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## Theological Observer

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## THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

### THE RISE AND FALL OF POPULAR RELIGION

Under this heading Dr. A. R. Eckhardt, professor and head of department of religion at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa., in *Religion in Life* (Autumn 1959) elaborates on the thought, projected repeatedly in recent times, that "our popular piety is on the wane." He discerns three dimensions of religion: 1. *Inevitable religion*, "the permanent receptacle for the life of faith"; 2. *established religion*, "socially established religion," assuming "institutional form"; 3. *novel religion*, characterized "by its tendency to come and go with the times and seasons." "This is the sort of thing that has been in the forefront of the recent surge of religiousness." It is these "surface manifestations of religion" that "have their rise and fall." "Novelty reproduces a measure of human creativity. But the trouble with novelty is that it loses its novelty." Despite the revival of interest in religion in recent years it is dubious to assume that there has been a serious rebirth of humble surrender to God, and even more dubious to assert that there has been an awakening of the Christian faith. The alleged revival of religion has had few, if any, discernible effects on morality. "The organizational achievements of the churches are paralleled by organizational achievements in crime and racketeering. Church membership has gone up across the years; so has the divorce rate. Church-school budgets have expanded; so has juvenile delinquency." However, "all this means that Christians do not have to be disturbed if or when the surge of piety actually enters upon a period of decline. They may even welcome the recession. The question for the church is whether it will seize the peculiar opportunities of the hour to apply the gospel of the Christ, 'the same yesterday and today and forever.'"

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

### SWISS THEOLOGIANS ON ALTAR FELLOWSHIP

Under this heading the *Lutherischer Rundblick* (August 1959) p. 128, quotes from the *Jahrbuch des Martin Luther-Bundes, 8. Folge* (1957—58) a most interesting opinion on altar fellowship by two Swiss theologians, Walther Luethi and Eduard Thurneysen, which first appeared in "*Predigt—Beichte—Abendmahl*" (1957, pp. 121 f.) and reads: "But how about the possibility of altar fellowship with so decisive and even divisive a difference of the preaching [confession]? Here, it seems to us, there are two narrow ways which may be chosen in truthfulness and brotherly love. Either: we know the antitheses and



are [fully] conscious of them; indeed, we seek to bring them into clearer focus by spiritual endeavor, but then [nevertheless] proceed to the joint celebration of Holy Communion despite the existing antitheses. Communion fellowship in that case is one: despite the faith. Or: under such circumstances we forgo the joint celebration of Holy Communion, in which case this yielding may be borne as a spiritual fasting. This second way, which, as is well known, Luther and Zwingli chose, is no less than the first an act of love. Just as the first way stresses love without betraying the truth, so the second way stresses the truth without sacrificing love. But most objectionable appears to us a third way which, alas, is most popular: acting as though—a romantic bridging over, a trifling with, or even a deliberate covering of the antitheses, and an altar fellowship for the sake of peace and the preservation of appearances to outsiders. This third way serves neither the truth nor love. It is a broad way that leads to destruction." The *Lutherischer Rundblick's* attention was drawn to the quotation by Pfarrer A. Seebass of the St. Ulrich's Church, Brunswick; Seebass adds the comment: "It seems to us that the authors of the Arnoldshain Theses are in danger of going the third way. However, we regard also the first way as not permissible, for we see in it a denial of the truth which, as always, also denies true love."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

*Hancock, Mich.*—Representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were named the top officers of the National Lutheran Editors' and Managers' Association at its 46th annual meeting here. As president of their respective groups the editors' section re-elected Dr. Lorenz F. Blankenbuehler of the *Lutheran Witness*, and the managers' section elected Dr. Otto A. Dorn of Concordia Publishing House. Both men are of St. Louis, Mo., where next year's convention of the association will be held, Sept. 21—22. Mr. Dorn succeeds E. M. Laitala, manager of the Finnish Lutheran Book Concern of the Suomi Synod, which was host to the meeting here, attended by nearly 50 editors and managers.

Also re-elected by the editors were, as vice-president, Dr. Albert P. Stauderman of Philadelphia, associate editor of the *Lutheran*, weekly news magazine of the United Lutheran Church in America, and as secretary, the Rev. William H. Gentz of Minneapolis, associate editor of the *Lutheran Herald*, official weekly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The managers elected Frank Rhody as vice-president and William Pepper as secretary, both of the United Lutheran Publication House at



Philadelphia. Named again as treasurer was Birger Swenson of the Augustana Book Concern at Rock Island, Ill.

*New York.*—Official periodicals of the eight church bodies participating in the National Lutheran Council now have a combined circulation of nearly 600,000 copies per issue among the 5,362,000 members of their denominations.

The *Lutheran*, weekly news magazine of the United Lutheran Church in America, announced that it has passed the 200,000 mark, with 200,345 paid subscribers as of Oct. 1. This is said to be the largest circulation of any denominational weekly magazine in America.

The *Lutheran Standard* of the American Lutheran Church reported that it has reached 140,000. The *Lutheran Companion* of the Augustana Lutheran Church is expected to pass the 100,000 mark this fall. That figure has also been attained by the *Lutheran Herald* of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. All three periodicals are weeklies.

The biweekly *Lutheran Messenger* of the Lutheran Free Church has a circulation of 14,000, the weekly *Ansgar Lutheran* of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church 12,000, the semimonthly *Lutheran Tidings* of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church 8,000, and the semi-monthly *Lutheran Counselor* of the Suomi Synod 3,000.

The largest circulation of all Lutheran periodicals is that of the bi-weekly *Lutheran Witness* of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which has more than 500,000 subscribers.

*Hancock, Mich.*—Pope John XXIII, his call for an Ecumenical Council, and the Roman Catholic Church's wooing of Eastern Orthodoxy were cited here by a Lutheran editor as the major religious news stories of the past year.

The list was compiled by Dr. Albert P. Stauderman of Philadelphia, associate editor of the *Lutheran*, weekly news magazine of the United Lutheran Church in America. His summary of "The Year in the Churches" was a feature of the 46th annual meeting of the National Lutheran Editors' and Managers' Association, held here Sept. 23—24.

Other top stories in religion listed by Dr. Stauderman included: the tensions between church and state in East Europe, the issue of a Roman Catholic for president, court action on prayers and Bible reading in public schools, Sunday closing laws, growth in church membership, the rise of liturgical movements, and religious reaction to Premier Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the United States.

The editors' section of the association discussed but took no formal action on the implications surrounding the possible candidacy of a Roman Catholic for president of the United States. The feeling of the



majority seemed to be that presidential candidates should be judged solely on their qualifications for the office without regard to their religious affiliation. This attitude was summed up in the observation of one editor who declared that "rather than endanger the great fabric of freedom in this country, which includes the Bill of Rights, we ought to be willing to see a Roman Catholic nominated or elected as president."

The editors agreed that they have an obligation to acquaint their readers with the claims, teachings, and principles of the Roman Catholic Church in the event a Catholic is nominated for the presidency.

A report on the Foundation for Reformation Research was given the editors by Dr. Alfred O. Fuerbringer, president of Concordia Seminary at St. Louis, Mo., and chairman of the board of the foundation. Financed largely by a five-year \$75,000 grant from the Aid Association for Lutherans at Appleton, Wis., the foundation was launched in 1957 to collect and preserve historical source material pertaining to the Protestant Reformation and related areas of the history of the Christian Church. Dr. Fuerbringer said the foundation is at work both in this country and abroad to unearth and microfilm pertinent documents for a permanent, comprehensive collection of material for use of scholars and students of the Reformation.

At a joint dinner session the editors and managers were addressed by Dr. Donald G. Yerg, a meteorologist in the Department of Physics at Michigan Tech. He discussed the impact of science on theology, and vice versa, and stressed the necessity of both.

*Winnipeg.*—Exploratory conversations "looking toward one Lutheran Church in Canada" have been temporarily suspended, pending completion of current merger negotiations among parent bodies in the United States. The action to suspend the unity discussions, held annually for the past five years, was taken at a two-day meeting here, Sept. 2—3. The 45 delegates from seven church bodies voted instead to hold doctrinal discussions during the next few years, a move that was urged by representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Doctrinal talks will be planned by a steering committee consisting of the Rev. Otto A. Olson, Jr., of Saskatoon, president of the Canada Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Church; Dr. Karl Holfeld of Regina, president of the Canada District of the American Lutheran Church; Dr. Earl J. Treusch of Winnipeg, executive director of the Canadian Lutheran Council; and the Rev. L. W. Koehler of Winnipeg, president of the Manitoba-Saskatchewan District of the Missouri Synod.



Augustana's delegation to the meeting here had been instructed to ask that the exploratory conversations be changed into merger negotiations "at the earliest possible date" and that meetings be held twice annually. It was soon apparent, however, that the group was not prepared for such a move at present. This was emphasized in a panel on the subject "What steps need to be taken in order to change these exploratory conversations into official merger negotiations, according to the polity of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod."

Dr. Albert Schwermann of Concordia College in Edmonton explained that permission must be received from the Missouri Synod's Committee on Lutheran Unity, but that he would not favor such a request before doctrinal agreement has been reached among the various bodies.

Dr. Schwermann, who is president of the Lutheran Church — Canada, formed last year by the four Districts of the Missouri Synod in Canada, said his group already had authority to meet with others and discuss doctrine. Rather than one Lutheran Church in Canada, he said the direction "finding favor" among Missouri pastors, judging by three pastoral conferences he had recently attended, was that of an autonomous Canadian Church affiliated with the Missouri Synod.

Another view was given by the Rev. Arne Kristo of Port Credit, a suburb of Toronto, who said that a gathering of church council members of Missouri congregations in the Toronto area had expressed the hope that the goal of one Lutheran Church in Canada would be pursued.

*River Forest, Ill.*—The Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church has become the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. The change in name was voted at the 38th biennial convention of the denomination, which has 20,000 members in 70 congregations, most of them east of the Mississippi. It was organized in 1902.

Dr. Paul Rafaj of Olyphant, Pa., elected to his sixth consecutive two-year term as president of the church, said the action was motivated by the fact that "in our church work we are no longer limited to Slovak-speaking people."

In changing its name the synod followed the lead of two other bodies that belong to the four-member Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Last year the Norwegian Synod became the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and earlier this year the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States became the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Also associated with the Synodical Conference is The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

*Springfield, Ohio.*—A famous name rose again from the pages of history when Wittenberg College changed its name to Wittenberg



University on Sept. 1. In 1815 Germany's Wittenberg University of Reformation fame went out of existence as an individual entity when it merged with the University of Halle. The institution, at which Martin Luther taught, had been founded in 1502.

Wittenberg College was founded in 1845 and has functioned as a small university through most of its 115-year history. A theological seminary has always been part of the college, and graduate studies were established in 1883. The institution was reorganized in 1957 with a small university structure of five units—College of Arts and Sciences, School of Professional Studies, School of Community Education, Theological School, and Graduate Studies Program.

The change of name from Wittenberg College to Wittenberg University recognizes the structure under which the school has operated since its founding and emphasizes the objectives specifically adopted two years ago.

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

*St. Paul, Minn.*—Minnesota's Roman Catholic elementary and secondary schools "saved" state's taxpayers about \$37,510,751 during the 1958—59 school year, according to the *St. Paul Catholic Bulletin*. It added that if the state had to replace the church-operated educational facilities today, the cost of doing so would be around \$190,391,630.

The figures are based on cost estimates from the Minnesota state department of education and enrollment figures from the *Official Catholic Directory*, the newspaper said. During the 1958—59 school year, 114,242 students attended the 319 Catholic parochial and private grade schools in the state and 18,899 attended the 69 Catholic high schools.

*Kalida, Ohio.*—Several changes were made in the Kalida Elementary School here as a result of "religious teaching" protests lodged with the State Board of Education in Columbus. Superintendent John Phillips of the Kalida local school district removed a crucifix from a hallway and changed the geography and history textbooks. Two Protestant mothers had complained to the board that the school had displayed the crucifix and used textbooks which presented Roman Catholic interpretation of subjects.

The institution, also known as St. Michael's School, has been operating since 1948. Mr. Phillips said the protests were the first lodged since that time. "Of approximately 32 Protestant parents of pupils in our school, only a few are causing trouble because they like to be heard," he said. There are 382 children enrolled this year.



Some Kalida parents told the state board that their children, first-graders, were being given Roman Catholic religious instruction by teachers who are Catholic nuns. Mr. Phillips said that the 11 teaching nuns are Sisters of Divine Providence of Covington, Ky., and teach religion only in special classes after the regular hours.

He pointed out that five have masters degrees, three have at least five years of teaching training, and the other three have bachelor's degrees. Two lay teachers are employed. "We are operating the school by all the standards necessary and prescribed by the state," he said. "We have done away with any prayers in the school, and religion is not a part of our schedule."

A Catholic parish, St. Michael's, built the school and rents the building to the State Board of Education for \$8,000 a year. Mr. Phillips said he welcomed an investigation by the State Board of Education and branded "religious teaching" charges as false. "We are not asking anyone to take religion," he said.

*Philadelphia.*— Pennsylvania's ten-year-old law requiring Bible reading in the schools, as well as the widespread practice of compulsory classroom recitation of the Lord's Prayer, was ruled unconstitutional by a special three-judge Federal Court here.

Immediately after the decision C. Brewster Rhoads, attorney for the School District of Abington Township, defendant in the case, said he would recommend that the district file an appeal with the United States Supreme Court.

Holding that the law "amounts to religious instruction or a promotion of religious education," a violation of the First and the Fourteenth Amendment, the Federal Court declared that the combination of the Bible reading followed by recitation of the Lord's prayer gives a "devotional and religious aspect" to the morning exercises.

Dr. Charles H. Boehm, state superintendent of public instruction, said he would consult with the State Attorney General before issuing any instructions to the schools on the decision. He said it was possible that the state would join in an appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court.

The superintendent called both outlawed practices "an appropriate introduction to the school day" and expressed the hope that "the courts will not take away every vestige of the recognition of a Supreme Being."

Composing the Federal Court which handed down the decision were Chief Judge John L. Biggs, Jr., of the Third United States Circuit and District Judges William H. Kirkpatrick and C. William Kraft, Jr.

"If the study of the Bible as an artistic work, a treasury of moral



truths, or historical text, can be separated from doctrinal matter or religiousness," they ruled, "we should find no objection. But the manner in which the Bible is employed by the legislative statute does not effect this division."

"The daily reading of the Bible buttressed with the authority of the State, and more importantly to children, backed with the authority of their teachers," the judges continued, "can hardly do less than inculcate or promote the inculcation of religious doctrine" in children's minds.

Concluding that the compulsory reading of the Bible "prohibits the free exercise of religion," the judges also said, "It makes no difference that the religious 'truth' inculcated may vary from one child to another. It also makes no difference that a sense of religion may not be instilled."

The American Jewish Congress, meanwhile, which had filed a "friend of the court" brief in the case, hailed the decision as a "major victory for religious freedom." It had supported the two Montgomery County parents—Edward L. Schempp and Sidney G. Schempp—who filed the petition which resulted in the court's ruling.

The law called for the reading of "at least ten verses from the Holy Bible—at the opening of each public school on each school day, by the teacher in charge." The two complaining parents charged that by requiring school children to commit a devotional act, the state was violating freedom of religion and church-state separation.

They noted that the First Amendment prohibits Congress from curtailing freedom of religion and the Fourteenth Amendment extends this prohibition to the state.