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Theological Observer. – Kirchlich Zeitgeschichtliches

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Theological Observer

The Exclusiveness of Christianity.—In the *Presbyterian Guardian* (January 10, 1947) Leslie W. Sloat, under the given heading, publishes the appeal: "Let Christians be Christians in 1947." A few sentences from the lengthy article may remind also the readers of this periodical of the seriousness involved in the issue of being a Christian. We read: "The Christian faith as set forth in the New Testament is a completely exclusive faith. It demands a total surrender on the part of its adherents. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus Christ and at the same time engage in other practices or accept other religious beliefs. We are living once again in a time when almost the whole tendency in religious thinking is toward mutual tolerance. In our day this form of thinking is rendered effective chiefly at the top of the scale rather than on the level of the individual. So we have our church union committees, our federal and world councils, our committees for co-operation of Christians and Jews, of Catholics and Protestants, and so forth. We have not yet reached the stage where the individual seeks the answer to his personal religious needs by joining a whole series of cults. But if the present tendency continues, the time will come when even on the lowest level the various systems of belief will be so tolerant of one another that we will be encouraged to find out what each has to offer us. In the face of such a tendency it is necessary that we again emphasize the exclusiveness of Christianity. He who would be true to the Word of God cannot look with anything but strong distaste upon the modern tendencies in the field of religious faith and practice. The exclusiveness of Christianity, it should be recognized, is grounded in the very nature of the Christian faith." The writer then points out that the entire Christian theology, from the loci of Theology Proper to Soteriology with its emphasis on salvation by grace through faith in the redemptive blood of Christ Jesus, the world's divine-human Savior, demands this absolute exclusiveness. Then he proceeds to say: "In recent years again, against the background of the pagan theory of evolution, the effort has been made to find a basic unity in all religious experience. Though this experience is described in different terms and in different creeds, it is said to be at bottom something common to all men. Hence the growing indifference to creeds and to the particularisms of certain religious forms. Hence the movements for bringing religions of varied background into a common fellowship of co-operation and union. If history repeats itself once more, this period of religious synthesis will again be followed by a breakup of the artificial union and by a reassertion of the distinctiveness and the exclusiveness of that which is truly Christian. Already there are signs on the horizon that such a development is in the making. But we do not depend upon history repeating itself nor upon signs on the horizon. We insist that the essential nature of true Christianity

demands that it shall travel the road of exclusiveness, of enmity against all other religion; for no other religion is true. And the people of God can have only a spirit of opposition to that which is false, which is opposed to their God, their Savior, and the truth that has been revealed to them from God. In the year 1947 there will be many efforts to break down this exclusiveness of the true Christian faith. We are [therefore] to be militant, not apologetic, in propagating the faith we hold dear, in all its implications for the life of our times. The year is young now. May its closing not find us regretful that we have been so sparing in the battle for the truth." The purpose of the "battle for the truth" is, of course, not greater division within Christendom, but the very opposite, namely, the bringing about of that true unity in faith which is the crowning accomplishment, among sincere believers in Christ, of such very insistence upon the truth of God's Word.

J. T. M.

Professor August Pieper Gone Home.— With a feeling of sadness and at the same time of triumphant joy one thinks of Prof. August Pieper as having passed on, exchanging his temporary abode for the permanent mansions above. Since he was a prominent theologian of the Lutheran Church, a few remarks on him should appear here. Professor Pieper was every inch a man, sturdy in his convictions, courageous in defending them, determined rather to suffer than to give up the truth. What is far more important—he was a humble Christian, who with childlike faith clung to the divine Savior. He must have been an excellent teacher. While we never attended any of his classes, his eminence as a debater and his eloquent discourses, poured forth at conferences without preparation, were evidence that he was able to present his positions with forcefulness and with great clarity. Everybody will admit that he exerted the deepest influence on the thinking and the outlook of the present generation of pastors in the Wisconsin Synod. His theology was not that of modern "scientific theologians," but simply that of historic Lutheranism, that of Luther, Walther, and Hoenecke. He possessed especially a definite grasp of the fundamental positions in Luther's teaching. Spurning all attempts to base his theology on speculation or metaphysics, he wished to be an honest Scripture theologian. His study of Luther had helped him to apprehend and put into the very center of his theological work the great Scripture doctrines which the Reformer with unrivaled power has sketched in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans. It was one of the traits of Professor Pieper that he desired to occupy himself with what is central in theology rather than with minor questions, though he was a keen student of whatever appeared in the field of theological scholarship, as his admirable article in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* on "Modern German Translations of the Bible" showed. Though we could not always agree with him, we gave him a full measure of our affectionate admiration and thank God for his profound understanding of the Scriptures. As a writer, almost unrivaled in our circles in

his beautiful German prose, he will be chiefly remembered for his *Commentary on the Second Part of Isaiah* and a large number of brilliant articles in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*.

He was born in 1857. His death occurred December 27, 1946, when he had reached the age of 89 years, a real patriarch among his former students, friends, and acquaintances. His memory will be honored as long as the Lutheran Church remains truly Lutheran.

A.

Our Duty as a Christian Church. — *The Lutheran Companion* (January 8, 1947) offers in its special column "The Spectator" the following bit of serious reflection: "About twelve months ago, Dr. Urey, the atomic scientist, said: 'The morals of the human race have degenerated unbelievably in the last five years. It is not to be expected that they would not further degenerate in a future war.' And, pray, what brought us to this climax of catastrophe? Must not the scientists themselves assume a large portion of the blame? Did not the majority of them hold to the following dogmas of materialistic faith until very recently? 1. Science, if given full freedom of inquiry and action, will inevitably bring about progress and civilization. 2. Religion may have value to primitive peoples or to the less intelligent among civilized men, but a scientist is above religion, taking nothing for granted, believing only what he can demonstrate experimentally. 3. Theology is a cultural field of interest, like poetry or painting. It is not a science like chemistry or physics, in other words, theology deals with opinions while science deals with facts. 4. Prayer is merely talking to one's self, something like the whistling of a boy who is afraid of the dark, but must walk home through the woods. 5. Morality may be of value. (To be demonstrated, however.) Science cannot be bothered with the Ten Commandments or any such relics of an outworn past, neither in its inquiries nor in its conclusions. — These are only five of the many doctrines preached especially by high school scientists during the "Spectator's" period of consciousness to date. Science has banished religion and theology from respectable thought, and therefore the moral code built upon them has also suffered ostracism. As a consequence science has now produced a Frankenstein (the atomic bomb) and in its fright flees to Mount Sinai, not to Calvary, as a rule. We Christians must help science find its way to the Cross, for not until then will any of us be safe. If Jesus Christ had full control of the atomic bomb and atomic power, who among us would be afraid?" No doubt every reader appreciates the writer's well-intentioned suggestion to "help science find its way to the Cross." But how can this be done? Will science ever become truly Christian? The experiences of the past prove quite the contrary. But that much certainly is true that we Christians must help as many as we can reach find their way back to the Cross, and that not merely to escape any possible atomic bomb of another war, but to save men from the wrath to come and to obtain eternal life. That, however, is so great a task that the Christian Church must devote itself to this work exclusively.

It dare not fritter away its time and talents with attempts at solving social problems. It is understood, of course, that the Church can never lead men to the Cross unless it proclaims also the Law of God. Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary belong together, for the Law and the Gospel are the appointed agencies by which God works toward the saving of sinners. J. T. M.

The Proposed Conference of American Churches on Closer Unity.—In response to overtures from the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches and the International Convention of Disciples of Christ, both of which proposed that the Federal Council convene "a plenary session of representatives of American Churches to study the possibility of closer unity," the following action was taken at the October meeting of the Executive Committee.

That the General Secretary be instructed to send a communication to the officials of all the Churches related to the Council, inquiring whether they desire to participate in such a conference and, in case the answer is affirmative, whether they will be prepared to designate a representative, or representatives, to serve with similar representatives of other Churches on a Joint Committee on Arrangements and Agenda.

That after the replies have been received, and in the light of the extent of interest manifested, the Executive Committee decide what relation, if any, the Federal Council should sustain to such a Conference and what measure of assistance, in the form of study or of administrative responsibility, it should provide.

It will now be for the Churches to determine to what extent they are interested in exploring some next step in closer relationships. A.

Brief Items from Religious News Service.—Soviet authorities have given permission for the creation of new Baptist seminaries in Russia and for the reopening of a previously established theological school, according to Jacob Zhidkov, chairman of the Baptist and Evangelical Union in the U. S. S. R. Sunday schools, however, do not exist in the Soviet Union, as the constitution does not permit religious instruction of children except in their homes.

The new scale of minimum salaries for pastors of Congregational Christian churches provides for an annual salary of \$2,400 for rural clergymen and \$2,400 plus a house for urban pastors.

Dr. John A. Hutton, former editor of the *British Weekly*, leading non-denominational organ published here, died at Seven Oaks, Kent, at the age of 78. A noted preacher, Dr. Hutton was an outstanding Free Church figure during the past fifty years.

A new Mormon "stake"—first in the Southeast—was formally organized at Jacksonville, Fla., at a gathering attended by more than 1,000 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Establishment of a stake means that officers will be selected locally rather than appointed by Mormon leaders in Salt Lake City. Alvin C. Chase was named president of the stake, with juris-

diction over an area embracing congregations from Waycross, Ga., to Orlando in central Florida. The stake is the fourth to be organized east of the Mississippi River, others being located in Washington, Chicago, and New York. The local organization is the 163d stake of the Church in the United States. The first Mormon missionary came to Florida in 1895.

According to Dr. Paul C. Empie, teaching of religion by the churches is now permitted in the Russian Zone in Germany, but 40,000 teachers must be trained and 3,000,000 textbooks secured if it is to be done.

Texts of the first five peace treaties drawn up by the Allies provide "freedom of worship" in Italy, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, Finland, and Trieste and, additionally, place a prohibition on discriminatory laws, based on religious grounds, in Rumania and Hungary. Article 15 of the treaty with Italy states: "Italy shall take all measures necessary to secure to all persons under Italian jurisdiction, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and of the fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, of press and publication, of religious worship, of political opinion, and of public meeting."

Of the 16,500,000 Roman Catholic inhabitants of rural areas in France, only 7,500,000, or 45 per cent, practice their faith, according to an ecclesiastical survey recently completed. A further 4,000,000, the survey reported, have their children baptized, make their First Communion, and are married and buried with religious rites.

A bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives which would appropriate \$150,000,000 for elementary and secondary parochial and public schools in the 1947 fiscal year. Under the terms of the measure, sponsored by Rep. Richard J. Welch (R.-Calif.), the appropriation would be increased to \$200,000,000 in 1948 and \$250,000,000 each year thereafter.

The fourth annual National Pilgrimages to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico will take place on March 10 to 28 and on Sept. 29 to Oct. 16, it was announced by the Most Rev. Thomas E. Molloy, Roman Catholic Bishop of Brooklyn. Our Lady of Guadalupe is patroness of all Spanish-speaking peoples in Mexico and Latin America. There are 525 churches dedicated to her throughout the world. More than 90 of these are in the United States.

Distribution of the New Testament to Davenport, Iowa, public school pupils by the local Gideon organization was ordered discontinued by the educational committee of the Davenport Board of Education. The committee acted after receiving a protest from Rabbi Abram V. Goodman on behalf of the congregation of Temple Emanuel. The congregation asserted that the Gideons' action violated the principle of separation of Church and State, opened the door to circulation of literature by other groups, and, by dividing Protestants and no-Protestants, embarrassed those who did not take copies of the Testaments.