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Theological Observer

"Hamma Digest" Issue. — For some years Dean E. E. Flack has sent us copies of the *Hamma Digest Issue* of the *Wittenberg Bulletin* published by Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio. We were very happy to receive also this year's *Hamma Digest* with its rich variety of stimulating articles. The *Digest* contains articles on "Christian Higher Education Year" by Rees Edgar Tulloss; "Can the Lutheran Churches in America be Conditioned for Ecumenicity?" by Otto H. Bostrom; "On the Natural Knowledge of God" by Otto W. Heick; "The Focus of Evangelical Worship" by Willard D. Allbeck; "Toynbee's Analysis of History" by Cyrus M. Wallick; "Christianity and History" by George E. Mendenhall; "The Need for Reappraisal in American Education" by Henry O. Yoder; "Write a Letter, Pastor" by Amos John Traver; and "Arrows in the Bible" by E. E. Flack. In some articles one notes the zeal of a prophet, a zeal which occasionally condenses into a white heat. This may account for the overstatement made by Otto H. Bostrom, "To realize ecumenical unity in the Christian Church is the most urgent concern for Christians today" (p. 12), and Prof. Mendenhall's unfair interpretation, "In general, theology has not been founded on the experiences of history, but instead on abstract thought and reasoning from premises thought to be found in Scripture. A good example of such a foundation on abstraction is the orthodoxist premise of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. The new historical knowledge made such a position impossible to any but the ignorant or intellectually dishonest. The orthodox consequently fought with bitterness, vindictiveness, and unchristian vituperation against what they conceived to be an attack on the very foundation of their faith; they were right in seeing the far-reaching implications of the new disciplines of historical research, but they were wrong in believing that the foundation of Christian faith is a rational premise of logic" (p. 36). Professor Mendenhall's interpretation is unfair because also for many orthodox believers the foundation of Christian faith is far more than "a rational premise of logic." There is a thing like oversimplification also in theological thinking. Apart from the above and a few other minor considerations, we owe much to all the articles in this year's *Digest*. P. M. B.

Is Catholic Doctrine Changing? — This question is under discussion in Protestant circles both here and in Europe. At Bad Boll in Germany we were informed this past summer that there appear to be straws in the wind that the Vatican is revising its position on Neo-Thomism. We have not noted such a change of sentiment in our own country. Yet it would surely be possible for Catholic authorities, with permission from Rome, to make adjustments of Thomistic principles to present-day secular forms of thought. It would even be possible for Rome, in the interest of greater and more important issues and objectives, to shelve

altogether certain Thomistic principles in so far as they deal with wholly secular affairs. But this is a far cry from saying that Rome is changing her doctrine. Rome will not change the doctrines that the Pope is God's viceregent and Peter's successor here on earth, that he is above all councils and synods, that his word is final, and that the Roman Church is above every form of government. M. Martinez, writing in the *Christian Century* (Aug. 31, p. 1015) is right when he says, "Against this Jesuit [Fr. Dunne] stand the words of Pius IX, who in his encyclical *Longinqua Oceani* says: 'It is necessary to destroy the error of those who might believe that perhaps the status of the church in America is a desirable one, and also an error that an imitation of that sort of thing, the separation of church and state, is legal and even convenient.' These are the words of the supreme authority in the Catholic Church and whatever Fr. Dunne or anyone else might say to the contrary has no value whatever. The Catholic Church has not changed nor is it changing. But the times and the circumstances have changed and the church must adapt itself to them, at least outwardly, while waiting for *der Tag*." P. M. B.

The "Paradox" Concept in Modern Theology.—In *Religion and Life* (Autumn, 1949), Rev. Waymon Parsons contributes a review of current Protestant theology under the title "The Theological Pendulum," in which he traces the rise and development of modern liberalism and modern neo-orthodoxy. He concludes that neo-orthodoxy has swung too far away from center and has sponsored views as extreme as those against which it was a reaction. The author analyzes in particular what he believes to be extreme views in such areas as the depravity of man, Jesus and Christology, revelation and reason, freedom and authority. This is not the place to expose, on Scriptural grounds, all the errors of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy and of some of Rev. Parsons' conclusions. We are, however, calling attention to an observation made by Rev. Parsons which every Lutheran theologian may well take to heart, namely, his warning against what he calls "the wholesale use of the 'paradox' concept." Rev. Parsons writes: "It is not difficult to see that life and religion and theology produce many contradictions and baffling blind alleys. But on the whole we have been content to let a mystery remain a mystery and see some place for mystery in the total scheme of things. Now, however, there seems to be a tendency on the part of theologians to be highly pleased when any set of problems can be reduced to a paradox. It is well enough to realize that truth can often be arrived at by a dialectical process wherein we draw off an insight of value from the tension between opposites. But the contemporary fad of taking refuge in paradoxes and seeing in them a method of exalting religious truth strikes one as rather paralyzing, if it doesn't actually make an idol out of a stalemate." We shall go one step farther. The current fashion in some theological quarters to hide behind a "paradox" may be but another sinister way of granting to error

a rightful place alongside of truth. The "either-or" dialectic has its pitfalls, but the same is true of the "both-and" method. Both methods may be employed to express theological truth, but should never be used for the purpose of silencing and denying truth or of espousing and defending error.

P. M. B.

Lutheran Education.—This is the official educational journal of our Church edited by an editorial committee of the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest. Though this journal has now entered its 85th year, it shows no traces of old age. A casual look into the September issue with its timely editorials (*aktuell* in the best sense), its scholarly feature articles, its live news and notes, not to mention its invaluable music section, its crisp reviews, its pleasing make-up and eminent readability—all of it compels admiration and gratitude. Here is a journal, moreover, which methodically seizes upon every opportunity to impress upon its readers that the principles of Lutheran education are deeply anchored in the eternal principles revealed by God in Scripture. The inside cover of the journal features the passages Matt. 28:19-20, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and Psalm 111:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do His commandments," and the quotation from Luther, "Nothing will serve us and future generations better than maintaining good schools and training the youth." In keeping with the true and profound sentiments expressed in the above passages, the editorials in *Lutheran Education* time and again single out and apply relevant Biblical truths to the teaching process. One might expect this. What one does not expect is that wherever one happens to rest his eye-intake while paging through this journal, one discovers the warm pulse beat of a Christian heart which has contributed the item or article. Considering the superior materials offered in this journal, its breadth and depth of educational insight into the vast and complex business of education, especially that of our Church, considering also the blessings which have come to our Church through this journal these many years, one can't help wishing *Lutheran Education* and its pilots another *bon voyage* as it courageously moves forward into the uncharted sea of its 85th year. May its old friends pledge it renewed loyalty. May it find many new friends. Above all, may its philosophy of education penetrate into every nook and corner of the Lutheran Church throughout the world.

P. M. B.

Prof. H. Sasse on Baptism.—Prof. P. H. Buehring has rendered the Lutheran Church of our country a distinct service by publishing in *The Lutheran Outlook* (September) his English translation of Prof. H. Sasse's recent article on Baptism. The value of Professor Sasse's article lies in this that, on the one hand, he stresses the theological rather than the historical issues involved

in infant Baptism, and, on the other hand, presents the Lutheran doctrine of infant Baptism against the larger canvas of the doctrine of Baptism in general. One cannot deal with infant Baptism without entering in on the Lutheran doctrine of the Word and faith in the Sacraments. At the same time, Professor Sasse clearly indicates at which points the Lutheran doctrine of Baptism differs from that of the Roman and the Reformed churches. From his concluding remarks we cull the following important observation: "The question [infant vs. adult baptism] cuts no figure either in the New Testament or in Luther. Aside from the fact that adult candidates for baptism voice their assent and confess their faith personally, Baptism has always been administered in the Church 'just as though' the persons to be baptized themselves desire Baptism and believe that which is spoken in the Baptismal confession of faith. This practice must not be accounted for on the basis of liturgical traditionalism and ecclesiastical conservatism, but it belongs to the very essence of the rite. We baptize infants 'just as though' they were adults, even as we adults believe 'just as though' we were infants. Whatever the difference between adults and infants may signify for us humans and for our estimate of a man, for God it signifies nothing. A human being is a human being, is a child of Adam or a child of God, without regard to his age. That is the deeper reason why all baptismal rituals treat the infant 'just as though' it were grown up." P. M. B.

The Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration.—Ever since Rev. A. V. Neve published, in the December, 1948, issue of the *Lutheran Outlook*, an article entitled "Distinctive Characteristics of Lutheran Theology," in which he denied the doctrine of Biblical inspiration as defended, for example, in Dr. F. Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik*, a controversy has been carried on in that periodical on the question "Is the Written Word of God, the Bible, Inspired?" In the July, 1949, issue the *Outlook* published two articles *pro*, one by J. A. Dell, "The Doctrine of the Word," and another by E. H. Parsons, "Bible Reliability," and one *con* in the September, 1949, issue, by Rev. A. V. Neve "The Doctrine of the Word" (a reply). Another article *pro* appeared in the May, 1949, issue by the Rev. Mikkel Lono, which, as Dr. Dell suggests, might have been called "Answer to Rev. Neve." * Two recent books on the subject that do not represent the traditional doctrine of the Church are: *The Resurgence of the Gospel*, by Dr. T. Kantonen, and *The Doctrine of the Word*, by Joseph Sittler, Jr.

In the meanwhile the July, 1949, issue of *Der Lutheraner*, published by our brethren in Germany, offers an enlightening and, we may add, encouraging article under the heading "Verbalinspiration wieder aktuell?" Translated into English, the article reads:

"By Verbal Inspiration we mean that position toward Holy Scripture which avows that the Bible is God's inerrant Word and

* This article is reprinted in the current issue of this magazine.

that not only its general content, but also all that it contains, even the individual words, is the gift of the Spirit of God and the revelation of divine truth. This position rests upon the Bible's own testimony concerning itself (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; etc.) and corresponds to the unanimous witness of the Church from the beginning, as also to that of the fathers of the Reformation.

"Now, the confession of the infallible truth of Scripture has been so severely attacked in the German theology of the past century up to the immediate present that an attitude toward Scripture, as expressed by the term *Verbal Inspiration*, had to be regarded as absolutely impossible, that confessors of the truth who otherwise were sincere were ashamed of it, and that it [the term] was radically banned under all conditions from theological and ecclesiastical publications (*Oeffentlichkeit*).

"For this reason it might be considered as a noteworthy sign of reconsideration (*der Besinnung*) in some circles also of the Lutheran Church of our country that not only the matter, but also the word is used and discussed once more, perhaps as a possibility. Thus, according to a report submitted to us, Dr. Hans Asmussen, formerly president of the administrative board of the EKID, and now elected into the General Brotherhood Council (*Landesbruderrat*) of the Confessing Church of Schleswig-Holstein, at the 96th Lutheran Conference at Flensburg, read an essay on the doctrine of verbal inspiration, in which he declared that it is an indisputable fact that Holy Scripture is God's inerrant Word. The discussion that followed centered in the question whether it was right to give up the doctrine of verbal inspiration in view of the fact that there is nothing that can be put in its place.

"The same question in a similar form was recently propounded by Dr. Erich Stange in the first issue of the *Pastoralblaetter*, newly published by him, in connection with a discussion of the results of the church conference of the Missouri Synod at Bad Boll.

"Again, the Alsatian Dr. Suess, who has been called to the Ev. Luth. Faculty in Paris, expressed himself, in an essay on 'My View of Lutheran Existence Today,' as follows: . . . 'As the whole Person of Jesus of Nazareth, without any qualification, is the Christ, so also the whole Bible, even where it has no form or comeliness, is the Word of God. For this reason it is incomprehensible to me how people could conceive the idea of denying Verbal Inspiration. So the Holy Ghost, with ingenious magnanimity (*in genialischer Grosszuegigkeit*), did not regard words and letters as petty matters, but He was faithful even in the least things. . . .'

"We are not inclined to evaluate these first cautious attempts to elaborate a new attitude toward Scripture, as they are made, now here and now there, as an already incipient change to lay a new foundation. But we gladly take notice of the fact that the opposition of theology in the past against the reliability of the foundation, on which it itself rests, is now being felt here and there as a contradiction which must be overcome." J. T. M.

The Problem of Love.—In the *Anglican Theological Review* of July, 1949, William G. Shepherd of Saginaw, Mich., suggests that St. Paul distorted Christ's concept of love by "closing off the real capacity for love" by his doctrine of the flesh. The author assumes that the body and mind, psyche and soma, interact, that "the child is born loving," and that this love permeates the entire body. Jesus, he says, taught the unified form of love. But St. Paul regarded the body as evil, taught "an old and recognized morality of compulsion."

The result is this curious judgment:

Who can sing out with zest for life, the thrill of living and loving, when there have been bred into his bones the words, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live"?

The author concludes:

These facts point to one conclusion: we must take exception to St. Paul. We must look beyond Paul to Jesus for the law we teach, and forsake a Pauline ministry which helps make people unable — physically, emotionally and intellectually — to love.

The author seems to have overlooked, on the one hand, sayings of Jesus like Matt. 15:19 or John 3:6; and on the other hand, sayings of St. Paul like Phil. 4:8-9. St. Paul cannot be set in opposition to the Lord in this matter.

The solution to Mr. Shepherd's problem does not lie in repudiating his concept of the unity of body and spirit. The Word of God does indeed think of them together throughout; Gen. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Corinthians 15.

The great need in this area of thought is rather a correct understanding of "flesh." St. Paul does not think of the evils within his body or flesh as due to the nature of the body, but due to the lack of the presence of God. When he calls the body "dead," he means at the same time the entrance of the life by which the body, in this world and the world to come, actually functions with God; Romans 6; Colossians 3; Ephesians 5. Mr. Shepherd could hardly say that St. Paul sanctions "a loveless mating" if he had read Ephesians 5.

R. R. C.

Items from *Religious News Service*

Total membership of all religious bodies in the United States at the end of 1948 was 79,576,352 — or 53.3 per cent of the population — according to the annual church statistics report of the *Christian Herald*. The religious population of the United States is "about 60 per cent Protestant, 33 per cent Roman Catholic, 6 per cent Jewish, and 1 per cent divided among such groups as Russian and Greek Orthodox, Spiritualist, Buddhist, and others." It listed 47,557,203 persons as members of 222 Protestant denominations,

a gain of 1,407,527 over the previous year. The Roman Catholic total was given as 26,075,697, as reported in the 1948 *Catholic Directory*, a gain of 807,524.

The Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* is being reissued by the Baker Book House of Grand Rapids. Dr. Lef-ferts A. Loetscher, associate professor of church history at Princeton Theological Seminary, will serve as editor in chief with a staff of recognized theologians. The modernizing program will include two supplementary volumes featuring new theological thought and information on topics of the original set, plus new articles of recent origin and interest and biographies of contemporary theologians and religious leaders.

A dictionary of the Navajo language—fruit of nearly fifty years' work by a Franciscan priest—is nearing completion at St. Michaels, Ariz. Navajo stem vocabulary is a 600-page English and Navajo creation of Fr. Berard Haile, O. F. M., of Canton, Ohio, and Chattanooga, Tenn., who has been at work on the project since entering the Navajo mission in 1900.

Ancient Hebrew manuscripts dating back to the First Century B. C., which were accidentally discovered in Palestine early last year, will be published in photographic form this fall with suitable transcriptions under the auspices of the American School of Oriental Research at Yale University. The manuscripts include a commentary on the book of Habakkuk and the oldest known copy of the book of Isaiah, the most ancient complete Biblical document ever found.

One hundred years of Moravian mission work in Nicaragua were celebrated by the denominations last month. Celebrations were held in the three centers of Moravian work—Bilwaskarma, where the mission hospital and a native training institute are located, Puerto Cabezas, and Bluefields, where secondary educational work is centered.

Bishop Ivan Lee Holt of St. Louis, president of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, recently attended a meeting in northwest Germany at which Roman Catholic and Protestant clergymen prayed together. Speaking to a gathering at the Methodist assembly grounds in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, Bishop Holt said the German meeting was attended by twelve Roman Catholic and twelve Protestant clergymen who "not only talked, but read the Scriptures and prayed together."

The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome has issued a ruling permitting priests to perform marriage ceremonies under certain conditions for Catholics who marry Communists. According to the ruling, the ceremony may not be performed in a church without the bishop's permission or a Mass celebrated, but it may take place in a sacristy or a parochial residence.