view on tolerance is not an inaccurate summary of the official voice of that church. On that ground, Roman Catholics have no business consorting with us heretics, except that they may convert us. On that ground, they have nothing to learn from us except what not to do, what not to believe."
A.

Brief Items.—In St. Louis the Metropolitan Church Federation adopted this resolution: "In view of the evidence of the growing spirit of intolerance in various areas of American social and educational life, especially manifest in the renewed activities of such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan, the Metropolitan Church Federation of St. Louis urges on all Christians the necessity of a firm and vigorous opposition to all such movements. Such movements being contrary to the spirit of Christianity and democracy, we affirm that no Christian can have a part in any organization that appeals to a spirit of hatred and prejudice."

According to the *Lutheran* of July 10, Dr. Carl C. Rasmussen of Gettysburg Seminary left on June 28 for Europe to spend four months on that continent. The time will be given to "a study of the current theological literature of the European countries. He will confer with authors and publishers regarding books deserving translation into English." Wartburg Theological Seminary at Dubuque is granting a year's leave of absence to Dr. Charles Bodensieck, its president. His mission is "to help maintain relations between the churches over there and over here."

Dr. Horace Ford Martin has resigned as president of Biblical Seminary, New York, because he reached the retirement age. He is a member of the U. L. C. A. His successor will be Dr. John G. McKee, who has been connected with the seminary for the past twenty-one years. The school was founded in 1900 as a non-denominational seminary.

A transport plane seating 27 passengers has been purchased for the Lutheran World Convention by Daniel Nelson, the convention's China Relief Director. The plane will make regular trips from China to Calcutta to transport missionary personnel and to bring back medicines and supplies. It will connect in India with the plane from Europe operated by the Scandinavian missionary societies.—*Christian Century*.

London needs many new church buildings. A report says that if there is to be a church for every 10,000 persons living in London, 35 new buildings are required. During the war 624 of the 701 churches were damaged and 91 were completely destroyed.

A unique dinner was recently "held" in New York. Tickets were sold at \$20, \$15, \$10, and \$5 per plate. The interesting feature was that the dinner did not take place, that the guests participated *in absentia*, that the speakers served likewise *in absentia*, that the food was likewise conspicuous through *absentia*, and that the only thing which did not have this characteristic was the money, which was for European and Asiatic relief. Who would not like to serve as speaker on such an occasion? and what a pleasure to be a guest at a banquet of that kind! Long live *in absentia* of this nature.

From *Religious News Service*.—The Moravian Church in Czechoslovakia has voted to sever official relations with the denomination's headquarters in Herrenhut, Saxony, Germany, and has elected its own bishop and general assembly. Breaking of ties with German branches of their denominations is now being undertaken by all religious groups in Czechoslovakia, either voluntarily or under state compulsion.

A total of 109,705 elementary school children attended classes under a released-time program of the city of New York during the past season, it was announced by Assistant Superintendent of Schools William Jansen. In a report to Dr. Walter M. Howlett, executive secretary of the Greater New York Co-ordinating Committee on Released-Time, Jansen pointed out that this figure was a drop of only 1,906 from last year. The elementary school register decreased by 15,000 pupils in the same period. The Borough of Brooklyn reported the largest attendance, 43,829.

Speaking before the Assembly of the Northern Presbyterians meeting in Atlantic City, Governor Edward Martin of Pennsylvania urged his hearers to help revive in members of all Christian churches a sense of unity in their beliefs and principles. "This unity," he said, "should be strong enough to brush aside the small differences which divide us and to release our power for the great fight that is upon us. We have peace today, but it is an uneasy peace, without brotherhood. It is a peace without the unity of purpose we reached in the battle against the Axis. There is only one institution on earth, only one force or belief, held by a sufficient number of men, powerful enough to fight the forces of disunity. That power is religion." It is well to urge striving for unity, but more important is the urging that loyalty to God and His truth be manifested.

25 archbishops and 102 bishops were appointed by Pope Pius XII to sees throughout the world at a secret consistory attended by 20 cardinals.

Nearly one fourth of the \$10,000,000 sought by Lutheran World Action for Overseas Relief and Spiritual Reconstruction has been raised in cash contributions in the first quarter of the two-year drive, it was reported by Dr. Paul C. Empie, national director of the appeal. According to Dr. Empie's report, the eight participating bodies of the National Lutheran Council and related sources in the last six months have turned in \$2,393,411.45, or 23.9 per cent of the total sought.

In Rome a priest, Father Pecoraro, who allegedly took part in a republican demonstration and afterwards headed a group of Communists on a march through Rome waving a red flag, was suspended. An ecclesiastical court is investigating charges against him. In the strongly Communist provinces of Emilia 20 priests have been slain by anti-clerical elements, according to a report from Rome.