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## Theological Observer. – Kirchlich Zeitgeschichtliches

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## THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

### THE NEW LOOK IN AMERICAN PIETY

There is so much truth in the article which Dr. A. Roy Eckardt, professor of religion, Lehigh University, South Bethlehem, Pa., writes under this heading in the *Christian Century* (November 17, 1954) that in the writer's opinion it deserves wide distribution and close consideration. Dr. Eckardt begins with the thought that today the Americans, like the Athenians in Paul's day, are in every way very religious. Religious books are best sellers. Popular songs center in religious themes. Religious broadcasts are listened to by thousands. Few radio productions can out-box-office religious extravaganzas, and that goes also for TV offerings. There are prayer breakfasts for politicians, and cabinet meetings function much better after a "word of prayer."

Still, as Professor Eckardt points out, not all is well with this "American piety." Today's religious revival, as J. C. Bennett has suggested, is largely a matter of American "culture religion," with (to quote only one element which Dr. Bennett mentions) "the tendency to reduce Christianity to a gospel of happiness and success with no place for . . . the biblical warning against idolatry, judgment, repentance, or the cross." Dr. Eckardt writes: "The divergent voices of American culture religion are one in the faith that God is an exceedingly handy fellow to have around." There is doubtless sincerity of motive in much of the new piety. But it hardly follows that the new piety is to be accepted uncritically. The truth is that a given brand of piety may represent nothing more than nice, virile idol worship.

There are, in particular, three aspects of the new piety which should cause the Christian concern. The first of these is the cult of "peace of mind." The Christian church speaks in the name of the Great Physician who makes minds, souls, and bodies whole. This peace-of-mind cult readily turns into religious narcissism. The individual and his psycho-spiritual state occupy the center of the religious stage. The New Testament however forcibly reminds Christians that in this world they have tribulation. They are to be of good cheer, but only because Christ has overcome the world. The peace-of-mind movement is deficient morally and empirically.

A second disturbing aspect of the new American piety is the cult of the "Man Upstairs." "A rhapsodic inquiry greets us from the TV screen and the radio: 'Have you talked to the Man Upstairs? God is

a friendly neighbor who dwells in the apartment just above. Call on him anytime, especially if you are feeling a little blue. He does not get upset over your little faults. He understands. Thus is the citizenry guided to divine-human chumminess." The peace-of-mind cult makes more of an appeal to the "sick soul" religionist, while the cult of the "Man Upstairs" attracts more the "healthy-minded" type. The appeal of religion is that it can make a person get even more pleasure out of life. Fellowship with the Lord is, so to say, an extra emotional jag that keeps him happy. The "gospel" makes his "feel real good." The moral and spiritual life is buried in triviality. In criticism of this cult Dr. Eckardt writes: "The Christian whose norm is Scripture must always have a particularly uneasy conscience. He recognizes the gulf between the quality of his life and the sacrifice of God's only Son on the cross. He knows the love that came down on Calvary. He knows the judgment, too. And he knows that the love cannot be separated from the judgment."

The third dangerous aspect of the new American piety is the cult of "we" versus "they," or that of the "chosen people." This cult is more tangibly sinister than are the other two. The first two cults have already stimulated and endorsed powerful human emotions. The obvious outcome is that it is un-American to be un-religious. We are the good spiritual people. The dangers in the "we" versus "they" cult are especially evident today in relationships between this country and the rest of the world. The temptation is just about irresistible for a powerful nation to rely on its religiosity as proof of its own virtue. Thus is threatened the possibility of sober and responsible political action.

In conclusion Dr. Eckardt writes: "Against all human idolatries we may set the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding. We have not earned His peace. It is a gift we have received. It does not center in the self or the group. It centers in the cross and the empty tomb. It provides an ultimate vantage point from which the whole drama of life may be viewed. God ceases to be fashioned in our image; we are made over into His. . . . The Gospel meets the desperate human need of which the cults are an ominous symptom. It does so in the very act of defeating idolatry." J. T. MUELLER

#### JOHN WESLEY AND BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

Under this heading, Professor P. S. Sanders, "Instructor in Religion at Amherst College, Amherst, Mass.," presents in *Religion in Life* (Autumn, 1954) an interesting study on Wesley's doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The article is prompted by the "renewed interest

in Baptism among evangelical Protestants" today. Dr. Sanders starts out from the premise that Wesley was not a profound systematic theologian and that he was very little interested in systematic theology. But he allowed no trifling with the "common fundamental principles of Christianity." One of these was the doctrine of Baptism, though there is not a great deal of material on that subject in his works. Perhaps the best source for his opinions on Baptism is *A Treatise on Baptism*, which his father, rector at Epworth, published in 1700 and which he revised and issued under his own name in 1756. In this monograph he defines Baptism as the "washing away of original sin by the application of Christ's death." All mankind is under the condemnation of the disobedience of Adam. Infants as well as adults . . . are "obnoxious to both the guilt and punishment of Adam's transgression," and Baptism is the "ordinary instrument of our justification." Against those who denied the inherited corruption of human nature he insisted upon the universality of natural, inherited human depravity.

Now, the first benefit of Baptism is that it removes the guilt of inherited sin, which is effected by the free mercy of God through the death of His Son. Other benefits of Baptism are that "by Baptism we enter into covenant with God," that "by Baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently are made members of Christ, its Head," that "Baptism makes us children of God," and that "in consequence of our being made children of God, we are heirs in the kingdom of heaven." These five benefits, says Dr. Sanders, are really one, and they add up to regeneration. . . . In short, Baptism offers salvation. In teaching these benefits Wesley followed the "classical" Anglican theology.

Wesley, however, as the article states further, made a distinction between the religious experience of infants in Baptism and that of adults in conversion. To this he was moved by his sensitive awareness of the prevailing profligacy of his times. The necessity of turning from the fruits of sin to the gifts of the Holy Spirit raised for him the question of the relationship between Baptism, conversion, and regeneration. In his sermon "The New Birth" he states explicitly that "Baptism is not the new birth; they are not one and the same thing." Again: "As the new birth is not the same thing with Baptism, so it does not always accompany Baptism; they do not constantly go together." When he revised the Anglican Articles for the Methodists in the United States, he not only abridged them considerably, but also made verbal changes, so that the article on Baptism reads: "Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians

are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. . . . The Baptism of young children is . . . to be retained in the Church." Dr. Sanders believes that "he was driving home his main point that what matters most in a man's spiritual career is not his Baptism, but his being justified by faith." Nevertheless, Wesley insisted that he never departed from any essential of the Anglican Church. How are we to solve the problem involved in this contradictory teaching? The writer thinks that Wesley "has done more to muddle the situation than to clarify it." Still some sense can be made of the problem by keeping in mind that for Wesley "conversion was a process of which the subject was conscious and aware, and which was made possible only on condition of man's free co-operation." He believed both in baptismal regeneration and in the necessity of a consciously known new birth. Baptism cancels the guilt of inherited depravity, yet there must also be individual conversion; and it is at this point that Wesley's doctrine of Arminianism and prevenient grace prevailed.

Wesley's problem in teaching and at the same time weakening, if not denying, baptismal regeneration was that of his tension between his inherited view of baptismal regeneration, which, as taught in the Anglican Church, is not adequate at its best, and his synergistic view of conversion, or regeneration, as an act of volitional decision for Christ, which man under the influence of the Holy Spirit must himself accomplish. In contradistinction to Wesley, Luther strictly held to the *sola gratia-sola fide* doctrine, and so he was able to evaluate rightly also the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, as it is clearly outlined and sharply accentuated in his Small Catechism.

J. T. MUELLER

#### CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

In *Theology Today* (October, 1954) Prof. E. G. Homrighausen analyzes the tense situation which faces Christian missions in India today. There is, as he writes, in India an antimissionary spirit, which manifests itself in some local communities, in certain national actions, and in a few persons of the central government. Nehru does not share this antimissionary spirit, but neither is he enthusiastic about the evangelistic work of missionaries. He has repeatedly paid tribute to the educational, medical, and philanthropic work of missions, and he has recently declared Christianity to be a respected religion of India. He has also expressed his desire to adhere to the policy of religious tolerance guaranteed by India's new constitution. Nevertheless, as he declares, the large number of missionaries in India — now about 4,683,

or double the number before the last war — cause a "political" problem. He charges many missionaries with political activity against the central government and other offenses, such as using foreign funds to "buy" converts, being spies and agents of foreign governments, and the like. There are two major sources of such criticism: 1. Hindu societies which want the new state to be founded solely upon Hinduism, and 2. Anti-American Communism, which makes a strong appeal to the masses in India. All anti-Christian organizations insist that Christian evangelistic work must end, since the growth of the Christian Church endangers native Indian culture and traditions. American missionaries, in particular, come in for heavy criticism since the United States has offered military aid to Pakistan, has made its H-bomb tests in the Pacific, and has criticized Nehru's so-called neutralism. A great "offense" to most Indians is the Christian emphasis on conversion. Christianity refuses to accept Hinduism, which is willing to incorporate the "good" of all religions into a pantheon of tolerance.

Against those who spread these criticisms of Christian missions, Indian Christians and missionaries have appointed a committee to deal with problems affecting missions and government. They are beginning to deny some of the charges, to offer a strong apologetic for true Christianity, and to demand their constitutional rights. Foreign missionaries, however, can understand why over one hundred missionaries were denied visas to enter and work in India during the past two years. Upon them rest many crucial responsibilities, among them, to help the church in India to become responsible for its own life and missionary activity, to educate Indian Christians to fulfill their vocation as citizens of their nation, to train a native leadership which will develop a more mature Indian churchmanship, and the like. The article closes with a warning not to depend for protection upon one man or even upon the written word of the Indian constitution. "Greater suffering may yet be involved in the ordeal through which the Indian church is asked to pass. Real security is in God alone!"

J. T. MUELLER

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

*Johannesburg, South Africa.*—Charges that the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa is to blame for racial segregation (*apartheid*) in this country and in the mandated areas of Southwest Africa were denied here by an official spokesman for the church.

The denial was issued here by the Rev. C. B. Brink, Moderator of the Federal Council of the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.

*Toronto.* — A two-year evangelism campaign to be conducted throughout the United States and Canada was voted by the United Lutheran Church in America at its 19th biennial convention here. The delegates approved the expenditure of \$528,974 to cover the cost of the campaign. Plans call for dividing the two North American countries into 12 zones under the direction of the church's Board of Social Missions. In each zone there will be a church crusade, attendance drives among lapsed members, and a campaign to bring new members into the church.

The convention's action followed a warning by several members of the Missions Board that "we stand at the bottom of all Lutheran churches in America in regard to efficiency in evangelism." They also affirmed that "our evangelism efforts lack enthusiasm, vigor, and determination."

*New York.* — Lutheran groups will not support proposals to legalize bingo under church or charitable auspices, Dr. John W. Behnken, President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, said in a statement issued by the denomination's Public Relations office here. Dr. Behnken said that bingo is not necessary for the operation of a system of church-supported schools.

He pointed out that the Missouri Synod's 1,161 full-time elementary schools in North America with an attendance of 107,310 pupils are supported entirely through the freewill offerings of its members.

"We believe that this is the method prescribed in the New Testament for the support of Christian churches," Dr. Behnken said. "The church cannot lend its good name to satisfy the gambling urge of people who are restricted from carrying on such activity under other sponsorship because of its possible deleterious effect upon the community."

*New York.* — At least 2,000 non-Jews are being converted to Judaism each year in the United States, and the number is gradually increasing.

Rabbi David Max Eichhorn, chairman of the Committee on the Unaffiliated of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), made this disclosure in the current issue of Jewish Social Studies. His findings were based on a survey conducted by the committee to determine the current status of proselytes and conversions to Judaism in the U.S. Participating in the study were Reform and Conservative rabbis throughout the country. The Rabbinical Council of America, Orthodox group, did not take part.

On the basis of questionnaires answered by 294 Conservative rabbis

and 491 Reform rabbis it was revealed that during the year 1952 to 1953 Reform rabbis converted between 1,000 and 1,200 non-Jews and Conservative rabbis between 500 and 550. In the five previous years, 1948—1953, Reform rabbis converted between 750 to 1,000 annually and Conservative rabbis from 350 to 400.

Rabbi Eichhorn said some Orthodox rabbis told him that the annual number of Orthodox proselytes is much higher than 500.

The survey also disclosed that only about one in 20 of the 2,000 persons converted annually became Jews without involvement of marriage.

Reform and Conservative rabbis agree that most of these converts are at least as good Jews as born Jews and, in many cases, much better. The depth of their Jewishness, the survey showed, is sometimes determined not so much by their formal conversion as by the attitudes and feelings of their Jewish marriage partners, relatives, and associates.

The Reform rabbis reported a consistent ratio of one male for every four female proselytes. Among the converts received by Conservative rabbis, the ratio of females was even higher, six or seven females to one male.

Thirteen Reform rabbis reported that they have each received more than 100 converts in the course of their ministries. Only eight Conservative rabbis reported that they have each received over 50 proselytes and only three more than 100.

During the five-year period 1948—53 seventy-five Reform rabbis (21 per cent of questionnaire respondents) and 34 Conservative rabbis (15.3 per cent) had no conversions.

Preparation for conversion ranged among the Reform rabbis from two weeks to fifteen months and among Conservative rabbis from one month to two years. The average length of study fixed by the Reform rabbis is 3.7 months and by the Conservative rabbis 4.1 months.

It was estimated by 396 Reform and 188 Conservative rabbis that, respectively, 66.4 per cent and 63.9 per cent of their proselytes have joined a synagog. Moreover, 386 Reform and 193 Conservative rabbis estimated that 85.1 per cent and 92.6 per cent of persons converted by them are raising their children as Jews.

While both rabbinical groups agreed that proselytes are more faithful to the Jewish faith than born Jews, Reform rabbis rated the religiosity of the proselytes higher than did their Conservative colleagues.

*New York.*—The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa was accused, in United Nations debate here, of being largely responsible for racial segregation in South Africa and its mandate territory, South-



west Africa. The charge was made by Awni Khalidy, Iraq's permanent representative at the U.N., in debate on Southwest Africa before the General Assembly's Trusteeship Committee. Attacks on churches have been rare in the U.N. But Mr. Khalidy pulled no punches in blaming the South African denomination for its espousal of *apartheid*.

He said the fact that the Dutch Reformed Church was the only national religion in South Africa was an important factor in that country's policy of segregation. It is, the Iraqi said, "a source of pain that a church which worships God and His Law on earth should perpetrate a doctrine of racial inequality."

"How far removed is the Dutch Reformed Church and its doctrine of racial supremacy from the Sermon on the Mount!" he said. "How far removed is this unfortunate philosophy from the teachings of Christ!"

Mr. Khalidy said the outside world had been shocked by the stand taken by the Dutch Reformed Church and by the South African regime's attitude toward the people of Southwest Africa. Every kind of discrimination is practiced against Negroes in the mandated territory, he said. He also charged that South Africa's action in beginning the integration of Southwest Africa was equivalent to the use of force and contrary to the U.N. Charter.

Under the mandate, South Africa was committed to lead the population toward freedom, the Iraqi representative observed, not to take it over. He said that Southwest Africa was the only territory placed under mandate after World War I that had not yet either become independent or been placed under U.N. trusteeship.

When the Malan government first advocated *apartheid*, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa endorsed the segregation policy.

Since then, however, some individual Dutch Reformed leaders have criticized it. At the World Council of Churches' Second Assembly in Evanston, Ill., in August, Dr. Ben J. Marais of the South African denomination rejected the segregation principle and called on his church to admit its guilt.

Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa generally have opposed the *apartheid* policy. Some of these groups have taken the lead in fostering interracial gatherings and church services in the face of official disapproval.

*Oslo.*—A parliamentary committee's report just released here said that theological disputes must ultimately be resolved within the church itself. It added, however, that there are times when the government must intervene to decide what can be taught by the church.

Predominantly Lutheran Norway has a centuries-old state church.

Some 96 per cent of its three million people are baptized into the established Lutheran church.

The committee's report grew out of a theological controversy known as the "hell-discussion" which has stirred the country for more than a year. The report said the government had acted correctly when it asked responsible church authorities for advice before taking a stand on the issue. And it recommended that the same procedure be used in any future religious dispute referred to the government. In February, the Norwegian Cabinet declared that Bishop Kristian Schjelderup of Hamar was not faithful to his ordination pledges in maintaining that the conception of an everlasting punishment in hell is incompatible with Christianity as a religion of love.

*New York.* — Latin-American Lutherans affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation will have their first Spanish-language theological seminary next April. Dr. Stewart W. Herman, director of the L. W. F. Committee on Latin America, said the cornerstone of a \$75,000 building for a seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina, will be laid on November 28.

*Belgrade.* — Nearly \$2,000,000 worth of food parcels for distribution to needy persons in Yugoslavia were sent here during the first 10 months of this year by the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Relief, according to the semiofficial news agency, Yugopress.

*Minneapolis, Minn.* — A goal of January 1, 1956, for completing all documents in the proposed merger of four Lutheran denominations was set at a meeting of the joint union committee of the four groups here.

The joint committee is composed of nine representatives each from the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Free Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church.

*Bonn, Germany.* — Dr. Eugene Gerstenmaier, 48-year-old Lutheran minister, has been elected president of the *Bundestag*, lower house of the West German Parliament. He succeeds Dr. Herman Ehlers, a member of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKID) and vice-chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's governing political party. Dr. Ehlers died October 29 in Oldenburg after a throat operation.

Dr. Gerstenmaier was chiefly responsible for organizing the *Hilfswerk*, the Evangelical Church's welfare agency, in 1945 and was its chief executive for the next six years. He was elected to the *Bundestag*, as a C. D. U. representative, in 1949 and currently is chairman of the chamber's Foreign Affairs Committee.