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## Theological Observer. – Kirchlich Zeitgeschichtliches

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## THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

### SENTIMENT AGAINST CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Is the period of Christian missionary work in foreign countries drawing to a close? Christian churches at any rate will do well to redeem the time for preaching the Gospel while opportunity to do so is being granted them. As *Time* (October 10, 1955) reports, Israel's Chief Rabbinate has recently warned Israeli parents that "our children are being severed from the faith of their fathers. The danger to our children from missionaries cannot be exaggerated. They represent a danger to the Jewish religion and nation." Nine major Protestant and eight major Roman Catholic missions are now operating Christian schools in Israel, mostly in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Ramle, and Nazareth. They are attended by only 1,500 of the 300,000 Israeli children under 14. The Keren Yeldenu ("Our Child's Fund"), a citizens' organization, has removed about 1,400 children from mission auspices during the past two years, though the mission schools train the children to be loyal to their parents and homeland and do not permit them to be baptized against their parents' will.

Christian missions face trouble also in the state of Madhya Pradesh in Central India. Of its 21 million inhabitants more than two thirds are Hindus, while the rest are adherents of primitive religions. About 9,000 of the tribesmen and Hindu untouchables have in recent years joined the Christian missions operating in that state, mostly Roman Catholic. Now the 78-year-old Ravishanker Shukla, the "political boss" of the state, is crusading against the missions. The anti-Christian sparks have also spread elsewhere, as in Travancore Cochin, where the three million of India's eight million Christians are accused of plotting to make the area an "independent Christian state."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

### THE USE AND ABUSE OF SYMBOLS

There is sound advice in an article by L. David Miller, which appeared in the *Lutheran Quarterly* (August 1955) under the given heading. The author fully recognizes the value of symbols in worship. "The ministry of symbolism serves an educational function." Nevertheless, he warns: "Art forms cannot accomplish worship. Spiritual help comes when the heart and the mind are joined with the eyes and ears. To attach too much significance to a tangible object may result in idolatry." Again: "The ministry of symbolism may lose its effectiveness also by overemphasis. Carving and painting symbols at random

on every available two-by-four degrades them to mere decoration. Frequently the selection of symbols is left to the judgment of people better qualified for laying cement than for making appropriate decisions in matters of propriety." Or: "Symbolism is robbed of meaning by indiscriminate use. In early Christian art symbolism was not so lavish as is generally supposed. It was never used merely as decoration, but as a necessary means of communicating spiritual truth to believers and concealing it from enemies. In later years, when elaborate houses of worship were built with ornate sculpture and stained-glass windows, symbols were used to identify Biblical characters, because few of the worshipers could read. Thus it became customary to identify our Lord by means of a nimbus, a circle around his head. From this circle emanated four rays forming a cross. Such symbols should be used appropriately and with restraint. Lutherans do not condemn art forms and make a virtue of bleak, prosaic severity. Martin Luther retained symbolism, but he warned against excess, distortion of meaning, and overemphasis on secondary matters. We need to be firmly grounded in the past, but we need also to be discriminating and creative."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

#### ASSISTANT MINISTER: HIS PROBLEM AND OURS

*Religion in Life* (Autumn 1955) discusses in two articles the problems facing a senior pastor and his assistant. The one is written by an assistant pastor who, under the heading "An Assistant Speaks His Mind," treats the matter from his point of view, while in the second article entitled "The Assistant Minister: His Problems and Ours" a now retired elderly minister presents the difficulties from the senior pastor's standpoint. In both articles the presentation of the problems is realistic. But what is more important than the statement of the problems is the suggestion of remedies for their prevention or removal. The "assistant" thus suggests the appointment of a competent personnel committee to weigh all grievances, dispel all tensions, and engender a wholesome spirit in order that hatreds and misunderstandings may not fester until an unfortunate climax is reached. But more important than such a committee is the necessity that the senior and assistant ministers act in an honest, mature, and Christian fashion toward each other. To preach about the Book of Hosea, with its immortal message of forgiving love, is not enough; we must incorporate it into our lives. Both groups must learn along with Hosea the great virtue of patience and long-suffering forbearance. In true Christian humility they must make determined efforts in curbing their natural hankering for prominence and their

craving for the cheap applause of men. Then, and only then, will they, as senior or assistant ministers, be worthy of their "high calling in Jesus Christ." The senior pastor suggests as remedies summer refresher courses for senior pastors on parish administration and recent theories as well as administrative committees to guide the young ministers. But basically the need is for insight, for patience, for frankness, a "learning spirit."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

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

*Phoenix, Ariz.* — A Red Mass — the first in Arizona's history — was held in St. Agnes Church here to implore divine aid for the courts and members of the bar in their daily labors. It was sponsored by the local Saint Thomas More Society.

Saint Thomas More is the patron saint of Catholic lawyers. The society was organized here last spring by attorneys interested in the church's history in legal affairs and in the furtherance of higher standards of law practice.

*Denver.* — A new constitution making the Brotherhood of the American Lutheran Church an official laymen's auxiliary of the denomination was adopted by the organization at its seventh biennial convention here. The action brings into auxiliary status a total of 958 local men's clubs, with a combined membership of 25,000, according to Herbert Hufnagel, the Brotherhood's retiring president. He reported that 125 new groups had been chartered in the last two years.

Dale H. Bruning of Bruning, Nebr., a farmer and stockman, was elected president for the next four years. The Brotherhood's 1957 convention will be held in Minneapolis, Minn. The new auxiliary also voted to sponsor a pre-induction training program for young men of the denomination. Veterans of World War II or the Korean conflict will be deputized to provide the military-religious orientation.

*Salt Lake City, Utah.* — A statewide "crackdown" on the practice of polygamy by members of two religious cults began here with complaints filed before City Judge J. Patton Neeley. The cults were identified as "Fundamentalists." They have no connection with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon), which abandoned polygamy more than half a century ago. Three men were accused of unlawful cohabitation in Salt Lake County. Frank E. Moss, Salt Lake County attorney, said the three had 13 wives and a total of 62 children under 18 years of age.

Utah Attorney General E. R. Callister said an over-all investigation of the practice of polygamy in Utah was being directed and co-

ordained through his office. A special appropriation of \$20,000 was earmarked by the last legislature for the purpose. "We have reason to believe the practice is widespread and growing rapidly," Mr. Callister said. "We intend to prosecute as cases come to our attention."

*Miami, Fla.*—Clergymen and churches of this state were asked by Gov. Le Roy Collins to brand careless driving as "an evil, an ugly sin." He spoke here at the closing session of the seventh annual conference of the Governor's Highway Safety Council. "We know," the governor said, "that almost all our accidents happen because the drivers involved commit violations of our traffic laws."

*Berlin.*—East German Communists are developing ceremonies to take the place of Christian Baptism, marriage, and funeral rites. Last year youth dedication ceremonies were launched in the Soviet Zone as a Communist counterpart of Christian confirmation and first Communion rites.

The new ceremonies were announced by East German Communist newspapers, several of which also published articles "enlightening" readers on how to discontinue membership in churches. They said the clerical procedure connected with leaving the church would be taken care of without cost by all registrars' offices and authorized notaries. Church observers here said it was obvious the Communists are trying to create a pseudoreligious cult to advance their ideology.

The rites announced by the Communists are:

1. "Name-giving" ceremonies, to be held on Sundays in the offices of public registrars. Birth certificates will, if desired, be handed over to parents in "a solemn form."
2. Similar ceremonies will be provided for newlyweds. Upon payment of an extra fee a small band will play "suitable music."
3. In the case of funerals Communist functionaries will be available for speeches at the graves of the deceased.

*Stockholm.*—An increase in suicide attempts in Sweden has been ascribed by several leading daily papers here to a decline of Christian influence among the people. According to reports, the number of suicides in the country has doubled in the last two years. There are 1,200 attempted suicides a year. The latter figure is greater than the annual total of traffic fatalities. Unhappy marriages or love affairs rank first as motives for suicide attempts. Next come alcoholism and psychic disorders. Economic difficulties or disease are third on the list of causes.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NEWS BUREAU  
OF THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

*New York.* — Publication of the first volume of a three-volume study described as the "most definitive comparison ever made of the history, policies, and programs" of Protestant welfare work in the United States was announced here by the National Council of Churches.

*The Activating Concern*, a 128-page study of basic principle and policy in Protestant welfare work, was edited for the NCCCUSA by Dr. E. Theodore Bachmann, professor of church history and missions and director of graduate studies at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, Calif. He is also editor of the third and final volume of the study series, *The Emerging Perspective*, scheduled for publication about March 15, 1956.

The three-volume series is a result of a pioneering effort by the National Council to compile a national inventory of all health and welfare agencies and institutions related to Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches.

*Copenhagen, Denmark.* — For the first time since the Reformation, Roman Catholic bishops of the Scandinavian countries met for formal discussion of their common problems, it was reported by Church News from the Northern Countries, news bulletin of the Northern (Protestant) Ecumenical Institute. The meeting was held here in the "oldest" post-Reformation era Roman Catholic see. The Roman bishopric of Copenhagen was re-established in 1953; those in Norway, Sweden, and Finland followed, said the Church News.

As of today, the report continued, Roman Catholic membership in the Scandinavian countries has reached 52,000, of whom 75 per cent are Scandinavians by birth and 25 per cent are immigrants and refugees. Of the total 27,000 are in Denmark, 18,000 in Sweden, 5,000 in Norway, and 2,000 in Finland. In Sweden two thirds of the Roman Catholics are postwar immigrants, the Church News said.

*Milwaukee, Wis.* — Deviation from Lutheran doctrine by young pastors of the Northwest Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America is once more creating newspaper headlines here and throughout the Midwest, because:

1. The young Milwaukee pastor, George P. Crist, 31, convicted in July of "heresy," has returned his ordination papers to the Northwest Synod;
2. The Rev. John Gerberding, 33, a friend of Crist, who was acquitted in a similar trial last August, announced his resignation from

the pastorate at Menomonee Falls, hinting it was because of demands he be retried;

3. The Rev. Victor K. Wrigley, close friend of Crist and Gerberding, has been ordered to stand trial on heresy charges in Milwaukee, beginning November 10.

Mr. Crist, now a graduate student working for a Master's degree in philosophy at the University of Iowa, was found guilty on nine counts of heretical teachings, including abandonment of fundamental principles of Scriptural interpretation which guided Martin Luther, the denial of the Virgin Birth and the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He was ordered temporarily suspended from the ministry by Dr. Paul E. Bishop, president of the Northwest Synod, pending a final verdict by the synod's annual convention in Milwaukee next May. The return of his ordination papers in effect makes the temporary suspension permanent, but, according to newspaper reports, Dr. Bishop pointed out that Mr. Crist has appealed the trial findings to the synod's annual convention and that the appeal still stands. Mr. Crist, it was said, will "in all probability" press his appeal, seeking to determine whether the trial committee acted correctly.

His close friend, the Rev. John Gerberding of Holy Cross Lutheran Church at Menomonee Falls, accused on charges similar to those held against Mr. Crist, was unanimously acquitted by a trial committee in August. However, he announced his desire to resign and said he would urge his congregation to accept the resignation effective December 1, "in the best interest of the family." He was led to resign by the fact that Dr. Bishop had called the reopening of his trial "a necessity," Mr. Gerberding explained.

A retrial of Mr. Gerberding was earlier demanded by 35 Milwaukee ULCA pastors, who based their demand on "important new evidence against the accused minister and conflicting evidence given by the pastor." The group was particularly disturbed by a statement Mr. Gerberding made to the press after his trial: "I have not changed my opinions, nor was I asked to."

Attention was focused upon the Milwaukee pastors' demand for a retrial by the semiannual conference of Wisconsin pastors held in Milwaukee in mid-September, when a resolution was passed calling for an investigation of "all conflicting doctrinal statements" made by Gerberding.

In the announcement of his resignation, Mr. Gerberding hinted that the synod president had urged him to turn in his ordination papers, but added that "I still have six weeks to think about that." He said the

controversy over his case had left the congregation "tired and broken," and he charged that the synod "has acted like a sect, not as a member of the Lutheran Church."

The announcement that the Rev. Victor K. Wrigley of Brookfield, Wis., has been ordered to stand trial on November 10 was understood here as an indication that the case against the third young pastor was nearing its climax.

A close friend of Crist and Gerberding and a classmate of both at Northwestern Lutheran Seminary, he was accused at the same time and for similar deviations, but has so far not come before a trial committee. His case was also discussed at the September conference of the Wisconsin pastors, which passed a special resolution appealing to him "in brotherly love" to submit to the constitutional procedure for investigation of accused pastors. The resolution urged Mr. Wrigley to "cease to show insubordination by defiant quasi-legal maneuvering and bargaining."

It was understood here that Mr. Wrigley had absented himself from investigation meetings on the grounds that his congregational council had advised him to do so, because it held that one member of the committee was "prejudiced" and the investigation procedure is "more that of instigating charges than of investigating them."

According to newspaper reports, the Gethsemane Lutheran congregation of Brookfield sustained its council's stand by a vote of 118 to one. A young people's group of the congregation wrote to the synod president to state that "in our hearts we know this man to be a Christian," and "we stand in wonder and bewilderment as to how you can charge him with being a heretic." (October 21, 1955.)