

3-1-1954

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. (1954) "Theological Observer. – Kirchlich Zeitgeschichtliches," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 25, Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol25/iss1/16>

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

CONCERNING THE GRAVE OF ST. PETER

About two years ago the Vatican announced in the press that there is definite proof that the grave of St. Peter has been traced in the excavations made under St. Peter's at Rome. The publication promised to give details at some future time. Since these details have not been published, the question has been asked whether or not the papal announcement was true. An interesting report on the matter was given by Prof. Armin von Gerkan in an article on the subject published first in the *Ev.-Luth. Kirchenzeitung* (November 15, 1952) and then reprinted in the *Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der aelteren Kirche* (Heft 3—4, 1952/1953). Prof. von Gerkan concludes his thorough and critical article with these words:

"The excavations have shown that Constantine believed the same thing as after him the whole world and also the excavators, namely, that the grave of the Apostle had been here. If it has not been found this only shows, as was to be assumed, that in the early time of the Christian Church the doubtlessly very humble grave was not yet venerated and that in the course of a century it was forgotten. But the conclusion that there never was such a grave is not warranted. On the contrary, I am inclined to stress the possibility that it might have been at this very place [under the present Church of St. Peter's], even if today no remains of it can be found."

J. T. MUELLER

THE GREAT COMMISSION IN ROMAN CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

The *Evangelischer Bund—Konfessionskundliches Institut* (Bensheim, Germany) features in its March-April issue an informative and thought-provoking article by Professor Harald Kruska, Berlin, on current Roman Catholic thought and practice in the area of missions. We believe this article to be so unusually significant that we are submitting its main progress of thought.

Modern Roman Catholic interest in missions is traceable to the dictum of Pope Pius XI: "Maximum sanctissimumque omnium Catholicorum operum, quale est opus missionum." In terms of statistics, there were active in 1949 in Roman Catholic foreign missions 272,722 workers (foreign and native). In this total number are included 26,840 priests, 9,331 lay brothers, 61,577 nuns, 82,863 cate-

chists, and 92,111 teachers. The vast program of world missions is directed by the Congregation of Cardinals for the Propagation of the Faith. Roman Catholic world missions were significantly promoted also by the encyclicals *Maximum illud* (1919), of Benedict XV; *Rerum ecclesiae gestarum* (1926), of Pius XI; and *Evangelii praecones: De sacris missionibus provehendis* (1951), of Pius XII. These encyclicals regard world missions as the most serious concern of Christ and the Church and enjoin upon the faithful wholehearted participation in the missionary program of the Church. The slogan is "All the faithful for all the unfaithful." World-mission Sunday is observed on the second last Sunday in October. Societies for the propagation of the faith are numerous and very active. One result has been that Roman seminaries have now instituted courses in Apostology, Evangelistology, and Missiology (references to studies are cited by Professor Kruska).

The pioneer in the Roman Catholic world mission program and its scientific formulation is Joseph Schmidlin (1876—1944). His monumental work is *Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss* (second edition 1923). He was also the founder of *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* (1911), the first Roman Catholic scientific journal on world missions. Since 1947 this journal appears under the title *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*. Schmidlin was also the initiator and first director of the International Institute for the Scientific Study of Missions (headquarters are in Münster, Germany).

This academic and scientific interest in world missions in the Roman Church is accompanied by a compulsion for immediate and effective action. There is an intense devotion to such movements as Catholic Reformation, Catholic Action, and Catholic World Missions. The term "heathen missions" (*Heidenmission, Heidenbekehrung*) has no place in Roman Catholic thought and literature. For also heretics and schismatics, in fact, all non-Romanists, are to be the objects of Roman missionary endeavor. "Conversion to Catholicism" is the watchword, since from the Roman point of view the divorce of Christianity from Catholicism is a fiction. True ecumenicity is, according to the Roman view, Roman Catholicity. True mission work is that phase of the Church's work which concerns itself with implanting the Catholic Church in regions where it has not as yet been established.

Roman Catholic theologians are compelled, however, to give serious thought to two basic problems. The one is: What is the goal of missions? Is its goal basically Christological or ecclesiological in character? Is its goal to enable people to enter the Kingdom or to enter the Church? Is its goal to gain souls for *Christ* ("Seelen für das

Lamm zu werben," to use Zinzendorf's phrase), or is it to gain souls for the Church? Is its goal *fidem propagare in universo mundo, Christianum nomen per universum orbem propagare, evangelicae veritatis lumen ubique diffundere, promulgatio evangelii, conversio infidelium, illuminatio gentium, praedicatio apostolica*? Or is its goal the *opus adductionis animarum ad ecclesiam Christi*? In his encyclical *Evangelii praecones*, Pope Pius XII declares: "Naturally all these holy enterprises have as their first objective that the light of Christian truth might shine brighter among new peoples and that new Christians might be won. But they must regard it as their ultimate goal—and this must never be lost sight of—that the Church becomes firmly established among other peoples and that these peoples achieve their own native hierarchy."

Roman Catholic thought regarding world missions is definitely opposed to the mere preaching of Christ and to the establishment of a mere pneumatic (spiritual) Church. For the Church is an organic living structure according to Roman teaching. It is the mystical body of Christ whose head is Christ, to whom alone regal power belongs. But this mystical body of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church which, in its visible representation, is ruled by the Pope, the vicegerent of Christ. And no one is a member of the *corpus mysticum Christi* who does not recognize the Pope as its visible and juridical head. This means, as a French writer expresses it, "Ce qui doit être implanté: c'est l'église catholique." Even more significant is the statement, "L'église est hiérarchique." The Roman Church regards itself the only saving Church because, so it claims, Christ has entrusted to it the administration of the graces of salvation and holds her responsible for preserving in its unadulterated form the heritage of the Christian faith. Whoever does not actually (*re*) belong to this Church or wishes to belong to it (*voto*), cannot be saved. Therefore the primary goal of Roman Catholic missionaries is not the propagation of the Gospel, but the establishment of the Roman Church.

The second problem which is at present occupying the thought of Roman theologians is the question of accommodation. Briefly stated, the question is: May the Church accommodate itself to the existing culture of a given country in which it carries on missionary activities? If so, to what extent may it accommodate itself, and what are the theological grounds for such accommodation? This is a question of supreme relevance. For since World War II, 1,250 million people have received a new political status. Among these, 750 million have become Communist. But the Church which is established in Communist countries

is expected to divorce itself completely from Western thought and influence. It is to find its roots in the country in which it is established, and it is expected to adjust itself to the soul of the people whom it Christianizes, and it may in no sense interfere with the true freedom of these peoples.

In view of this situation some Roman Catholic scholars have taken the position: "The hour has struck when we must return to the methods of a former day. These methods culminated in the effort to accommodate the Gospel to the character of the people, to adjust the Church to the views, customs, and practices of land and people."

For some Roman Catholic thinkers such an accommodation is a relatively simple thing, since the Roman Church still lives by the theology of Thomas Aquinas, who declared: "*Gratia naturam non tollit, sed perficit.*" For Thomas, human nature still has, since the Fall, a Christian ingredient which needs only to be fanned into a flame by the divine light and nurtured with divine grace. All that is necessary, therefore, is to build on the best there is in human nature, to incorporate the best there is in pagan life and culture into Christian life and culture, all of which means, in effect, to add a second story to the one which already exists and have the superior lighting of the second story illuminate also the first story. Thus, so some Thomists believe, both the individual and the Church will realize their true potentials.

But there are other Thomists who believe in a radical application of the accommodation theory. They are determined to reform the theology of Thomas and to adjust it to whatever situation might arise in a mission field. In view of the dangerous consequences of this movement, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Humani generis*, rejected the views of these ultraradical theorists and enjoined upon the faithful strict adherence to the *philosophia perennis*, the untouchable heritage of centuries perfected by Thomas into an all-comprehensive system.

Conclusion. In the above, we have attempted to sketch in bold outline the basic thoughts of Professor Kruska's article. Do these developments in Roman Catholic missionary thought and practice have any meaning and relevance for our Lutheran Church? We maintain: Most decidedly! They compel us to restudy, on the basis of the Word and our Confessions, such pertinent questions as these:

1. What are the immediate and ultimate objectives in all our mission endeavors; specifically, in our foreign mission endeavors?
2. Are we still committed to the teaching of Scripture and our Confessions that "in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18) and that conversion by the Holy Spirit results in a new

creature whose thoughts are directed Godward and to the service of man and who strives, with the help of God, to conform to the image of Christ? Are we ready, therefore, to meet the opposition of natural man who rises in revolt against this Scriptural teaching?

These are basic questions. In view of the vast expansion of our foreign mission program; in view also of the growing interest in world missions which is manifesting itself on the campuses of our colleges and seminaries, the creation of a chair of missions at one of our theological seminaries is no longer a *desideratum*, but one of the burning needs of the hour.

P. M. B.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

Athens.—Historic Athonias Theological School on Mount Athos has been reopened as a pan-Orthodox training institution with 40 monks enrolled as the first students in its new four-year curriculum.

Reopening of the seminary was initiated by Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Istanbul, who as spiritual head of Eastern Orthodoxy secured the agreement of all 20 Orthodox monasteries on Mount Athos to send two young monks each for training at the school.

When it was founded in 1749 by monks of the Mount Athos Vatopedi Monastery, the institution drew students from all parts of the Middle East. It ceased functioning in 1790 and lay in neglect until 1900—by which time it was virtually in ruins—when Ecumenical Patriarch Joachym III sponsored a movement to finance its reconstruction.

Reopened in 1906, the seminary continued in operation for another decade, closing in 1916, in the midst of World War I, because of a lack of students.

Rome.—Spiritual benefits and indulgences to be gained by the faithful during the 1954 Marian Year are contained in a decree issued by the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary and published in *Osservatore Romano*, Vatican newspaper.

According to the decree, the special indulgences can be gained from the opening of the Marian Year on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, until the same day in 1954.

The decree states:

1. A plenary indulgence may be gained by visiting churches built in honor of the Virgin Mary, or mission area chapels dedicated to her, on the opening or closing day of the Marian Year, Christmas Day, the feasts of the Annunciation, Purification, Seven Dolors, and the Assumption.

2. A plenary indulgence may be gained on all Saturdays of the Marian Year and every time the faithful take part in collective pilgrimages to shrines and sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin.

3. A plenary indulgence may be gained under the usual conditions (Confession, Communion and prayers for the intention of the Pope) for those attending solemn ceremonies in honor of the Blessed Virgin. If those taking part in such ceremonies do not receive Confession or Communion but at least make an act of contrition they shall enjoy a partial indulgence of ten years.

4. The faithful who attend Solemn Pontifical Mass on the opening and closing days of the Marian Year also will be granted a partial indulgence of ten years.

5. All altars dedicated to the Virgin Mary are privileged. (This means that a plenary indulgence for the dead may be gained when Masses are celebrated for them on such altars.)

6. Individual Catholics who visit Marian Shrines or sanctuaries to which pilgrims come from faraway countries will be able to gain a plenary indulgence not only on Saturdays but also on the weekdays of the Marian Year.

An indulgence is the remission of temporal punishment because of sin after its guilt has been forgiven. A plenary indulgence is the remission of the whole debt of temporal punishment. A partial indulgence remits only a part of that punishment.

Geneva.—The general secretariat of the World Council of Churches has received to date the names of 284 delegates and 70 accredited visitors chosen by 58 member churches as their representatives to the Council's Second Assembly at Evanston, Ill., next summer.

Seventy-five consultants have accepted the invitation of the World Council's executive committee to be present at the Assembly, and ten fraternal delegates have been chosen by various organizations to participate.

Paris.—In a warning against the weakness of recent French governments, Maurice Cardinal Feltin, Archbishop of Paris, suggested to a congregation which included top administration leaders that bold, new methods should be tried to strengthen France.

He spoke in St. Clotilde's church at a Mass marking the beginning of the parliamentary year. Premier Joseph Laniel and several members of his cabinet were among the government officials present.

"Is not the time ripe for introduction of new methods of production, administration, and community living?" asked Cardinal Feltin.

He said there was no use in "multiplying decrees and laws or creating new institutions" if the people to whom they apply "glory in checkmating them."

If the people are to co-operate, the Cardinal added, they must feel they are living in a country which is "really governed." When the State is feeble, he warned, anarchy is near.

"You can be assured," Cardinal Feltin said, "that in the difficult circumstances you have to face at present, and which will probably not be easily resolved, you can count on the efficacious aid of the Church.

"Without renouncing her liberty, she will always seek to help those who are in positions of responsibility."

L. W. SPIRZ

New York.—Five anniversaries connected with its life will be celebrated at one time by the Metropolitan Lutheran Inner Mission Society here.

At a festival service on Sunday, November 15, the agency marked the centenary of immigrant work by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the port of New York. This work is now carried on by the Inner Mission Society. Simultaneously it will commemorate the 50th anniversary of its building, 40th of its women's auxiliary, 30th of the agency itself, and 15th of its "open house" community children's program.

Minneapolis, Minn.—A Martin Luther Library will be included in a new \$1,500,000 headquarters building to be constructed here for Lutheran Brotherhood, life insurance society, officials announced.

The library will carry out one of the purposes of the society—"to aid the Lutheran Church in extending the Lutheran Faith," according to Carl F. Granrud, Minneapolis, Lutheran Brotherhood president.

Dr. Randolph Haugan, manager of Augsburg Publishing House and vice-chairman of the Lutheran Brotherhood board of directors, is in charge of plans for the library.

The Year in Religion.—Church membership has increased faster than the population and is now at an "all-time high" whether viewed numerically or percentage-wise.

For the latest statistical year (figures for the most part representing the calendar year 1952) the churches as a whole had a much higher rate of growth than they have enjoyed for several decades. A net gain of 3,604,124 in the membership of all religious bodies in the United States, bringing the total to 92,277,129, shows an increase of nearly 4.1 per cent for the year, as compared with 2.12 per cent for the previous year, which was not far from the average for many preceding years.

Forty-seven denominations, including about two-thirds of all American Protestants, gave \$1,286,633,160 through church channels, or \$34.32 apiece, an increase of 6.1 per cent over last year's per capita rate.

The enrollment in the Sunday school increased 6.4 per cent, or even faster than the churches. Much of the urgency for introducing religious education into the weekday school program, either in the public schools themselves or through a "released-time" program, has been based on the assumption that the churches are failing to educate their own young. Maybe they are; but the notable increase in Sunday school enrollment suggests that there may be more vitality in that institution than some have supposed, and it may have some bearing on the unprecedented growth of the churches.

Emphasis on evangelism has been a recognizable factor in the activities of the churches, including those which do not practice the more conspicuous evangelistic methods that are associated with "revivalism." Whatever the method, the obvious fact is that the churches which grow are those which make a definite and sustained effort to grow—and most of them do.

The Bible continues to be a best-seller. The American Bible Society distributed nearly a million complete Bibles and almost one and a half million New Testaments, besides 11 million "portions." The total sale of the new Revised Standard Version was over 2,500,000 before the end of 1953.

In spite of the closing of some fields, notably China, the number of Protestant foreign missionaries under American boards increased from 15,000 to 18,000 during 1952. Roman Catholic missions showed a similar growth. (DR. WINFRED E. GARRISON)

Minneapolis, Minn.—Publication of the *Lutheran Outlook*, official organ of the American Lutheran Conference, was suspended with the November-December issue.

The journal had been edited by Dr. J. A. Dell, a Columbus, Ohio, clergyman of the American Lutheran Church, who died recently. It was published by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church Publishing House, Blair, Nebr.

New York.—Lutheran World Relief shipped 5,163,153 pounds of relief goods valued at \$1,689,286 to six overseas countries in December.

New York.—More than two-and-a-half million pounds of clothing were contributed by U.S. Lutherans in response to the 1953 Thanksgiving Clothing Appeal of Lutheran World Relief, it was announced here. The theme of the appeal was "Let Your Clothing Speak for Christ."

L. W. SPITZ