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## Theological Observer

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# THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

## BARMEN-REDIVIVUS

Under this heading *Theology Today* (October 1959) reminds its readers that in 1934 about 140 delegates from 19 German territorial churches — Lutheran, Reformed, United — met in Barmen to form the National Synod of the Confessing Church. Out of that meeting came a militant declaration of faith against National Socialism. At the 25th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration, held recently, Bishop Otto Dibelius stated that the situation in East Germany today is the same as it was for all Germany in 1934. He therefore called for an appreciation of the Declaration as a living document applicable to the East German situation. Thus Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl of the East German Democratic Republic has made it quite clear in a recent address that atheism is to be the official religion of that state. Weddings, funerals, and the naming of children are conducted in the spirit of atheism. Christian young people face a difficult future in education and work if they do not yield to the ceremony of *Jugendweihe* (youth dedication) instead of being confirmed by the church. Competent observers report that while everyone celebrates Christmas, the real meaning of it is denatured. Gifts are exchanged, family reunions are held, trees are displayed in schools and even in public places, but the celebration is socialistic and secular. The hardest blow for German Protestants is the recent move of the state to transform the famous Luther Memorial Hall at Wittenberg into a museum of revolutionary propaganda. Here is where Luther lived and worked; here are deposited his books and manuscripts. However, church attendance remains about the same as heretofore, though baptisms and weddings have decreased, while contributions have increased. Many youths are still unconfirmed, while some pastors are

working at secular jobs to supplement their salaries.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

## REVELATION AS EVENT

Under this heading Dr. J. N. Thomas of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va., in *Interpretation* (October 1959) offers an excellent review of Dr. J. K. S. Reid's *The Authority of Scripture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958. 286 pp. \$4.50). The writer was interested especially in some of the comments which Dr. Thomas appends to his review. He thus writes: "The reviewer comes to the end of Reid's book . . . with the feeling that some of its fundamental ideas, though much in vogue for the past forty years, stand in need of careful re-examination. The first and perhaps most fundamental of these is the assumption that revelation, being pure event or encounter, does not involve the transmission of truth about God. . . . When impartially examined, does not revelation turn out to be both event and transmission of truth? Events are revelatory only when *interpreted* [italics in text] as acts of God, and interpretation involves the receiving of truths and the formulation of judgments *about* (italics in text) these acts. . . . The life of Jesus of Nazareth was an historic event, but some thought it to mean no more than that John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets had appeared. The event became revelatory only when men joined Peter in affirming, 'Thou art the Christ.' But this was a statement of a *truth about Jesus* [italics in text], even one susceptible of propositional formulation, and which Jesus Himself said was revealed by His Father in heaven. If revelation is only event and not the transmission of truth, either Jesus or the report of the synoptists was wrong . . . so [also] we need a re-examination of the cognate and widely used charac-



terization of the Bible as the 'witness' to revelation . . . how does, how can the Bible witness to God and his acts except through conveying information and stating truths *about* [italics in text] them? Does it simply point to Christ, as does the finger of John the Baptist in Grunewald's painting? Does it not also point the Christ to whom the finger points and do this by means of giving information and stating truths? In the second place, to say that the Bible possesses an authoritative 'intrinsic quality' because composed by 'special men,' that is, the *first* [italics in text] witnesses, is closely analogous to saying that it is normative because written by inspired men. . . . In thus sharing largely the traditional theory that the Bible is an authoritative book Reid might well have adopted also the traditional view that God, through the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*, brings about 'our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof.' Instead, he inconsistently advances the existentialist view that the Bible "*becomes*" [quotes and italics in text] authoritative (the Word of God) when God sovereignly appoints it as 'the means through which (He) addresses men.' The genius of this view is that the Bible is . . . like a telephone, which is one means of communication among others, but which does not itself contain that which is communicated."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

IN HONOR OF SUPERINTENDENT  
HEINRICH MARTIN, D. D.

The *Lutherischer Rundblick* (November 1959) honors by a special contribution the faithful ministry of Dr. H. Martin, who on May 10, 1959, reached the age of 75 years. Dr. Martin is now retired, but he was a consecrated pastor for nearly 50 years, superintendent of the Hessian Diocese of the Independent Ev.-Luth. Church for 30, and superintendent of the Ev.-Luth. Independent Church for 7 years. It was largely through

his efforts that this church joined the federation of Lutheran Free Churches. As a gifted writer he contributed many valuable articles to confessing Lutheran periodicals and read numerous essays at the pastoral conferences of the Free Church group. In view of his outstanding merits Concordia Seminary of St. Louis, Mo., recently conferred upon him the well-deserved degree of doctor of divinity. The *Lutherischer Rundblick* characterizes Dr. Martin as a sound and thorough *Schrifttheologe* whose theology was deeply rooted in the Scriptures and oriented to the official confessions of the Lutheran Church. This fact the editorial proves by quoting in part several articles which Dr. Martin has written. The following brief statements are taken from a contribution of his to the *Lutherische Blätter* (No. 10, 1959).

Why is it that today the theology that characterizes itself as Lutheran, often makes a painful impression? Why is it, for example, that it does not confess with joyous conviction the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but rather accords to the Sacrament the character of a *sacrifice* [propitiatory], and not that merely of a thankoffering which the Sacrament [indeed] deserves. May not, in the last analysis, the fault be due to [human] ingratitude which does not desire to receive anything from God as a free gift, but recognizes only what it elaborates itself in the sweat of its theological face and so places ahead of the eternal Scripture truths its own theological findings?

Toward the end of his article he warns against unionistic church connections and writes:

The false ties with which the Lutheran Church permits itself to be bound, will shackle also its theology and silence its tongue. We, therefore, must adhere to the Lutheran Church in order that God may continue to grant us a theology which is able to illuminate the church in the future and replenish its ministers with a convincing witness to the Cross of Christ, for the Cross is the Alpha and Omega of Lutheran theology. It is a *theologia*



*crucis* just as the church is an *ecclesia crucis*. But the *theologia crucis* is always a theology of verity, conviction, and joy.

At the Bad Boll theological conferences Dr. Martin invariably proved himself a modest, dignified, and sagacious counselor whose advice was listened to with deepest respect.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

*Chicago.*—Representatives of the National Lutheran Council and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod agreed here to hold their long-awaited exploratory talks on inter-Lutheran relations at Chicago, in July. The agenda of the conversations, expected to last three days, will consist of several subjects devoted to the doctrinal basis of co-operation between the two groups.

A co-operative agency for eight Lutheran denominations, the NLC represents 5,362,000 members. The Missouri Synod, not an NLC affiliate, has 2,315,000 communicants.

Agreement on the meeting's time and place was reached by the NLC 15-member Executive Committee and five Missouri Synod leaders. They decided that a detailed résumé of present co-operative activities would be compiled by the two groups to provide the foundation for their joint exploration of the doctrinal basis undergirding existing relationships.

Both the NLC and the Missouri Synod will form committees of theologians to prepare preliminary statements on the doctrinal questions involved in co-operative efforts. These will be used as the starting point in the July talks.

Attendance at that meeting will be limited to the council's Executive Committee, plus a few theologians as consultants, and a group of similar size or smaller from the Missouri Synod.

Dr. Paul C. Empie, NLC executive director, gave a partial review of activities shared

by his agency and the Missouri Lutherans. He said these include the Lutheran Refugee Service, Lutheran World Relief, and Lutheran Service Commission, which operates service centers in this country and overseas for members of the armed forces.

*Geneva.*—The 16th-century German reformer Martin Luther, who was born 476 years ago Nov. 10, now has 1,834 descendants, according to a new genealogical book issued by a German publisher.

*New York.*—A permanent Lutheran Immigration Service will be inaugurated on Jan. 1, 1960, as the joint agency of the National Lutheran Council and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The LIS will combine the present activities of the Lutheran Refugee Service, which is also a co-operative effort of the NLC and the Missouri Synod, and the service to immigrants of the Council's Division of Welfare.

The new agency will be administered by a joint supervisory committee of seven members, five appointed by the NLC's Welfare Division and two by the Missouri Synod's Board of Social Welfare. A director will be elected by the committee at its first meeting early in January.

A budget of \$99,073 has been set for the first year of operation in 1960. An agreement approved by the executive committee of the council and the board of directors of the Missouri Synod provides that the former contribute 70 per cent and the latter 30 per cent to the annual budget of the agency.

The agreement, which may be terminated by either party on two years' notice, was negotiated for the NLC by Dr. Henry J. Whiting, executive secretary of the Division of Welfare, and for the Missouri Synod by Dr. Henry F. Wind, executive secretary of the Board of Social Welfare.

One of the major tasks of the Lutheran Immigration Service will be to complete residual responsibilities growing out of the



Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and the Refugee Relief Act of 1953.

Under this emergency legislation the NLC's Lutheran Resettlement Service, operative from late 1948 to 1953, and the joint Lutheran Refugee Service, functioning from 1953 through 1959, helped more than 59,000 displaced persons and refugees to resettle in the United States. Aid has been given in 1959 to nearly 1,000 refugees arriving under various quotas and special laws.

The new agency will arrange reception services at ports of entry for incoming immigrants and refer them to congregations for spiritual ministry. It will also plan and coordinate services to be rendered by the churches and Lutheran welfare agencies for the protection, guidance, and council of immigrants.

Other functions of the LIS will be to give information and counsel as requested on immigration procedures and problems, to study the need for, and results of, immigration and interpret these findings to the churches, and to represent the position of the churches on immigration to governmental and voluntary agencies.

The Lutheran Immigration Service is expected to work closely with the Lutheran World Federation, through its Department of Lutheran World Service, on matters of joint interest in behalf of immigration of individuals, families, and groups of people.

*St. Louis.*—The Board for Missions in North and South America of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod announced here that it has applied for membership in the Division of Home Missions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Approval of the application, it was reported in New York, is being recommended by the Home Missions Division to the membership committee of the National Council's General Board.

The Missouri Synod board said it voted

to participate in the NCCCUSA Division "to the extent our principles permit." Such participation, it was noted, does not imply denominational membership in the National Council.

Relationships of varying character are maintained with several units of the National Council, including its departments of Religious Liberty, Social Welfare, Stewardship and Benevolence, Church and Economic Life, and Worship and the Arts in the Division of Christian Life and Work; the Division of Foreign Missions, Church World Service, and the Broadcasting and Film Commission.

The Missouri Synod has insisted in the past upon "doctrinal agreement" before participating in joint services of public worship with other denominations or in the conduct of jointly controlled mission projects. Denominational executives asserted no change in policy was contemplated or involved in the application of the mission board.

Dr. William H. Hillmer, executive secretary of the Missouri Synod board, explained that the Division of Home Missions of the National Council "is a co-operative enterprise, which emphasizes information exchange and research in addition to providing a channel of co-operation for denominational boards that want to use it and to the extent each wants to make use of it."

Dr. Hillmer denied a statement emanating from sources outside the Synod that the application of the board represents "an apparent reversal" of previous policy. He termed the action an example of "developing co-operation where well-defined principle makes well-defined co-operation possible."

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

*St. Louis, Mo.*—Fourteen archbishops and bishops, more than 225 priests, and official representatives of 210 colleges and universities, including 19 presidents, were among



those attending the dedication of the Pius XII Memorial Library here.

Built on the campus of St. Louis University, the \$4,250,000 structure houses more than 11 million microfilm pages of hand-written manuscripts from the Vatican Library and the university's own collection of nearly 600,000 volumes.

*Stockholm.* — The Swedish government has turned down an application by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) for permission to photograph (State Lutheran) Church of Sweden parish records of the last 70 years for purposes of proxy baptism of the dead.

Swedish Church records dated before 1890 have been photographed for the past 10 years by the Genealogical Society of Utah, an auxiliary of the Mormon body.

Members of the group believe that people who died without knowledge of Mormonism may be made adherents of that religion through baptism by proxy. For this reason they gather information about deceased relatives of living Mormons. Scandinavian Lutheran parish registers not only record religious ceremonies but also contain the official civil rolls of births, marriages, and deaths.

Last year opposition by Church of Denmark clergy forced the government of that country to defer enforcement of a directive requiring them to submit current parish records to regional offices for photographing by Mormons. A committee comprising both state church and government representatives was appointed to study the matter further.

*Boston.* — Any nation that resorts to birth control to settle problems of overpopulation is doomed to self-destruction, Auxiliary Bishop-designate Thomas J. Riley of Boston declared here.

Writing in the *Pilot*, official archdiocesan newspaper, he said any such nation also

would be subject to decimation by more numerous surrounding countries. "It is not without significance," he noted, "that the one nation which is frowning upon contraception is Red China. The Chinese government is striving to make its nation a world power by sheer weight of numbers."

"The Catholic Church has always taught, and will continue to teach," he added, "that contraception is essentially and unchangeably in violation of the law of God. Meanwhile married people must be urged to face the problem of overpopulation in their own families by means which are in accord with the fundamental principles of morality."

Bishop-designate Riley said the purposes of married life must be looked at from a point of view "more elevated than that of mere sexual gratification." The pleasures of marital intercourse, he said, "must be sought within the limits imposed for it by the law of God. The remedy for the problem of overpopulation is the constructive social planning which will follow the law of God."

*Minneapolis, Minn.* — A Lutheran church official here questioned the wisdom of having PTA meetings open with prayer, since, he said, such an organization is so closely connected with tax-supported public schools.

The Rev. S. E. Lee of Hawley, Minn., treasurer of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (formerly the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church), stated his views in a letter to the *Minneapolis Star*.

"A more serious thing in this matter of the opening prayer is the implication it has for a Christian," he wrote. "If I were asked to offer the prayer suggested by the organization, I would have to refuse because this prayer purposely eliminates the name of Christ in order not to offend those who do not believe in Him.

"Under these conditions sincere Christians cannot join in praying this prayer. To do so, would amount to denial of the One who gave



His life to save them and humbly asks that prayers be offered in His name."

A conflict over the PTA prayer has arisen in the PTA of Westwood School in Bloomington, Minneapolis suburb. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Franz unsuccessfully sought to have the prayer dropped.

The prayer, they said, not only excludes humanists and atheists, "but it violates the beliefs of those religions that do not adhere to a monotheistic doctrine and those individuals who while belonging to religious organizations do not as members have to accept the concept of a supreme deity."

Meanwhile a second Bloomington PTA, the Portland junior high school group, has decided that its members should say the prayer approved by the national PTA in unison before each meeting.

*Tallahassee, Fla.*—Public schools may be used as temporary places of worship during hours when school is not in session, the Florida Supreme Court ruled here.

The ruling upheld a Duval Circuit Court (Jacksonville) decision which dismissed a complaint of a group of Protestant churches and individuals against the Duval Board of School Trustees for allowing a Roman Catholic church group to use the Southside Estates Elementary School as a temporary place of worship.

Plaintiffs argued that permitting religious groups to use the school building was an indirect contribution of public assistance and thus violated the state constitution.

But the Supreme Court disagreed. In a unanimous opinion, written by Justice Campbell Thornal, the court ruled that a school board of trustees "has the power to exercise a reasonable discretion to permit the use of school buildings during nonschool hours for any legal assembly, which includes religious meetings."

The court added that use of the buildings would be subject to judicial review "should such discretion be abused to the point that

it would be construed as a contribution of public funds" aiding a particular religion or religious group.

The Supreme Court also noted that the protesting groups argued that any benefit to a religious group from the use of public property is in violation of the state constitution. To follow this argument literally, the court said, would lead to "almost absurd results."

*New York.*—An American Lutheran churchman visited Russia as one of five representatives of the World Council of Churches.

Dr. O. Frederick Nolde is a member of the delegation which left Geneva, Switzerland, on Dec. 1 to spend three and a half weeks in the Soviet Union as guests of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

As director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Dr. Nolde is an associate general secretary of the World Council, with offices in New York. He is also dean of the Graduate School of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

In his CCIA post Dr. Nolde closely follows the work of the United Nations. He is particularly concerned with human rights, religious liberty, and world peace. He has frequently been present at international conferences in Europe and has visited church and governmental officials in Asia.

The delegation's itinerary, arranged by the Moscow Patriarchate, started with a four-day visit in Moscow and was to include a four-day visit in Soviet Armenia and shorter stopovers in Riga, Kiev, and Leningrad.

It was expected that at least two formal meetings would be held with Russian Orthodox Church leaders in Moscow and the visitors would also talk with leaders of the Lutheran, Baptist, and Armenian churches in the Soviet Union.

Purpose of the visit is to continue the "get acquainted" process, which got under way when two representatives of the patri-



archate spent four weeks visiting the World Council's headquarters in Geneva.

*New York.*—Russian libraries have Bibles, but they are not accessible to the ordinary Soviet citizen, the American Bible Society's Advisory Council was told at its 41st annual meeting here.

All religious books in Soviet libraries are classified as research material available to "specialists" only, meaning that only a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church can get such a volume for reading, said Miss Barbara Wolfe, who served as a Russian-speaking guide at the U. S. Moscow Fair last summer.

Miss Wolfe, who was formerly connected with the Free Europe Exile Relations in Paris and now works for the State Department, added that, nevertheless, the Bible has not been forgotten in Russia and is "desperately wanted."

As proof she cited her own experience with the "disappearing Bible" at the Moscow Fair. Miss Wolfe served with the special book display which contained a limited collection of Russian and English Bibles among some 8,000 other books published in the U. S.

She recalled that in a week or so all the Bibles were gone, including those in English and other languages. Then a rumor was started in Moscow that "the Americans are giving away free Bibles," she said, "and there was a constant demand for Bibles which were no longer available."

"The American Bible Society came to our rescue with a shipment of some 50 Russian Bibles and a new collection of English editions," Miss Wolfe said.

She also said that the question of religion was frequently brought up in her often prolonged discussions with young students at the fair.

"Religion is not a dead issue in the Soviet Union, and the best way to keep it alive is to distribute Bibles," she concluded. "If each American going to Russia as a tourist would take only one Bible with him and hand it to a stranger on the street, great things could be accomplished."

*Washington, D. C.*—Dr. Paul C. Empie of New York asserted here that Lutherans, as the third largest Protestant group in the United States, are being taken more seriously than ever before by other denominations.

Speaking to 47 Lutheran theological students from 13 countries, Dr. Empie attributed the rising influence of the Lutheran Church to its Americanization. He said national origins are being abandoned and the churches are entering the mainstream of American life.

"The day of usefulness of isolation is over," he added.

Strong impetus to this development has been given by Lutheran mergers now in progress, he said, one bringing together those of Norwegian, Danish, and German background, the other uniting those of Swedish, Danish, Finnish, and German ancestry.

The seminarians heard Dr. Empie, executive director of the National Lutheran Council, at the beginning of a five-day overseas Lutheran theological students' conference sponsored by the NLC, Nov. 25—29. The first two days were spent in the nation's capital and the final three on the campus of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa.

Purpose of the conference was to discuss the work and mission of the Lutheran Church in America. Dr. Empie spoke on what the mergers between Lutheran bodies mean and what lessons can be drawn from them.