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## Theological Observer. - Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

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## THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

### CHURCH UNION NEGOTIATIONS

At the present time almost a score of movements are under way in which two or more Churches are discussing the possibility of church union. In 1952 S. E. Neill published *Towards Church Union*, 1937 to 1952, in which he presented all the basic material covering the various union movements during this period. In the *Ecumenical Review* (April, 1954, pp. 300 ff.) J. Robert Nelson reports on the negotiations toward organic union or closer fellowship which have taken place since the publication of this study. In Ceylon five churches, chiefly of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist origin, are negotiating with a view to establishing organic union. The chief obstacles to the union seem to lie in the fact that various types of the ministry are represented in the negotiating bodies. The union committee is seeking a *modus procedendi* to satisfy the divergent elements represented in the negotiating Churches.—In Iran two Churches, the Anglican and the Presbyterian, are negotiating for union. In Madagascar three different groups are attempting to unite. In North India and in Pakistan five separate groups have agreed upon a plan of church union. Here also the problem of church polity enters in very largely inasmuch as Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists are represented in the negotiations.

In the United States negotiations are currently under way to merge several bodies which are closely related to each other. Though the American Baptist Convention (formerly the Northern Baptists) and the Disciples of Christ have very much in common and have been closely associated with each other for some time, the proposed merger is not imminent. The four Lutheran bodies that have been negotiating toward an ultimate merger are: the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Free Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. The three largest Presbyterian bodies are currently studying the *Plan of Union*, a comprehensive statement of Reformed doctrine and polity. The Churches involved are the Presbyterian Church in the USA (Northern Presbyterians), Presbyterian Church in the US (Southern Presbyterians), and the United Presbyterian Church. The Methodist Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church have also been discussing a possible union, but at present have apparently not progressed very far beyond the point of studying the rites and ceremonies used by both churches. The proposed union which mystifies a Lutheran is the contemplated merger of the Con-



gregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church. It must be kept in mind that the former body is known for its liberalism. In fact, the Christian Churches which united with the Congregational Churches were formerly known as Unitarian Baptists. The Evangelical and Reformed Church is a merger of the former Evangelical Synod, which has its roots in German Lutheranism, and the German Reformed Church.

In the second part of his report the author mentions the negotiations which are under way to establish a closer fellowship between various groups in Australia, Great Britain, Scotland, New Zealand, and in the United States. He reports the negotiations between the small American Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America as well as the negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The author does not mention the intersynodical discussions between the two Lutheran bodies in Australia.

While the World Council of Churches has consistently followed its constitution in refraining from initiating any church union, the fact remains that the Ecumenical Movement, which culminated in the formation of the World Council of Churches, has given speed and impetus to many of the church union negotiations which are under way. At the same time history shows that practically every attempt to unite the Churches has only led to the addition of one or more church bodies to the existing number of separate organizations. If ever, this is the time when the Lutheran Church must take its confessions seriously and by word and deed demonstrate to the Christian Church that true Church unions are possible only on the basis of doctrinal unity.

F. E. M.

#### THE BIBLE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT THOUGHT

In Protestantism the Bible is the first, final, and only source of divine truth. For Roman Catholics, the final authority of divine truth is the Church (Roman Catholic) and not the Bible, not even tradition.

The differing consequences of these two differing attitudes toward the Bible may not always be apparent. But they are as real as they are inevitable. I may be permitted to relate a personal experience. Recently I conferred with a Roman Catholic monseigneur regarding the use of the Bible in ritualistic meetings of fraternal orders. We agreed that in such meetings the Bible is out of place. But our reasoning differed. I told Father—that by giving prominence to the Bible in their meetings, by having it lie open on the altar, by



having candidates take an obligation on the Bible, by having chaplains offer prayer, by having the lodge sing religious hymns, these orders were, at the minimum, simulating a religious worship in spite of their protestations to the contrary, and they ought, therefore, eliminate these religious features from their lodge meetings. But Father—argued, "Indeed, the Bible has no place in such meetings. If a Bible is to be used at all, it ought to be the Douay version. But, seriously speaking: for Protestants the Bible is the source and symbol of religious authority. It is not that for Roman Catholics. For them the source and symbol of religious authority is the Church."

Because of their differing attitude toward the degree of prominence to be accorded the Bible, Roman Catholics and Protestants differ also in their exegetical approach to the Bible. To this basic difference Dr. T. F. Torrance calls attention in the March issue of the *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Dr. Torrance states the difference so effectively that we are reporting his analysis in full. We are also, however, adding his reminder which Protestant exegetes will do well to bear in mind.

The Roman Church has nothing that it can set beside the massive *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. . . . It is not lack of industry among Roman scholars, although they were admittedly late in coming into the field of modern Biblical studies. It is due to the fact that for them the interpretation of Holy Scripture is altogether bound up with the historical consciousness of the Church, for it is only in the evolution of that consciousness that the exegesis of a text is found to be unfolded. A theological dictionary of the New Testament would mean for them not only a semantic and hermeneutic study of the theological terms used in the Scriptures but a historical study of the enlarged sense these terms have acquired in the fermented growth of the mind of the Church. Roman Catholic concern in the history of the exegesis of a Biblical passage is not so much to get at the original meaning and revelatory import of the passage, though that is even for them a necessary starting point, but to read off the authoritative truth from the Church's historical consciousness.

It is becoming increasingly clear, that this historical study of exegetical interpretation is no less important for the Evangelical Church, but for quite a different reason: in order to prevent us from reading into Holy Scripture the ideas which we unconsciously absorb in our day and generation, and to free Biblical scholarship from the bondage of the traditions of men. What could be more helpful here than a historico-critical study of exegetical interpretation in order that our own exegesis by being compared with that of other generations may



be submitted to ruthless questioning and robbed of its alien presuppositions? It is through such an awakening to our own unconscious conceptions that we can let the Bible speak to us objectively and learn to conform our thinking to its message.

P. M. B.

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

*New Delhi.*—Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru told the Lower House of Parliament here that the government is not in favor of increasing the number of missionaries in the country.

He also indicated that missionary activities in border areas would be restricted.

The Prime Minister's comments were in reply to criticisms that foreign missionaries, especially Americans, were allowed to conduct activities in Uttar Pradesh state on the Indo-Tibetan border.

The claim was made that some of the missions owned immovable property and extensive farm lands beyond the forbidden "inner line." This "inner line" is the farthest limit prescribed by the Uttar Pradesh government beyond which no foreigner is allowed to go without permission from the authorities.

While Mr. Nehru referred primarily to missionary activity in border areas, he said that in other areas local problems also were made difficult "by the presence of an excessive number of missionaries."

The government regards this question as a political problem and not a religious one, Mr. Nehru said. He declared that Christianity is a respected religion in India, and the good work of missionaries in public health and education is appreciated in the country. But he added that the presence of foreigners, particularly in border areas, is looked upon with suspicion.

*New York.*—Distribution of Scriptures in the United States increased by 140 per cent over the past five years and reached an all-time high of 9,726,391 volumes during 1953, it was reported here at the 138th annual meeting of the American Bible Society.

In 1948, a five-year program was adopted to double the domestic distribution of Scriptures, which that year amounted to 4,047,915 volumes. In 1953, the goal was met and exceeded by 40 per cent.

Of the total number of volumes distributed in the U.S., 509,298 were whole Bibles, 815,732 were Testaments, and 8,401,361 were portions of the Bible. In addition, chaplains distributed 1,301,145 Scriptures to members of the Armed Forces and veterans.

*Paterson, N. J.*—The Rutherford (N. J.) Board of Education and the Gideons International have jointly appealed to the United States



Supreme Court to review the New Jersey Supreme Court's ruling last December that distribution of Gideon New Testaments to Rutherford public school children is unconstitutional.

*New Delhi.*—One hundred and nine American missionaries have been refused permission to enter India in the past two years, a high government official disclosed in Parliament.

Deputy Home Minister Balwant Nagesh Datar gave the figure at question time in the Council of States. He refused, for the present, to say whether an American missionary had been arrested on a charge of spying.

Mr. Datar said 789 U.S. missionaries had been approved for entry in the two-year period.

Applications of the 109, he added, were rejected on the ground that their services "were not required." Some had stated that they wanted to propagate religion, he said.

A year ago, Mr. Datar and the Home Minister, Kailash Nath Karju, announced it was government policy to limit evangelical work to natives. Foreign missionaries who were being admitted, they said, understood that their proper roles in India were in educational, medical, philanthropic, agricultural, and social-uplift work.

Christian religious leaders immediately protested the policy. Since then additional comments by government officials have served only to confuse the issue of whether foreign missionaries are allowed to evangelize and proselytize.

The government's attitude has undoubtedly been influenced by the frequent charges made by members of Parliament that foreign missionaries have mixed in Indian politics.

Such charges, aired again at the question period, led to Mr. Datar's disclosure of the figures concerning American missionaries whose applications for admission had been rejected.

He reported that 533 applications had been received from U.S. missionaries in the fiscal year 1952—53 and 365 in 1953—54.

Of the 533, he said, 55 were rejected, and of the 365 exactly 54 were turned down.

Mr. Datar said most of the missionaries had come to India for "educational, medical, relief, social, and evangelical work."

The question on espionage was raised by a member who asked whether an American missionary working in Bharat Sewak Samaj had been arrested for spying.

Mr. Datar said he would require prior notice to reply to such a query.



Another question which went unanswered sought to discover whether any missionaries had been found maintaining liaison with United Nations observers.

Some of the queries were answered by Dr. Katju. The Home Minister said there were nine foreign missionaries presently operating in Jammu and Kashmir.

He added that Parliament would be given information he was now collecting as to the nationality of these missionaries and as to the question whether any new missions had been started in the area since 1947, the year of India's partition.

Dr. Katju said he had no information as to whether any of the missionaries were indulging in pro-Pakistan propaganda. He gave the same reply to a question whether the missionaries were collecting signatures from Kashmiris asking the U.N. to give Kashmir an independent status.

Mr. Datar was asked whether it was true that Lutheran missionaries in the Sundergarh district of Orissa had been found fostering political discontent among the district's tribal peoples.

The Deputy Minister said two reports concerning the work of these missionaries had been received recently. But he declared it would not be in the public interest to disclose their contents or the action contemplated by the government.

*Bombay.*—Orthodox Hindus in the Poona area near here launched a passive resistance movement designed to oust foreign missionaries from India.

It is known as the "Quit India" movement, and its supporters plan to hold demonstrations at missionary centers.

One such demonstration was scheduled for Kedgaon, a village near Poona, where there is a Protestant mission for widows and fallen women.

*New York.*—Plans for the formation of a United Lutheran Church in Japan were agreed upon in principle at an All-Lutheran Free Conference in Tokyo, it was reported here.

The news bureau of the United Lutheran Church in America said a plan of organization approved by the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church was submitted to the conference.

It provides for one Lutheran Church in Japan, united in a federation or national council, one ministerium, ordination by the Church, a central budget supported by all groups, and a confessional statement by the newly formed Church on the doctrine of the Word.

Committees were appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws for



the United Church and to draw up a doctrinal statement, the news bureau said. They are to report at the next regular meeting of the All-Lutheran Free Conference.

The Tokyo meeting was attended by missionaries representing the Suomi Synod; Evangelical Lutheran Church; Norwegian Missionary Society; Lutheran Free Church of Norway; Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; Lutheran Brethren; Augustana Church; and United Lutheran Church of America.

*Pokagon, Mich.*—Residents of this community observed the 41st anniversary of the first singing of the hymn "The Old Rugged Cross."

The hymn's popularity is due largely to its use during the Billy Sunday-Homer Rodeheaver revival campaigns. The copyright is now owned by Mr. Rodeheaver, who lives at Winona Lake, Ind.

*Stockholm.*—A special committee of the National Diaconate Board has recommended that the Swedish State Lutheran Church set up temporary two-year intensified courses to train laymen for the ministry as a means of easing its shortage of ordained pastors.

The pastor shortage was termed "desperate" by the committee in a report issued after a survey of conditions. It said there are no candidates available for 62 vacant charges at the present time, and the prospects are that in five years the number of unfilled vacancies will rise to 250 unless something is done.

The committee urged that 40 lay students a year be admitted, until the end of 1956, to the University of Lund or to a residential college for concentrated two-year theology courses. At the completion of these courses, it said, the candidates could be given brief practical training at the university and then "ordained without delay."

*Istanbul.*—Concern over the condition of the famous Church of St. Sophia, considered the world's finest example of Byzantine art, has been expressed here.

Excessive dampness is said to have weakened some of its main supports to such a degree that the tremendous dome, a triumph of Byzantine architecture, is in danger of collapsing.

The church was built by Justinian the Great and dedicated in A.D. 538 as the seat of the chief prelate of the Eastern Church. It became a Moslem mosque after the capture of Constantinople by Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Some years ago the building was converted into a museum, and since that time, according to archeological experts here, it has been permitted to fall into a state of neglect.

L. W. SPITZ