

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 28

Article 71

12-1-1957

Theological Observer

Martin H. Scharlemann
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Scharlemann, Martin H. (1957) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 28, Article 71.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol28/iss1/71>

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

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE EAST ZONE

At the recent assembly of the Lutheran World Federation the Lutherisches Verlagshaus of Berlin distributed complimentary copies of *Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, prepared particularly for the meetings in Minneapolis. This number contains numerous reports and discussions of the Lutheran World Federation. Of all the matters mentioned none perhaps is more intriguing than the opening sentence of a description of the Lutheran Church behind the iron curtain. It notes that the occupation of large sections of Eastern Germany, where the Lutheran Church is strong, by Russian forces was not a part of the military situation as determined by actual conquest at the time of Germany's surrender. If the original lines of partition had been retained, such notable places as Eisleben, Eisenach, Erfurt, Wittenberg, and the Wartburg would have remained under Western control. It is interesting to speculate how and why the lines were changed with the consent of the United States. One might entertain the suspicion that this was done in consequence of Roman Catholic pressure on our own State Department, sensitive as it is to the aspirations of the Roman hierarchy. Pastor Martin Niemoeller of World War II fame has remarked a number of times that the Roman Church has been using the partitioning of Germany for purposes of its own aggrandizement. The aim of pressuring for the inclusion of larger sections of Eastern Germany would obviously have been that of weakening the Lutheran Church by arranging for the subjection of 15,000,000 Lutherans to Communist oppression. However, in the counsels of God the exact opposite may yet happen. For it becomes increasingly evident that church life is particularly strong in the Eastern part of Germany. It may well be that by having to pass through the refining fires of persecution that portion of the Lutheran Church will become the source of renewed spiritual life in our church as a whole.

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

LOOKING BACK AT BILLY GRAHAM'S NEW YORK CAMPAIGN

Life counted them! There were only 65,000, instead of the 200,000 that supporters of Billy Graham claimed were in attendance at his last rally in New York City. This sizable discrepancy is one of the disturbing features of the Graham crusade. Men who have observed the methods of some of the leaders of the Graham organization have

been disturbed by their failure to keep in mind that their task is a spiritual one.

A word is in order at this point on the evangelist and his crusade, particularly since he had occasion to address the convention of the Atlantic District of our Synod last summer. Everyone there was greatly impressed by his sincerity and personal humility. Yet one can hardly avoid uttering two cautions. In the first instance (and this is based on personal observation and attendance at some rallies in New York) Billy Graham in his preaching very rarely proclaims the "good news." The individual hearer is usually led to believe that the forgiveness of sins is a conditional gift. The New Testament, of course, indicates that there is no "if" or "but" connected with this forgiveness. The Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world, and this includes everyone. Forgiveness is there for the taking. To be sure, the New Testament occasionally uses the imperatives, "Repent! Believe!" However, these are evangelical imperatives. They were not intended to be an appeal to the human will as though it were capable of making a decision for Christ. The invitations extended in Madison Square Garden appealed to the individual in such a way as to suggest that he could "with his own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ and come to Him."

In the second instance, there was in the crusade no evidence whatsoever that the evangelist understood the nature of the church as it is described in the New Testament. This, of course, is somewhat related to the normal Baptist view of the Sacraments. Even apart from this circumstance the listener in Madison Square Garden could in no way get even a brief glimpse of that people of God with which, as a group, God identifies Himself in His eternal purposes.

These are serious deficiencies. They need special mention because we hear men saying that Graham's theology is almost Lutheran. It is very definitely not!

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

RUDOLF BULTMANN: A CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN

The *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (July 1957), under this heading, presents Bultmann's "demythologizing" as a challenge to Roman Catholic theology. Describing it as "an attempted escape from complete skepticism," the writer, a Jesuit, finds in it much to praise. In the final paragraph he sums up his appreciation of Bultmann's method in the following words: "The work of Rudolf Bultmann is not only admirable for its testimony to the renewed vitality of German

Protestant thought. It is, in many of its aspects, a valuable contribution to Catholic Scripture studies in the middle of the twentieth century." But he criticizes Bultmann's conclusions: "It is quite obvious that most of Bultmann's contentions are inadmissible from the Catholic point of view. His conception of a demythologized kerygma effectively cuts all links between 1957 and the years of Jesus' life upon earth, and *ipso facto* evacuates the message of salvation. As G. Casalis has remarked, 'For Herr Bultmann, salvation is not the event of the year 30, but a change in man's understanding of himself.' And Helmut Thielicke, who has contributed an essay to the volume *Kerygma and Myth*, points out that it is the change in my way of understanding myself and not the birth of a Child of Bethlehem two thousand years ago which is denoted by the phrase 'the Word became flesh.' Finally, with Père Benoit, we must ask as Catholics whether God and the created world are so incompatible that every statement which describes the relations between them must be regarded as a myth. 'To resolve the problem in a manner which is certainly not that of the NT authors, either Paul or John, is to expose oneself to misinterpret their writings. More, it is to expose oneself to the danger of falsifying Christianity itself.'"

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

NEW TESTAMENT AND MYTH, THE EXISTENTIAL APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY

Under this heading Maria Fuerth Sulzbach, a student of Bultmann, in *Religion in Life* (Autumn 1957) presents an able analysis and criticism of the existential approach to Christianity. In passing, she states that "Tillich's Christology is not biblical." But while she admits that "religious consciousness requires mythological language," she insists also that "*Heilsgeschichte* which is 'liberated' from factual history is no longer Christian *Heilsgeschichte*." Again: "The obstacle confronting modern man is not the mythological elements in New Testament Christology (modern man often makes use of symbolic language), but rather the acceptance of the revelation itself, which is as much of a *scandalon* for modern man as it was for his ancestors." In conclusion she writes: "The gospel would still be the stumbling block, the *scandalon* it has always been, even if it were possible to remove all mythological language. For it is not the mythological language but the Gospel testimony, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,' which will always be the *scandalon*. No amount of cutting loose from the foundation of the

New Testament can change this. In fact, if theology tries to do this, it declines, as C. H. Dodd says, into insignificance, 'and has in fact nothing to say to the world which the world may not learn elsewhere.'" Very true also is her statement preceding the final paragraph: ". . . the mythological constituents of New Testament Christology are not cosmological statements but affirmations of faith concerning the Lordship of Christ as conferred on him by God. As Karl Barth points out . . . , the Gospels have never been affected by a changing cosmology or world-picture."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BRIEF ITEMS FROM NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

Minneapolis.—Leaders of the Lutheran World Federation were unanimous in the opinion that its third assembly here more than exceeded their fondest hopes for the 11-day international church congress.

They also predicted that the assembly—which opened with an evening worship on August 15 attended by more than 10,000 and closed with an afternoon festival service on August 25 that attracted more than 100,000—will strengthen world Lutheranism.

Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist of Geneva, Switzerland, executive secretary of the LWF, said the assembly "more than fulfilled my expectations in every respect."

Dr. Franklin Clark Fry of New York, new president of the federation, said, "Our hosts in Minnesota provided a physical setting and an atmosphere of friendliness that were bound to lead to good results, and they did."

Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hannover, Germany, retiring LWF president, said the assembly "even surpassed our expectations" in many cases. He referred to the high attendance at the various sessions and to "the power of cohesion" within the assembly.

"The assembly will help in a considerable way to strengthen the sense of unity among Lutherans," he added, "and will help Lutheran congregations to realize their duties as over against the world."

Dr. Fry provided a capsule summary of the federation's history when he said that "at Lund we learned to march together, at Hannover we learned to worship together, at Minneapolis we learned to think together."

The third assembly at Minneapolis, he added, represented "a kind of coming of age for the LWF."

The LWF's first assembly in Lund, Sweden, in 1947, he pointed out,

was a time for renewal of acquaintances and, in some cases, reconciliation of former enemies.

At its second assembly in Hannover, Germany, in 1952, the LWF "began to find itself" and adopted a more effective organization in place of scattered activities that had been carried on prior to that time, he said.

"Here in Minneapolis," he added, "all phases of the worldwide Lutheran work and fellowship were advanced and co-ordinated."

Dr. Lund-Quist said the assembly gave the LWF "much more solid backing and support for its total program" and represented a major advance in doctrinal and inner unity.

One effect of the assembly, he said, was to build strong support and understanding among many members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Missouri Synod is not a member of the LWF but sent 15 official and many unofficial visitors to the assembly.

For the overseas delegates the assembly was an experience which will give them new ideas about American church life and a new conception of American friendliness, Dr. Lund-Quist said.

For American Lutherans, he added, the concluding festival service brought them to a consciousness of their worldwide responsibility and a sense of common strength not tested before.

Minneapolis.—The Lutheran World Federation's new executive committee has approved plans to explore the "practical possibility" of setting up a Confessional Research Institute for the study of Roman Catholic theology.

At a two-day meeting here, following the close of the LWF's third assembly, the committee authorized the federation's department of theology to engage a research fellow to study the feasibility of the project.

He will be assisted by a special advisory committee of outstanding theologians, consisting of:

Dr. Kristen Ejner Skydsgaard, professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Copenhagen and head of the Danish Ecumenical Institute. He is a member of the Church of Denmark.

Dr. Peter Brunner, professor of systematic theology at the University of Heidelberg and a member of the LWF's Commission on Theology and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hannover, Germany.

Bishop Hermann Dietzfelbinger, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, Germany.

Results of the survey will be presented to the executive committee at its next meeting, which will be held in Strasbourg, France,

Oct. 26—30, 1958, at the invitation of the Lutheran Church of Alsace-Lorraine. At that time a decision will be made on whether or not the proposed project should be initiated.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

St. Louis, Mo.—A budget of \$16,000,000 for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for the 1958—59 fiscal year was adopted by a conference of denominational leaders here. The 1957—58 budget was \$14,200,000.

Some 700 representatives of the synod's 32 North American Districts attended the conference.

Largest allocations were made for education and missions. A total of \$6,680,538 was designated for various phases of the synod's educational work. Missions in the United States, Canada, and foreign countries will get \$6,241,103.

The rest of the budget will go for administration, standing and special committees, social welfare and pensions.

Toronto.—"Mission by fission" was accomplished here when Redeemer Lutheran Church split its ten-year-old congregation of 400 four ways instead of attempting to enlarge the church.

Members moved into three new missions on the eastern, western, and northwestern edges of the city. Only those within easy reach of Redeemer Church will continue to worship there.

Heretofore people came from all over Toronto to attend Redeemer.

The Rev. Albert Jacobi, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada, preached in a service of "Godspeed" to the departing members.

The splitup is believed to be the first such action in the history of the United Lutheran Church in America.

Chicago.—The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod may reconsider its decision not to join the Lutheran World Federation.

Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist, federation executive secretary, said this was indicated at a meeting here attended by representatives of the synod and the LWF.

He said the synod's unity committee will re-examine its stand opposing LWF membership.

"The Missouri Synod representatives spoke very positively of the results of the recent LWF assembly in Minneapolis," Dr. Lund-Quist said.

One reason the Missouri Synod has stayed outside the LWF is its feeling that the federation has taken on some functions of a church.

Missouri Synod representatives were told here that the LWF Commission on Theology will study the bases and functions of a federation during the coming five-year period and that the synod will be invited to take part.

A resolution adopted by the LWF assembly urging the Missouri Synod to reconsider the action on LWF membership was presented to the synod representatives here by Dr. Lund-Quist and Dr. Franklin Fry of New York, new LWF president.

Representing the Missouri Synod at the meeting were Dr. John W. Behnken, St. Louis, Mo., President; Dr. Arnold H. Grumm, St. Louis, First Vice-President; Dr. Alfred Fuerbringer, president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; and Dr. W. A. Baepler, president of Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill.

It was a "friendly" meeting, Dr. Lund-Quist said.

Chicago.—Representatives of four Lutheran denominations planning to merge reported progress here on the organizational structure of the proposed new 3,000,000-member Church.

The merging groups are the 2,300,000-member United Lutheran Church in America; the 536,000-member Augustana Lutheran Church; the 35,000-member Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church; and the 20,000-member American Evangelical Lutheran Church.

A Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, at three-day sessions here, authorized the creation of a new pension program for the 6,000 pastors of the merged church after hearing a report by a committee. Other committees reporting included those on powers and functions of officers and an executive body of the new church, foreign missions, American missions, geographical boundaries of constituent synods, doctrine and living tradition, a judiciary and parish education.

The Rev. Dr. Malvin H. Lundeen of La Grange, Ill., commission chairman, said the commissioners are reaching a "meeting of minds" on the patterns of organizations, and the merger negotiations are "moving along on schedule."

Dr. Lundeen said he doubted, however, that the new church would come into being before 1961. He is vice-president of the Augustana Church.

Madison, Wis.—Nearly one fifth of the alcoholics committed to the nation's mental institutions and general hospitals have been diagnosed as having permanent injury to the brain from alcohol, an official of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union said here.

Mrs. Fred J. Tooze of Portland, Oreg., national corresponding secre-

tary, said her statement was based on generally unpublished national public health statistics.

She spoke at an executive committee meeting preceding the union's 83d annual convention.

"Statistics compiled by the National Institute of Mental Health," Mrs. Tooze said, "show that of the 139,608 alcoholics committed to civilian mental institutions in 1953, 1954, and 1955, a total of 24,188 were diagnosed as having chronic brain syndrome (permanent brain damage resulting from alcohol).

"Another 38,202 or more than 27 per cent of the alcoholics committed were diagnosed in medical terms as with acute brain syndrome which the American Psychiatric Association says included hallucinations, delusions, and behavior disturbances."

The others among the 139,608 alcoholics, Mrs. Tooze said, were diagnosed as having "personality disorder or alcoholism addiction."

She said the statistics were significant in the following ways:

"They settle on the basis of competent medical authority the long-standing controversy over whether alcoholic beverage can damage the brain, by showing that it does and that the damage is permanent.

"They show that the country's short supply of mental institutions are being increasingly overcrowded by persons maimed or disabled by drink.

"They demonstrate that the problem of alcoholism, under unrestricted drink promotion and sales, far exceeds that of opium, heroin, or other narcotic drug addiction in our country.

"They reveal the unsoundness of any idea or ideology that 'moderation in drinking' is the solution of the alcohol problem, since each of the 139,608 persons committed obviously started out with the idea of drinking moderately."