

3-1-1958

Theological Observer

John Theodore Mueller
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Recommended Citation

Mueller, John Theodore (1958) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 29, Article 18.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol29/iss1/18>

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

THEOLOGY AND THE MOVIES

Under this heading Malcolm Boyd, now tutor assistant at Union Theological Seminary, N. Y., but formerly a writer, producer, advertising man, and publicist in Hollywood and New York, in *Theology Today* (October 1957) offers an unusual and interesting analysis of the theology, or religion, of the modern religious movie. He concludes that "non-religious cinema may convey implicit Christian truth more significantly for some persons than 'religious' drama could do, for the latter might only stiffen a non-Christian's initial attitude of indifference, resentment or downright opposition." "The list is growing of movies which their press agents label as 'religious' [because] religion is a subject that 'sells' in all the mass media currently." His criticism of them reads: "One finds most generally in 'religious' films made for mass theatrical distribution, soft answers, eclectic 'philosophically religious' abstract propositions, do-goodism and sentimentalism in pastoral garb, and, always, the classical 'hero' rather than the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ." He suggests: "A movie . . . if it is honest in spirit and in truth, gives us an element of life. Activity along the lines of Christian interpretation, translating into Christian terms what is right before one's eyes in life, is of the utmost importance in what we call 'Christian Education.' . . . The Christian expression in any medium of communication is that which is essentially honest, and, because its portrayal of character and event is true, enables us to perceive the person of Christ and his work and their significance for us and for our everyday lives." The impact of the "religious" movie upon people in general is far greater than one would surmise, and that is why such analyses as the one just referred to dare not be overlooked.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

"FAITH AND HOMELAND"

Glaube und Heimat is the motto of the annual published by the Lutherans of Austria. This slogan epitomizes their history.

At the time of the Reformation Austria was almost 95 per cent Lutheran. Men from all walks of life, including the ranks of the nobility, eagerly embraced the new proclamation of God's good news. But the Counter-Reformation soon set about its deadly work of exterminating evangelical faith and life. Lutherans were confronted with the choice of "faith or homeland" (*Glaube oder Heimat*). Thousands

of them left their native land rather than deny their faith. Notable among these emigrants were the 20,000 Salzburgers, whose story forms the background to Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*. Today Austria is 95 per cent Roman Catholic.

The Lutherans that remained in Austria in the days of oppression and persecution had to carry on in secret. For six generations they had to meet behind locked doors and drawn shades to worship God and to teach their children. Copies of the Scriptures and of their hymnbook had to be kept from the eyes of all except their most trusted friends. Finally, in 1781, Emperor Joseph II issued his famous Toleration Edict. At this point 73,000 persons declared themselves to be adherents of the evangelical faith and were permitted to organize in 28 congregations.

But this was toleration in the European sense only. Lutherans might indeed erect houses of worship; but they were not permitted to indicate in any way—by steeple or art windows—that these were church buildings. In fact, it was not until 1861 that the evangelical churches of Austria won full status under Austrian law.

Since that moment of achieving legal equality Lutherans in Austria have witnessed four major accessions to their ranks. At the turn of the century the Lutheran Church gained many thousands in partial consequence of a national "away-from-Rome" movement. By a plebiscite in 1921 the territory of Burgenland was transferred from Hungary to Austria. This netted a gain of 40,000 members. When the Social Democrats were overthrown in 1934, 25,000 persons—17,000 of them from large industrial centers—left the Roman Catholic Church to become Lutherans. Then, at the close of World War II, Austria was overrun with refugees from the Southeast. Many of these were evangelical in their religious persuasion. Today the Protestants of Austria number 420,000. Only 18,500 of these are adherents of the Helvetic Confession; all the rest profess to follow the Augsburg Confession.

Since the days of the Republic the Lutheran Church in Austria is no longer a state church. It is completely autonomous, depending on its own members for its support, also in financial matters. Under these conditions of freedom, Lutheranism in Austria has become a vigorous force in the nation. Its adherents no longer face a choice of either creed or country. They have both their faith and their homeland. Hence the aptness of the motto: "Glaube *und* Heimat."

We have had a personal interest in this church since the time that Miss Hildegard Lindner, an Austrian deaconess, stayed in our home for a few weeks some two years ago. Miss Lindner is the daughter of

a world-renowned eye surgeon of Vienna. After completing her training as a deaconess, she was assigned to a rural parish in one of the rugged mountain areas of southeastern Austria. Included among her many duties is confirmation instruction. There are no roads, not even bicycle paths, to some of the schools for which she is responsible. She walks to these places. It takes her from six in the morning to 11 o'clock to reach one of the remote villages of the parish. She makes this trip once a week during the school year.

It might be added here that deaconesses in Austria get Greek and Hebrew in their course of training. Miss Lindner could hold her own with the best of our Seminary students in both Old and New Testament languages. In her experience she has found the study of these languages among the most "practical" subjects she was ever required to take. We make a special point of this matter here mostly because there is a great deal of loose talk in our church today on the subject of what is practical for the ministry. We would suggest that any one in doubt about the practicality of the Biblical languages spend a few years in the bracing air of Austrian Lutheranism. Church life is less flabby there! And there is a shortage of pastors over there! We shall be happy personally to forward all applications for this kind of assignment to Bishop May in Vienna!

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

NOTES ON ASSEMBLY OF NATIONAL COUNCIL

National and international meetings of religious groups have developed a certain ritual for their major gatherings. They must meet in large auditoriums. They must stage an elaborate procession, with flags flying. The press tables must have green covers; and press reports must be used for all that can be got out of them. The LWF Assembly in Minneapolis followed this pattern; and the Fourth General Assembly of the National Council of Churches obeyed these rubrics faithfully at its meetings in St. Louis from December 1 to 6, 1957. The sessions of the latter, however, fell flat on their faces. They were so dull that members of the press section left in droves soon after the assembly opened. They found little that would make copy of any kind.

There were distinguished speakers. The program had been well planned. The organization was in high gear. Yet, as the *Christian Century* put it, "a curious flatness prevailed." In this observer's view the assembly suffered from three serious defects. These kept it from striking even a spark of prophetic fire.

For one thing, the sessions were organized too well. No speaker ever left his manuscript for more than two or three words. Now, as

anyone can testify who has ever had to prepare a full manuscript for such an occasion, few things can more effectively keep a person from being himself than just reading a speech prepared days or even weeks before the time of delivery. Those of us who were in the press section had most of the speeches, all typed up, at least a day before they were read. Of course, there was always the possibility that some speaker might break away and be himself. But no one showed the courage to do so. The place was so thoroughly mechanized that the press releases on the election of a new president, in the person of Dr. E. T. Dahlberg of St. Louis, were available two days before the elections were ever held. Of course, all of these papers were carefully marked so as to prevent premature release. How much more interesting would it have been if there had been two candidates to set forth their individual views as to what the National Council ought to be! (Incidentally, it became very clear that the organization is not really sure as to what it wants to be.) Then there would have been a debate, conflict, and resolution; and that makes good copy.

In the second place, the assembly turned tasteless because the Council itself sets out to do too much. It has found the words "The whole Gospel for the whole man" a convenient working slogan. It has done so, however, without ever asking itself how to go about this job most effectively. As a result it is fighting many battles, in many places, without any apparent cohesive strategy. A person gets the feeling that the council carries a staff of 700 people chiefly for the purpose of not getting caught "missing a trick." To illustrate, the Council falls into four divisions: Christian Education; Christian Life and Work; Home Missions; and Foreign Missions. This is a sensible arrangement. But now let's have a look at the Division of Christian Education. This consists of three commissions. They are: the Commission on General Christian Education; the Commission on Christian Higher Education; and the Joint Commission on Missionary Education. The first of these commissions is subdivided into no less than ten departments. If the old rule of good management that the span of control must be limited to seven or fewer holds true in church work as it does everywhere else, these ten subdivisions constitute an organizational labyrinth impossible to find through without the help of some kind Ariadne—in this instance a long and detailed printed report.

Some of this overextension, of course, is due to the fact that the people who are in the field of Christian education for the National Council accept the nondescript notion of education current in America as late as the opening day of the Sputnik age. This is a view that has

room for everything except the concept of indoctrination. The quickest way to become suspect in the Division of Christian Education is to raise the question of indoctrination. The response to such a suggestion invariably resembles the reaction to the ancient cry in Israel, "Leprosy! Beware!" For much of their lack of direction these experts really have only themselves to blame.

In the third instance, the sessions of the assembly stirred up so little response because everything that remotely suggested doctrinal discussions was avoided like the plague. The new president of the Council has expressed a faint hope that this will change. Like his predecessor he is persuaded that the time has come for churches to face up to the problem of doctrinal discussion and expression. Let us hope that something comes of all this. For much of American Protestantism lives with the strange illusion that a feeling of community can be created in the church without consideration of doctrine.

It would have added much to the meetings of the assembly to have some lively doctrinal debates. We should have liked to see a contest, for example, between Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill of the Episcopal Church and the Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam on some facet of theological truth. In fact, during the sessions, this observer could hardly contain his wish to have been at one of the early church councils, where doctrine was taken seriously even by lay emperors. In fact, these emperors would usually add a final fillip to the council meetings by banishing the bishop(s) that lost a theological debate. Such a procedure would make good copy today. It would add zest to a reporter's life. We can see it now: BISHOP EXILED TO FLOATING ICEBERG! (Where else could one locate a place for banishment in this age of radio and TV?)

With all this criticism behind us and out of our system, some words of praise must be appended. If there were no organization like the National Council of Churches, such issues as religion in public school education or the status of churches behind the Iron or Bamboo Curtains would not receive the broad consideration they deserve. Our own church body is indebted to the National Council for its support in getting and keeping "This Is the Life" aired over national networks. Our church's relief program also works in close co-ordination with Church World Service. For this reason The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is listed in the Council brochure as a "non-voting associate member of one or more Council units or area committees." Here, then, is further evidence that in the middle of the 20th century no

church organization can work in isolation and in indifference to what other denominations are doing severally and in association.

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

THE SOCIAL GOSPELER

Under this heading *Time* (November 18, 1957) writes about Walter Rauschenbusch, who died in 1918 at the age of 56, "broken in spirit by World War I, rejected by many Americans because of his German background and his attempts to keep the U.S. from fighting." Of Rauschenbusch the report says: "With six generations of ministers behind him (his parents came to the U.S. from Germany), Walter Rauschenbusch labored from 1886 to 1897 among the poor of Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen, reading Tolstoy, Mazzini, Marx, and supporting the reform movement of Single-Taxer Henry George." In his work *Christianity and the Social Crisis* he set forth the results of his social studies and by it introduced the "social gospel." It also made him famous among liberal Protestants in our country. Dr. H. P. van Dusen, president of Union Theological Seminary, once called Rauschenbusch "the greatest single personal influence on the life and thought of the U.S. church in the last 50 years." As *Time* says: "Later his social gospel became so powerful that it took U.S. Protestantism to opposite extremes: churches sometimes seemed to be turning into sanctified civic-betterment societies." The pendulum since then has swung back to a more conservative theology, as we read: "Today the churchman's complaint is no longer that the bodies of the workers are being sweated, but more likely that their souls are being stifled in too much benevolent prosperity." Nevertheless, the social gospel is not dead: "It is not so much that the social gospel is dead, but that it has been assimilated."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

MISSION AND MISSIONARIES

This significant statement was prepared by a group of missionaries on furlough in the course of a seminar on "The Role of the Missionary Today" at the University of Chicago, July 8—19, 1957. Participants in the seminar included missionaries from India, Burma, Malaya, Japan, Argentina, Mexico, Southern Rhodesia, Nigeria, and Belgian Congo. Some had previously served in China.

The Christian World Mission today finds itself in a context of strong criticism and reaction. The rise of nationalism in countries throughout the world has prompted many within and without the church to censure the strong Western complexion of Christian missions. Non-Christian religions are assuming their roles as national religions and are more than ever resentful of the Christian Evangel as a foreign intruder.

As tensions mount, and as young churches assume ever greater responsibility for their own affairs, some would seek to reinterpret the world mission of the church and the role of the Western missionary in it in such a way as to minimize the apostolic—the missionary—character of the church and the offense inherent in it. Missionaries from the West are frequently uncertain of the role remaining to them in the bridging of new frontiers and in serving young churches.

I. The Function of the Church

We believe that the function of the church today—as in every day—is mission. In obedience to the command "Go ye" (Matt. 28:19), the church must feel the compulsion to share unto all the ends of the earth the Good News of life and hope entrusted to it by a gracious God in Jesus Christ. The essence of this message is that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and that He has committed to us this ministry of reconciliation. We believe that any re-evaluating of the role of the missionary in today's world must begin with this understanding of the worldwide character of the church's task.

II. The Task of the Christian Missionary

Local witness and sending are indivisibly two parts of one task. Local evangelism grows weak when sending is neglected. The church in all its local and denominational branches must faithfully send forth missionary ambassadors of the Gospel until God brings His kingdom in all its fullness. Therefore, the young churches of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania have before them as large a share in the common mission as do the older churches. Consequently, there cannot be a fruitful definition of the role of the *Western missionary* until there has been attained a clear idea of the task of the *Christian missionary* sent by his fellow members in Christ to proclaim our Savior, Reconciler, and Lord at the many "ends of the earth" where He is not yet known and accepted by all.

III. The Role of the Western Missionary in the World Mission Today

Help Without Hindrance. We believe that the Western missionaries may be of use today in the areas of the young churches if these churches desire them and if the missionary can serve the church without becoming an obstacle to the life of the church; that is, if his well-intended efforts do not rob the church of the assuming of its own responsibility for leadership or hinder the witness of the church because the presence of Westerners proves an embarrassment.

Partners in the Gospel. Wherever we serve, we must live in the Christian community as brothers and sisters in Christ serving as partners in the mission of the church. Since in Christ there can be neither "Jew nor Greek, bond nor free," we, as Western missionaries, and the churches that we serve can be content with nothing less than full partnership in the Gospel. Mindful of the apostolic commission of our Lord, this partnership must be a global partnership in outreach.

Diversities of Ministries. We find it impossible to speak to any given situation, for the situations represented in this workshop are so diverse. We do, however, believe that all of our tasks should be concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel. Some will find that they can and must take an active part in direct evangelism. The witness of others may be equally relevant and equally effective as they work at their several tasks: the training of leadership (lay and professional), unobtrusively fostering and developing initiative by Christian nationals, by teaching, by healing, by taking part in organizational procedures, and by witnessing in their own Christian lives and homes.

God Is Our Sufficiency. We are not sufficient unto ourselves, God alone by His Spirit is our Sufficiency. The proclamation of the Gospel is a divine-human partnership. Human ingenuity and planning, while necessary, must be seen as man's response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit who ever seeks to bring redemption through Jesus Christ to all men. Therefore, all who are involved in the Christian mission today must be open to the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who our Lord has promised will lead us into all truth will also lead us into new paths of witness and service.

Submitted by
WILLIAM J. DANKER

CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

The Correspondence School of Concordia Seminary, organized in 1924, is currently in a process of reorganization.

In consultation with experts in the area of correspondence work, we have established basic policies. As a result, correspondence courses are integrated with the regular classroom program. Often the same instructor who teaches a course in the classroom also prepares the plan of study for the correspondence student. All courses are approved by the respective departments. The standards of the Correspondence School, the amount of work required of the student per unit credit, the value of credit given, the prerequisites, the fees, etc., are comparable to those of residence work.

The Correspondence School plans to bring all its courses up to date and prepare new ones. The following courses have been prepared in conformity with its policy: *How to Interpret the Bible*, *Biblical Theology*, *Old Testament Introduction* (I and II), *The Minor Prophets*, *Elements of Biblical Hebrew I*, *Christian Dogmatics* (I and II), *The Lutheran Reformation*, *The Lutheran Church in America*, and *Pastoral Theology I*. Some courses previously prepared continue to be offered. Seventeen additional courses have been assigned for preparation. Most of these should be ready for the printer in 1958. Among these are such courses as *Parish Administration*, *The Urban Church*, *Theology of the Old Testament*, *Biblical Backgrounds*, *Epistles of John*, *The Family in the Christian Church*, *Youth Work*, *Principles of Teaching*.

Upon completion of registration, the student receives all the lessons for the course so that he may adequately plan his work. All his lesson material receives individual attention by the instructor.

Thus the Correspondence School is endeavoring to extend the facilities of the seminary beyond the campus to your desk. Leading men in the church and educators have emphasized the need of a service of this kind.

For additional information write to:

E. L. LUEKER, *Director*
Correspondence School
Concordia Seminary
St. Louis 5, Mo.