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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

THE CHALLENGE OF SECULARISM

Under this heading Dr. E. G. Homrighausen in *Theology Today* (July 1959) envisions in modern secularism a certain challenge, inasmuch as "God may be making man aware of himself as a concrete existence confronting a situation which arouses him to ask in a new way, 'What must I do to be saved?'" Whether this is true or not, we shall not decide. But in the writer's description of secularism there occur a number of statements that are worth quoting. Thus we read: "It was Gerald Heard who wrote that Newton banished God from nature, Darwin banished God from life, and Freud banished God from the soul. Other names could be added to this list who have contributed to the banishment of God from other areas of life. Nietzsche's announcement that God was dead may have been premature, but it pointed to a condition as objectively real or culturally important. And to this list may be added that of Karl Marx, who wrote God off from any consideration of history. The scientific method and the rational approach have slowly withered away ecclesiastical discipline, supernatural sanctions, and absolute norms. It is now quite popular to hear this present time referred to as 'the post-Christian age.'" — "That modern western man is interested in the secular (things) is evident on every hand. Yet there is much evidence to indicate that secularism has always been with us in one form or another. Man lives a life of perennial alienation from God; he is a pilgrim and a stranger on this earth. It is a question whether the West was ever Christian. The human situation does not become *more* secular; it is *always* secular before God and in need of justifying grace. All human cultures are secular. It is doubtful whether we should ever hope for man's alienation to be completely overcome by the Gospel and his institutions and customs to become 'Christian.' To expect this alienation to be dissolved is to deny the eschatological nature of man's situation." We cannot agree to the writer's final statements as, for example, that "secularism may yet prove to be 'God's servant.'" Secularism may finally lead to man's acknowledgement of his utter helplessness and hopelessness. But his return to God can come only through the preaching of the Gospel. Perhaps that is what the writer wants us to read between the lines.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL PATTERN

Under this heading, Prof. O. A. Piper of Princeton Theological Seminary shows in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (June 1959) that there is but one way to explain "the puzzling fact that all four gospels have the same overall pattern," opening "their narrative with the appearance of the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, then describing his public ministry and concluding with the passion and resurrection and the appearances of the risen Lord." The nativity and infancy stories in Matthew and Luke, he holds, are but the announcement of what is to follow in the composition of the Gospel. This pattern of the Gospel story is clearly found in Acts 1:21,22, where personal participation in this story forms the requirement for the election of a new member to the body of the Twelve. The agreement of the gospels is not confined to a common selection of materials and their chronological arrangement, but implies also a number of motifs, all of which occur in all four gospels, e. g. (to name only one of the many which Dr. Piper gives), the slow and gradual recognition of the messiahship of Jesus and its final revelation. All the conjectures of the critical method of Biblical studies fail to account for this remarkable agreement as, for example, the "Two-Source hypothesis," the theory of "Form Criticism," the "Myth and Ritual" theory of Bultmann, the *Urevangelium* theory, and others. However, the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel pattern is to be found in the "apostolic proclamation of Jesus." This determined both which stories about Jesus could claim a place in the church's proclamation and what was the specific contribution they made to presenting Jesus as the Christ. This Gospel pattern, moreover, shows that the Jesus whom the disciples proclaimed and confessed as Christ or Lord was the Jesus who had manifested His messiahship in and through His public ministry. It was the structure or backbone of the revelation which had come to mankind through the public ministry of Jesus and had been apprehended by the disciples. The universal adherence to this Gospel pattern proves that for the primitive church the Gospel story had supernatural kerygmatic authority.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE PROBLEM OF AMBIGUITY IN JOHN 2:4

The *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (July 1959), under this heading, seeks to remove an ambiguity which it finds in John 2:4 and, more particularly, in Christ's apparent refusal to accede to the petition of His mother and yet complying with her wish after all. Protestant exegesis has failed to find such an "ambiguity" in the passage. In our

Lord's question it has always perceived an intimation that He could not permit her to direct Him with regard to the exercise of His divine power, while in the declarative statement that His hour had not yet come to furnish wine by a miracle and so to show forth His glory, He shows His readiness to help in His own time. Mary's command to the servants (v. 5) goes far to support this interpretation. But the writer says that with Christ's reply to Mary "there remains a high degree of dissatisfaction among both exegetes and mariologists with every explanation that has been advanced," as the frequent treatment of the problem by Roman Catholics proves. After a thorough discussion of all points involved in the verse for Mariologists, he reaches the conclusion that John here perceives a divine pattern in Mary's conduct, the same pattern which he suggests by Mary's presence on Calvary. This becomes clear especially if the verse is taken as a double question in the sense: "What do you wish of me, woman? Has not my hour come?" But even if 4b is taken as an affirmation of the nonarrival of the hour, it seems to be the evangelist's distillation of a mystery which he wishes to suggest as pertaining to Mary eminently in the economy of redemption. The word *γυνή* limns Mary as the bearer in a peculiar sense of the spiritual goods of the Messianic era, which belonged to her throughout the public ministry of Jesus, and especially at the Cross, and which remains her function as long as the "woman clothed with the sun" (Ap. 12), the new Israel, continues to be in travail and in the anguish of delivery. The new Israel of the NT presents the Messiah and the spiritual benefits of the last days to the world. She does so only in function of the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus. — To this interpretation the Protestant may reply by asking: But what of the clear words of the text, which say the very opposite of such a role that Mary is to play in the economy of redemption?

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS COMPLETED

Under this heading the International Journal *New Testament Studies* (April 1959) announces that "the translation of the New Testament into current English, a project undertaken with the authority of all the major churches in Britain, except the Roman Catholic, has been completed." Made from the original Greek text, the new translation will now be revised and prepared for publication. Copies will be ready for sale in the early part of 1961. The "New Translation" will be published jointly by the Oxford and Cambridge University presses. Two editions will be prepared: a handsomely produced library volume, with the translators' notes, and a popular edition in a smaller format.

Later the new translation of the Old Testament and of the Apocrypha will appear. The purpose of the undertaking is to provide a Bible in the English of today and to eliminate the archaic language of the Authorized Version, which, it is thought, encourages in many people the feeling that the Scriptures have little relevance to our age. Experimental translations of some passages were made a number of years ago by a group of scholars at Oxford and Cambridge universities. Then the Church of Scotland made an approach to the other churches on the subject, with the result that in 1947 the churches accepted a recommendation of the conference that a completely new translation from the original text was required. The general director of the "New Translation" is Dr. C. H. Dodd of Oxford, emeritus professor of divinity at Cambridge, who is regarded as one of the most eminent New Testament scholars of today. The project is supported also by the British and Foreign Bible Society and the National Bible Society of Scotland.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BRIEF ITEMS FROM RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

Vatican City.—Pope John XXIII is planning a drastic revision of the Roman Catholic Church's 400-year-old Index of Forbidden Books in the light of modern needs and conditions, according to informed Vatican sources.

Introduced by Pope Paul IV exactly 400 years ago, the index is published by a special section of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office at present headed by Msgr. Mario Crovini. It is a list of books condemned by the Holy See because of their heretical, immoral, and otherwise objectionable nature. Roman Catholics are not allowed to read such books without valid reason and special permission.

There have been 31 editions in all of the index, the last dating back to 1948. In recent years the index has been criticized as "anachronistic" on the ground that most of the 6,000 works listed on its 508 pages are by largely unknown writers of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries whose works are no longer available. Pope Leo XIII, in 1881, removed a number of obscure works from the index, but many others remain. They include books which championed ideas of little interest today except for scholars and historians.

Critics of the index in its present form have contended that it is not sufficient warning for the faithful against objectionable printed material, and something more extensive is needed. Another point they have made is that the index is printed in Latin, with an Italian preface, and is available only in a few bookstores throughout the world. Accord-

ing to the critics, the chief need is to keep adequately abreast of contemporary works. Msgr. Crovini has admitted that he and the three priests who assist him are almost fully occupied with books by the most important contemporary Catholic authors and cannot keep pace with the world's book production.

Revision of the index, the critics have argued, would be in keeping with Pope John's determination to keep the church fully alert to modern needs and problems, specifically those involving the defense of Christian teaching and morality. Only a comparatively few books have appeared on the index since the 1948 edition. They include all the works of Andre Gide, Alberto Moravia, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Other authors whose works have been banned are Henri Dumery, Simone de Beauvoir, Dr. Ange-Louis-Marie Hesnard, Marcelle de Jouvenel, and Jacqueline Martin. By a decree of June 28, 1949, all Marxist publications were automatically forbidden.

In certain cases excommunication is involved when a Roman Catholic reads a forbidden book. The index proscription also applies to printed images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the angels, saints, or other servants of God which are not in keeping with the teachings of the church.

Pope Pius V created a Congregation of the Index in 1571 to examine books, but this body was suppressed in 1917, and its functions were taken over by the Holy Office.

Saginaw, Mich.—Establishment of a full-time presidential office for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod was approved here by delegates to the denomination's 35th biennial meeting. This means that the Rev. Oscar J. Naumann, synod president, would have to resign as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minn., and move to Milwaukee, Wis., the synod's headquarters. Pastor Naumann was re-elected at an earlier session to his fourth consecutive two-year term as head of the 350,000-member denomination.

In a resolution creating the full-time office the synod asked Mr. Naumann to request his release from his congregation "at the earliest possible date." Synod trustees were authorized to set his salary and provide adequate housing facilities.

The Wisconsin Synod conducts missions in Japan, Germany, and northern Rhodesia, and among Apache Indians in Arizona. It also is a member of the Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, which supports mission work in the Southern States, Nigeria, and Ghana.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

Nyborg, Denmark.— A recommendation that the National Lutheran Council continue its trusteeship of the Tanganyika mission field for an indefinite period was passed here by the Commission of World Mission of the Lutheran World Federation. Passed after a half-day discussion of the situation in Tanganyika, the recommendation stated that the trusteeship should be continued "while the whole matter is being studied further." The subject was brought before the commission, in session here July 29—Aug. 5, because in 1957 the LWF had asked the NLC "to continue supervision of the work in Tanganyika . . . as an agent for the CWM for a period of two years."

The missions, located in the Northern Usambara and Uzaramo fields of Tanganyika, have been under NLC administration since the early years of World War II. They were among five in East Africa which were orphaned when their ties with the home countries were cut off during and after the war. All five are now administered under the name of the LWF, the others—one in the Buhaya field, the other in the southern highland area—being under the supervision of the Swedish missionary societies.

Other war-orphaned African and Asian mission fields that the NLC had been helping support were made an LWF responsibility after its Department of World Mission was organized in the autumn of 1952.

The NLC's staff in Tanganyika now consists of about 100 Lutheran missionaries from nine European mission societies and five American Lutheran church bodies. The Rev. Oscar R. Rolander of New York, who is secretary of the NLC's Department of World Missions Cooperation, works closely with the Tanganyika missions and churches. He was present at the commission discussion.

Copenhagen.— Ways for making the best Lutheran books available in more of the world's languages were discussed here July 27—28 by 24 representatives of Lutheran publishing houses in four European countries and the United States. The publishers' conference—first of its kind ever held by Lutherans—was organized by the Lutheran World Federation after interest in having such a meeting had been expressed by the committee on LWF relations of the National Lutheran Editors' and Managers' Association of the United States.

The participants agreed here on the necessity of a greater interchange of information about new books that they publish or have under consideration. This will enable translations into other tongues to be published with a minimum of delay. Their discussions dealt

mainly with the availability of good Lutheran publications in the publishers' own languages: English, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and German. However, they gave attention also to the religious literature needs of European minority Lutheran groups, such as those in France and Italy as well as those of the younger churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The publishers declared here their desire to help especially the latter group to solve their immense problems in literature production and distribution. They noted, however, that they lacked sufficient information about the younger churches' needs and agreed that at a similar conference in the future provision should be made for representation of literature specialists from those churches.

That conference, they said, should be held within "not more than three years." Meanwhile they named a three-man continuation committee to plan the second gathering and to promote the implementation of the ideas proposed here for greater consultation and co-operation among them. The committee is expected to meet about once a year. Its members are Dr. Torrey Walker of Philadelphia, executive secretary of the official publishing agency of the United Lutheran Church in America, convenor; Mr. Allan Hofgren of the Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsens Bokförlag, Stockholm; and Pastor Robert Geisen-doerfer of Munich, representative of Bavarian Lutheran publishing agencies.