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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

LUTHER'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

The *Anglican Theological Review* (January, 1955) publishes under this heading a study by W. A. Clebsch of how Luther conceived of God, from the conclusion of which we quote a few statements: "Luther's conception of God is fundamentally a Trinitarian conception. The Godhead no man can see, for He is naked reality, and that no human eye can behold. We see this hiding Father with near clarity only in the mirror of Christ, who presents Him unexpectedly to us on the Cross, and thus the Godhead is still veiled. Nor can we perceive even this by straining our own vision, but only by the revelatory action of the Spirit, who shows us the Godhead veiled in the Christ. In this drama we come to know God's character sufficiently unto our salvation. The inscrutable *deus nudus* . . . is the *deus absconditus* who has allowed us to see Him dimly; but also is the *deus revelatus* on the Cross; and is a lamp to our feet by action of the Spirit, the *deus revelatus* of all faithful people. . . . If Luther's primary contribution to the Christian conception of God is to be measured, it is that he saw again the 'God who acts,' the judging but loving, invading but supporting, self-showing but hiding, living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of Jesus the Christ. The static speculative Trinitarianism prevalent in his day Luther transformed into a dynamic, dramatic understanding of the Triune God's self-disclosure. Without breaking or altering the form of Trinitarian thought, Luther gave again to that form a powerful and moving content. By letting God be God, Luther let man be man, and let our salvation be salvation."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

MELANCHTHON'S PART IN LUTHER'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

In the *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* (Jahrgang 45, 1954, Heft 2) Hans Volz, in a clearly written and well-documented article entitled "Melanchthon's Anteil an der Lutherbibel," shows how much Luther owed to Melanchthon's scholarship in his translation of the Bible. The editor has obliged the English reader with the following concise abstract, which, however, can in no sense of the term be regarded as an adequate substitute for the excellent article itself. The editor says: "To Philip Melanchthon goes the credit for having induced Luther (December, 1521) to translate the Bible into German, but also for having collaborated in this work as a philologist and one of the best students of Greek in his day. He co-operated actively by

checking the Reformer's translated manuscripts before they were sent to the printer, both those of the New Testament and those of the Old Testament—above all as a student of the Septuagint. But it is impossible to indicate exactly which were his contributions. According to the records dealing with the various revisions, he also played a leading role in the revision of the Psalms in 1531 and of the entire Bible in 1534 and 1539, 1541, as well as in the partial revision of the New Testament in the fall of 1544. Indisputable and complete documentation makes it clear that from 1522 to 1544 Melanchthon collaborated as a philological interpreter of the biblical texts and as an expert in such technical matters as coins, whereas the linguistic formulation in German was in the main Luther's own work. The two books of Maccabees in Luther's Bible deserve special mention, for the linguistic indices and marginal notes indicate that Melanchthon translated the first book, and probably also the second. It has also been demonstrated that various changes made in the Bible after Luther's death were those of Melanchthon."

L. W. SPITZ

HE BELIEVED IN THE PARISH MINISTRY

Under this heading the *Christian Century* (December 6, 1954) paid Henry Sloane Coffin, the late president of Union Theological Seminary, a tribute which in the writer's opinion should not be overlooked: Dr. Coffin firmly believed in the parish ministry as the primary goal of the student of theology. "This," the editorial says, "was the decision he made when he became president of Union Theological Seminary to guide that school back to a perception that its fundamental task was the preparation of parish ministers and that the minister of a Protestant church needs to know how to preach. When Dr. Coffin took the reins at Union, the great seminary was in danger of drifting into a second-hand relation to the churches . . . the seminary was equipping more and more men with advanced degrees to teach the men who would assume the responsibilities of parishes, but fewer and fewer who felt called to undertake that ministry themselves. The typical Union graduate was becoming a professor, or a research scholar, or sometimes a junior board executive. Dr. Coffin changed all that. He believed that the distinguished faculty at Union, which he expanded and strengthened, could be counted on to supply the church with the scholars and teachers and administrators it assuredly needs. But he produced an atmosphere which made the school first of all a center for the training of pastors and preachers. The change brought an access of new energy to Union; its healthy influence may be traced

today in thriving parishes across the country and overseas." Our own church in the past has perhaps insufficiently stressed the training of scholars and teachers. There must be more of this in the future. But the primary purpose of the theological seminary is that of training preachers of the Gospel.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

UNE THEOLOGIE SELON LA PAROLE DE DIEU

Le Luthérien, the official periodical of the Lutheran Free Churches in France and Belgium, has published, in its issues of December, 1954, and January, 1955, the academic address delivered by Pastor G. Wolff, acting dean of the *Centre d'études théologiques* ("Center of Theological Studies") near Paris, on the occasion of its official opening, Sunday, November 14, 1954. As a matter of historical record we present the leading thoughts of this keynote address. "A Theology According to the Word of God," as Pastor Wolff pointed out, is, first of all, one which accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God, endeavors to determine the true meaning of that Word, accepts Scripture as the only source of all its teaching, and rejects every teaching that is contradictory to the Bible. It thus recognizes the principle of *sola Scriptura*. But next to this *principe scripturaire* a Scriptural theology recognizes also the principle of *sola fide* or the doctrine of justification by faith, which it holds as the *message principal* of Scripture. This doctrine confirms and maintains the Christian in humility and repentance, attributes to Christ's work the power to save, grants to the penitent sinner assurance of salvation, is the sole source of his sanctification, enables him to understand the true Sacraments or means of grace, makes all believers members of the holy, universal Christian Church, removes from the Christian all false hopes concerning an illusory paradise on earth, shows him the abyss which exists between faith and unbelief, and finally is the guiding principle of Christian preaching.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

Omaha, Nebr. — A Lutheran official proposed "rurban" churches to meet the problem created by the movement of city people to new, outlying residential areas.

The Rev. William H. Hillmer of St. Louis, Mo., Executive Secretary of the Home Mission Board, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, defined a "rurban" church as a congregation "not quite rural and not quite urban." He spoke at the board's regional missions conference here, attended by delegates from six Midwest states. Rev. Hillmer said

he hoped to see more "rurban" churches established among city dwellers moving to outlying areas. "It takes real courage to go into those areas," he said. "You have to build yourself into a community before it has the advantages of city life."

He said the method of organizing a "rurban" church is to look over the population to see if it is sufficient to need a church. If it does need one, then a mission or subsidized station is set up. Formerly, he explained, no attempt was made to organize a Lutheran church unless an adequate number of Lutherans lived in the area. "But we've changed our thinking about that," Rev. Hillmer said. "I remember when I had a mission in Seattle, Wash. There wasn't a Lutheran around it. You just have to go out and build."

Rev. Hillmer told the conference that since 1953 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has opened 222 new churches in North America and gained 12,797 new adult communicants. He said the denomination now operates 1,227 missions on the continent.

Prof. William Baehr of Kansas State College, Manhattan, Kans., quoted from a study of rural areas showing that the migration into urban areas is having a serious impact on country churches. During the 1940's, he said, about four million rural residents of North America moved into cities.

Ottawa.—Dr. John A. Mackay, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, in an address here, challenged Vice-President Richard M. Nixon's recent statement that the Roman Catholic Church was "one of the major bulwarks against Communism and totalitarian ideas."

"In charity, but with candor and at the risk of being termed a bigot," Dr. Mackay said, "I am compelled sorrowfully to say that the exact opposite is true." Mr. Nixon made his observation on the Catholic Church in a conference in Guatemala City, with Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano of Guatemala.

Dr. Mackay's address was delivered to the meeting here of the North American Area Council of the World Presbyterian Alliance, of which he is president. "Two decades ago," he said, "the Roman Catholic Church made concordats with the totalitarian rulers of Italy and Germany, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. Today the Roman Catholic Church has a concordat with, and is the chief supporter of, Francisco Franco, the totalitarian ruler of Spain and the most hated man in Spanish history."

"It also is a painful fact," Dr. Mackay continued, "that those Latin countries where the Roman Catholic Church has been the predominant

religious influence have been breeding grounds for Communism. This is true of Italy; it is particularly true of lands in Latin America."

Atlantic City, N. J.—American moviegoers have paid more than two million dollars to see the film "Martin Luther" since its *première* in May of 1953, it was reported to the National Lutheran Council at its 37th annual meeting here. Robert E. A. Lee, executive secretary of Lutheran Church Productions, Inc., sponsor of the film, said that an estimated ten million persons have seen the movie at some 3,000 theaters in the U.S. and Canada. Mr. Lee added that a "clear return" of \$700,000 had been made to Lutheran Church Productions after deduction of distribution fees and promotional and special exploitation expenses.

The six Lutheran groups represented in the corporation have received a return of \$550,000 thus far on their original investment of \$450,000, he said. They are the National Lutheran Council, United Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church, American Lutheran Church, and Augustana Lutheran Church.

Mr. Lee reported that the movie on the life of the Reformation leader has had only nominal success in the predominantly Lutheran countries of Norway and Sweden, while it has been "outstandingly successful" in non-Lutheran areas, including Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, and Holland. He said he could give no explanation for this fact. In West Germany, where the picture was filmed, an estimated four million persons have seen it, Mr. Lee said.

Munich, Germany (NLC).—A West German Lutheran theological conference in preparation for the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in 1957 will be held at the Evangelical Academy of Tutzing from August 22 to 26, it was announced here by *Evangelischer Pressedienst*, news bulletin of the Evangelical Church in Germany. A number of theologians from member churches of the LWF, chiefly from the United States, the Scandinavian countries, and Germany will speak on the proposed main theme of the next LWF Assembly, "The Message of Christ and the Witness of the Church," according to *Pressedienst*.

The conference is being arranged by the German National Committee for the LWF in behalf of the LWF Department of Theology, the report said. It added that the annual theological conference sponsored in Germany since 1948 by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will not be held in 1955, according to an announcement received here from Dr. J. W. Behnken of St. Louis, Mo., President of the Missouri Synod.