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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

HISTORY AND THE FREQUENCY OF COMMUNION RECEPTION

In the *Lutheran Quarterly* (November 1959) Dr. T. G. Tappert, under the given heading, publishes a helpful overview of the history of Communion attendance in the Christian Church. In the early church there was weekly (Acts 20:7) and perhaps even daily (Acts 2:46) observance of the Lord's Supper, though it is not clear whether "breaking bread" always refers to the Eucharist. There is evidence that this custom continued into the second and third centuries. The *Didache*, dating from about the middle of the second century, exhorts Christians: "On every Lord's Day . . . come together and break bread and give thanks." By the fourth century the frequency of Communion declined sharply. Augustine reports that by his time the frequency of both public observance and individual reception was "different in different places and countries." To arrest the tendency on the part of the people to avoid Communion altogether the Council of Agde (A. D. 506) required that people should commune at least three times a year: at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. By 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council made "once a year," namely, at Easter, mandatory as the minimum requirement of Communion reception. Following Luther's suggestion, various church orders recommended Communion attendance "about four times a year," or "at least four times a year," while others advised it "at least once or twice a year." To this day reception of Communion four times a year remains the custom among more churchly people in some Lutheran congregations in Europe. However, the average among European churchgoing Lutherans is more nearly twice a year, while more than half of the nominal Lutherans in Europe do

not commune at all. The record of Lutherans in North America certainly equals and probably exceeds that of their churchgoing brethren abroad.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Religion in Life (Winter, 1959-60), under this heading, offers a symposium on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in which it considers this basic tenet of the Christian faith from six different points of view. Cyril C. Richardson of Union Theological Seminary thinks that the Trinitarian pattern speaks inadequately of God in view of His "absolute-related nature." Claude Welch of the Yale University Divinity School defends the Trinitarian formula, though he seems to come quite close to modalism. But he rightly concludes that "every formulation of this truth [the Trinity] is transcended by the mystery here expressed." The four other articles scan the dogma from other weighty points of view. The symposium is prefaced by an "Editorial," written by Prof. T. A. Kantonen of Hamma Divinity School, which points out a number of essentials that one must keep in mind in connection with the Trinitarian teaching. He thus writes: "While one may be in danger of losing his soul by denying it [the Trinity], he is in danger of losing his wits in trying to understand it." Again: "Fortunately salvation does not depend upon the ability to understand a doctrine which a theologian can describe only as 'essential paradox.' Yet all the writers agree with Dr. Richardson that 'we are here dealing not with a mere intellectual abstraction, but with the very foundations of Christian piety.'" Or: "The doctrine of the Trinity is the whole gospel in epitome. As Barth insists, it is the Church's answer to the life-and-death question of the genuine-

ness of God's revelation in Christ. Thought forms have changed, but faith in Jesus Christ as 'very God of very God,' whose abiding presence is made real through the Holy Spirit, is as essential to the Church today as [it was] to the Nicene Fathers."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

Chicago.—Representatives of four uniting Lutheran bodies agreed here to name their proposed denomination the "Lutheran Evangelical Church in America."

The name was chosen by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, which also approved June 1962 as the tentative target date for establishment of the new church of more than three million members.

In reference to the chosen name the nomenclature committee's report pointed out that "the order of the words provides a different 'twist' in the usual processional of words in a Lutheran Church body name." Therefore it added, "Little legal difficulty should be encountered in its use."

The committee further stressed the ecumenical character of the approved name. "We are a part of the larger Evangelical Church of the Christian world, but still a part," it said. "We are a *Lutheran* part of the Evangelical Church.

"By this name we are emphasizing our partnership in the greater Church rather than putting the emphasis upon one part of the Church. Such emphasis would recognize our place as being a part of, but not the whole, of the Church in the world which treasures evangelical truth."

The committee also noted that "the words 'Lutheran' and 'Evangelical,' seemingly desired by the majority of the membership of our Churches, are both found here."

Selection of a name for the proposed new church had been held in abeyance by the JCLU because its legal counsel had advised against the choice of a title "deceptively

similar" to that of any other body. The 16 existing Lutheran denominations in America have already employed most possible juxtapositions of the words *American*, *Lutheran*, and *Evangelical*.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the name of the body that will merge next year with the American Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. After 10 years of negotiations they will form "The American Lutheran Church" at Minneapolis next April 22—24.

Consummation of the two mergers will reduce the number of Lutheran bodies from 16 to 11. The "Lutheran Evangelical Church in America," with 3,000,000 members, will be the largest, followed by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, with 2,315,000 and The American Lutheran Church, with 2,250,000.

Chicago.—A study of the future setup of theological seminaries in the new Lutheran Evangelical Church in America was authorized here by representatives of the four church bodies expected to enter the merger.

Preparation of the blueprint for theological education was voted by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity for the United, Augustana, Finnish Evangelical, and American Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

The commission instructed its committee on seminaries, headed by Dr. P. O. Bersell, president emeritus of the Augustana Church, to report at the next meeting of JCLU. It will be held in New York Feb. 18—20.

The committee was asked to draw up "a provisional table of alignment of synods and theological seminaries to be in effect during the first biennium of the new Church."

The committee was also requested to prepare "a projection for the future of the number and location of the theological seminaries of the new Church." The analysis will be presented to the constituting convention of the LECA, tentatively set for June 1962, and then will be referred to the Board of Theological Education. The board is to construct

a master plan for the future of seminaries in the new church.

Dr. Bersell told the commissioners that "the Church should exercise the greatest possible control of seminaries, both as to distribution and location."

"As goes the seminary, so goes the Church," he said.

After approval of the study by the JCLU, Augustana withdrew its earlier request that the commission adopt the principle of a maximum of five theological seminaries in the new Church.

The ULCA has 10 seminaries and the other three bodies one each. The 13 schools, it was reported, have 1,132 undergraduates and 119 faculty members. Their combined properties are valued at \$8,000,000 and their endowments total \$3,695,000. Contributions received from the churches, synods, and individuals amount to more than \$850,000 annually.

On the issue of theological education there was approved last year by the JCLU a compromise agreement under which supervision of the seminaries will be shared by the central body and the synods.

As now proposed, responsibility for ownership and administration of seminaries is placed with the synods, as is now the case in the ULCA. However, broad powers and duties are vested in the Board of Theological Education of the new Church.

The board is to recommend the location of seminaries, establish curricular standards, provide certain financial support, sponsor scholarships, counsel in the selection of teaching personnel, nominate some members of governing boards, and encourage post-graduate and other specialized studies.

Chicago.—*The Lutheran* has been selected as the name for the periodical of the new church body to be known as the Lutheran Evangelical Church in America.

The name of the church paper was voted here by the Joint Commission on Lutheran

Unity, which represents the United, Augustana, Finnish Evangelical, and American Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

The Lutheran is the name of the ULCA's weekly magazine. With more than 200,000 subscribers, it is said to have the largest circulation of any Protestant weekly in America.

Chicago.—Leaders of districts in the thirty synods that are expected to compose the new Lutheran Evangelical Church in America will be known as "deans."

Preference for the term "dean" rather than president to describe the presiding officer of the district was expressed here by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity.

Under the proposed constitution for synods in the new Church, districts to be established in each synod will contain between 20 and 40 congregations.

The leader of the new Church and the top officials of its proposed 30 synods will be known as "president."

Chicago.—Membership of the proposed Lutheran Evangelical Church in America in four ecumenical national and international organizations was recommended here by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity.

They are the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, National Council of Churches, and National Lutheran Council.

The commission represents the four Lutheran bodies who are uniting to form the 3,000,000-member Lutheran Evangelical Church. These are the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augustana Lutheran Church, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Suomi Synod), and United Lutheran Church in America.

Three of the four, the American Evangelical, Augustana, and United are now members of the four interdenominational organizations. The Suomi Synod belongs only to the NLC and the LWF.

In other actions the 46-member commis-

sion approved a revised preamble to the new organization's constitution. It reads:

"We, members of the Church of Christ, desiring to be blessed together with Word and Sacrament and to unite in the common confession, defense and propagation of our faith in Jesus Christ our Saviour, do hereby adopt this constitution and solemnly pledge ourselves to be governed by its provisions."

The commissioners also agreed on a constitutional language for provisions governing baptized, confirmed, and communing membership.

Child members in the merged church are defined as those who have been baptized and are a part of the family of the congregation, but who have not yet been confirmed.

Adult or confirmed members will be those who have been duly received into communicant membership of the congregation by adult Baptism, confirmation, certificate of transfer from another Lutheran congregation, or reaffirmation of faith.

Four merger documents are expected to receive their final approval by the commission at its next meeting in New York Feb. 18—20. These are the new church's constitution and bylaws, a synod constitution, and a model constitution for local congregations.

A tentative timetable calls for the four Lutheran groups to act on adoption of the union plans by August 1961 and to hold their final conventions and the merged church's constituting convention by June 30, 1962.

Stockholm.—Press organs in this country have reacted negatively to a proposed change in law that would deprive the Church of Sweden Assembly of its veto power over state legislation involving the affairs of that church.

The proposal has been approved by an official commission which is making a long-range study of the national constitution and which is expected to bring in a recommended revision in 1961 or 1962.

To this advocated change several papers have applied a statement that the head of the church, Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren, made in a book two years ago: "An increased dependence on the state would be of such fatal consequences that it must outweigh all the drawbacks connected with a separation between state and church."

Vatican City.—Helping backward countries to develop their natural resources, and not artificial birth control, is the way to solve the problem of overpopulation, Pope John XXIII declared in a secret consistory.

He clearly linked artificial birth control to the "problem of hunger," declaring that "to remedy this terrible calamity of hunger, one cannot in any way have recourse to erroneous doctrines and to the damaging and death-bearing methods of birth control."

"Instead," the Pope continued, "it is necessary that the riches of the earth be placed at the disposal of all, as God's commandment and justice demand. Let earthly goods be better distributed, let the barriers of egoism and self-interest be broken down. Let the best method be studied for helping the underdeveloped areas. Let men work to obtain from the earth itself the incalculable resources still hidden, which it can offer for the advantage of all."

Geneva.—Under the leadership of Bishop Wladislaw Fierla, head of the Polish Lutheran Church in Exile, the church's four congregations in Great Britain have asked the Lutheran World Federation to stop giving them subsidies, Director Bengt Hoffman of the LWF Department of World Service revealed here.

The step resulted from "a decision of the conscience, prompted by longfelt and often-expressed doctrinal consideration," said Bishop Fierla in a letter of notification to the Rev. William B. Schaeffer, LWF/WS senior representative in London.

In the past the Poles have sometimes disagreed doctrinally with the other Lutheran

refugee and immigrant groups which the federation assists in Great Britain, in the direction of the distinctive teaching of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The LWF subsidies in recent years have amounted to about 2,300 pounds (\$6,440) annually—roughly half the Poles' congregational and synodical expenses, including pastors' salaries. Bishop Fierla requested that these subsidies be discontinued as of Dec. 31, 1959.

In their place the Polish congregations will receive financial aid from the Missouri Synod starting in January 1960, Bishop Fierla told the Lutheran Council of Great Britain at a meeting in December.

He expressed hope that the Poles might be able to continue as members of the council, of which he was once the executive secretary. Because the action of their congregations was stated to be due to doctrinal differences with the other affiliated Lutheran groups, council leaders are now considering how this affects the Poles' relations with the organization itself.

The Lutheran Council is the joint agency of the various groups for a number of mutual interests and activities. It was originally set up in 1948 to be the common channel for the aid of both the LWF and the Missouri Synod to these groups of Continental origin: Germans, Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians, and Poles.

In 1955 the Missouri Synod withdrew from the arrangement and continued assisting only its affiliated Evangelical Lutheran Church of England. The ELCE itself dropped out of the council in 1957, when the latter decided to seek a more official relationship with the LWF.

Bishop Fierla told the council that the Polish congregations have no intention to join the ELCE, which reports 775 members as compared with their 950.

In his letter to Pastor Schaeffer the Polish churchman expressed "deep gratitude for all

the generous assistance you have given us for more than 10 years."

"Your help enabled us to carry on the work of our church in the difficult circumstances of life in exile," he said. "We trust that our decision will not alter the friendly relationship which exists between our church and the Lutheran World Federation."

He added the hope that there would be "further doctrinal discussion and consultation in inter-Lutheran affairs here in Great Britain in the hope of reaching unity in doctrine and practice."

When the Polish Church in Exile held its third synod in London last May, it sent "fraternal greetings" to the LWF assuring it of "our unity with the Evangelical faith, based on the Holy Bible and our (confessional writings)," and thanking the federation for its "constant help and co-operation."

Oslo.—Christians who argue that the Gospel of Christ should not be preached to Jews with the aim of conversion are not "faithful to the Lord of the Church and its mission," a veteran Norwegian missionary to Jews says in a statement published here.

The Rev. Magne Solheim of Haifa, who has worked among Jews and Jewish converts for the past 21 years—in Israel for the past 10—deplored the outspoken opposition of "many," including theologians, to this kind of evangelistic work.

He quoted the words of a Christian of Jewish race who said: "Satan uses many servants and many methods to hinder us from seeing that Jesus is our Messiah and Savior. In our times he is even closing the eyes of Christians . . . to prevent the salvation of the Jews."

From among such opponents of missions to Jews Pastor Solheim singled out Prof. Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary, New York, and a Dutch theologian whom he did not name. Dr. Niebuhr recently expressed the view that the Jews could better be helped to a closer relationship with God

within the framework of their own religion than by efforts to win them to the Christian faith.

The vigorous contrary opinion of the 49-year-old leader of the Norwegian Israel Mission was published here by the weekly religious news service *Kristelig Pressekontor* after a vacation visit by Pastor Solheim to his homeland.

He also rejected a view expressed by some Christians "that missions (to Jews) are unnecessary because the Jews will be converted by God's own direct action at the return of Christ."

Pointing out that in New Testament times Jews embraced the Christian faith as a result of preaching, Pastor Solheim declared: "For Jews today the way is the same. We must be faithful to the Lord of the church and the church's mission. . . . We must be true to the missionary command with respect to Israel too."

He said that Dr. Niebuhr's expressed opinion against evangelistic work among Jews "has been widely spread in Israel and throughout the world" and has been "harmful" to his mission.

By and large, however, "Jews today have no hostile attitude toward Jesus," Pastor Solheim stated.

Although "a Jew who becomes a Christian is (still) regarded as a traitor to his own people," nevertheless "there are many enlightened Jews who understand that if the church is to be true to the Gospel, it must proclaim that Gospel also to the Jews."

They respect Christians most when they do not "hide their Christian faith in their relations with Jews," he said. "It is tremendously shortsighted if we Christians believe that the church will gain favor in Jewish eyes by ignoring the Christian message."

Pastor Solheim's congregation at Haifa is

made up of Christians of Jewish blood from Europe—chiefly from Rumania, and in smaller numbers, from Hungary, Germany, and Yugoslavia. Some were baptized believers before they left Europe, others were converted after resettling in Israel.

After preaching the Gospel to such people in Rumania and Hungary since 1938, he was obliged by the Rumanian government to leave in 1949. The mission which was founded in Israel under his leadership in that year now has a staff of seven Norwegian missionaries.

Pastor Solheim is also the United Bible Society's agent in Israel. During the nine years the agency has been in his charge, it has sold 130,000 copies of the Scriptures in some 40 languages.

He recently reported that the Bible, including the New Testament, is read more than any other book in Israel. Israelis' eagerness to read the whole Bible, he said, is part of their generally expressed interest in Christian literature, history, and culture.

However, Protestants of Jewish background—whom Pastor Solheim calls Hebrew Christians—find themselves in a peculiar situation in Israel, since they have no recognized "nationality."

Israel's effort to be at the same time both a religious community and a democratic state, he says, has led to a still-unfinished debate over the definition of a "Jew"—whether the term fixes nationality, religion, or birth-right.

Meanwhile, although the government has granted to all citizens the right of civil burial, only religious laws are recognized for marriage and divorce. Since only the Jewish, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox faiths are officially recognized religious communities, other Christian groups, including Lutherans, face a problem of legal status for their marriages.