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Theological Observer

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS—LOGIA IESOU?

The *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (January 1960), under this heading, offers a very helpful analysis of the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, which came to light in 1947 and was published in Cairo in 1956. But already in 1952 it had been identified with a work well known through three fragments of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. In a "conclusion" the writer summarizes the picture which scholars now have of the origin of this apocryphon. It is presumably of Jewish-Christian origin. The original place of its composition seems to have been Edessa in Syria and the time, the early second century. The present Coptic text is evidently a translation from Greek. The original may have been a compilation from various sources, some of them at least originally Aramaic. The original compilers of the apocryphon probably were not Gnostics, though when it was included in the Gnostic library it may have undergone some sort of revision at the hands of Gnostics. The document is important for various reasons. First, it is the complete document of the fragments represented formerly by the Oxyrhynchus *logoi Ieson*. Again, it affords us an excellent example of an ancient form of apocryphal Jewish-Christian literature. Nevertheless, the textual value of the synoptic-type sayings seems to be slight, and it is extremely doubtful that we shall ever be able to say with assurance that any given logion of Thomas represents a genuine hitherto lost saying of Jesus. In an "addendum" R. M. Grant (*Notes on the Gospel of Thomas*) is quoted as stating: "We cannot expect to find any authentic sayings of Jesus accurately reproduced in it."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

A STUDY IN EXEGESIS

Interpretation (January 1960), under this heading, publishes a review of *The Midrash*

on *Psalms* (Midrash Tehillim), translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic by Rabbi W. G. Braude, Vol. XIII of the *Yale Judaica Series* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959). A "Midrash," the reviewer says, denotes a didactic or homiletic exposition of Scripture, though it can be applied also to a religious interpretation of history. The reviewer offers a number of samples of Midrash exegesis to give the reader the trend of thought and the type of exegesis here presented. The exegesis on Ps. 137:1 may serve as a fair example of what the *Midrash Tehillim* has to offer the reader. The text reads: "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down," and this is the given exposition: "This is explained as indicating that from the time the exiles left Jerusalem until they reached the Euphrates they had not been allowed to sit down. Rabbi Johanan, however, says that the Euphrates slew more Israelites than Nebuchadnezzar. In Palestine they drank only rain water, running water, or spring water; but when they drank of the Euphrates, they died. So they wept for the dead, including those whom the Babylonians had not permitted to be buried." The reviewer remarks on this exposition: "Manifestly the pastor cannot use this kind of exegesis in preparing his sermons; the preacher who does solid biblical work will have to employ the grammatico-historical method." He adds in conclusion: "The parish minister . . . would not receive an adequate theological return for his financial investment." In another article in the same journal, "The Interpreter and the Parables," the writer says *inter alia*: "As an interpreter, Luther's principles were much better than his own practice. He dismissed the allegorizing method as 'monkey tricks' (*Affenspiel*)," but in practice remained quite hospitable to the allegories of the Fathers. His own sermon on the "Good Samaritan" shows as many

"monkey tricks" as Origen's. The writer then praises Calvin, who pronounced the allegorizing of the Fathers "idle fooleries," as the finest interpreter of the parables since Chrysostom. In fairness to Luther, however, it should be stated that, while allegorizing in some instances, he quite consistently followed the grammatico-historical method, which he recognized as the only correct mode. On the other hand the Reformed divines became guilty of allegorizing when interpreting Christ's words of institution "This is My body; this is My blood." (Matt. 26:26, 28)

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

Attention has been called to a misquotation in my article in the August, 1958, CTM, p. 590, footnote 84. The context of Dr. Laetsch's words makes clear that this is *not* his own viewpoint; on the contrary, he finds Moeller's attention to refutation of critical scholars completely justifiable.

D. R. HILLERS

BRIEF ITEMS FROM LUTHERAN SOURCES

New York.—New York City has been chosen national headquarters of a proposed Lutheran body of three million members, and its name has been changed to the "Lutheran Church in America."

Representatives of the four bodies engaged in merger negotiations voted unanimously here in favor of New York over Chicago as the site for the main offices of the new denomination they hope to establish by June of 1962.

At the same time it was agreed that certain boards, commissions, auxiliaries, and agencies of the merged church should be located in Philadelphia, Chicago, and Minneapolis.

The union negotiators also approved the name "Lutheran Church in America," as a substitute for their original choice of "Lutheran Evangelical Church in America." The change was voted by 35 to 10 after more than three hours of discussion.

Action on headquarters and name was taken here by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, composed of 46 commissioners from the United Lutheran Church in America, Augustana Lutheran Church, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church or Suomi Synod, and American Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Geneva.—A prominent German Lutheran theologian has expressed the opinion that any church law authorizing the general ordination of women to the Christian ministry "attacks fundamental laws and commands of God" contained in Holy Scriptures.

Prof. Peter Brunner of Heidelberg has questioned whether the Swedish and Danish laws which provide for such ordination "rest on a general philosophy of life which has its roots in the Enlightenment and in the Idealism of the 19th century" rather than on the church's "witness that she is bound to Christ and to His Gospel."

Dr. Brunner, a member of the Lutheran World Federation Commission on Theology, gave his theological views on women pastors in the latest issue of the federation's quarterly, *Lutheran World*, published here.

He noted that the "confessional standards," or official doctrinal writings of Lutheranism, "do not express themselves on the problem" and that "an answer to the question whether or not women should be ordained to the pastoral ministry . . . is only possible by drawing theological conclusions from them."

The focal "theological conclusion" drawn by the University of Heidelberg professor was that "the combinations of being 'woman' and being 'pastor' contradict one another in a manner which involves the woman in the hidden depths of her created being in a conflict which attacks her very being."

This conflict between being "pastor" and being "woman" is "so hidden that empirical symptoms thereof are perhaps not apparent for a long time, perhaps not for an entire generation," he acknowledged. "It is quite possible that the combination . . . might for

a long time . . . be accompanied by the best of results.

"But finally the day will come when this conflict, which is built up in the hidden depths of created being, will manifest its great force even through empirical symptoms. In the long run it will eventually take its toll in the total cultural structure of an era."

He asserted that "an argument which believes it can derive a case for the ordination of women from the changed position of the woman in modern society has no validity in the church."

"We must take into account the theological doctrine of the sexual difference between man and woman as found in the Bible," Dr. Brunner said. "The church . . . cannot be satisfied to borrow the insights of biology, psychology, philosophy, sociology, or medicine."

The difference, he contended, is that God created man as "head" of woman and her as "subordinate" to him.

This relationship, "which was given at the creation, has not been obviated by the event of Christ, but has finally come into the light and has been brought into its own with new power and in a new way," the German theologian said. "(It is) in effect in the Christian church until the last Judgment.

"Were anyone to contest, in teaching and preaching, the factual and effective existence of this order and the factual validity of the corresponding command, he would be proclaiming a false teaching in regard to this central point, with which the whole Christian message hangs together. He would be a heretic."

Dr. Brunner explained that in speaking of the "subordination" of woman he was "dealing with a theological and not with a sociological relationship."

In further clarification he stated: "The woman is not a member of the (Christian) congregation with lesser rank. In regard to the reception of the Holy Ghost and His gifts the woman, as woman, is in no way preju-

diced against, since she is just as much a member of the body of Christ as is the man."

He added, however, that "this does not eliminate the fact that there are various ministries in the church . . . for which the very fact of being man or being woman . . . can under certain circumstances be of great importance."

The Heidelberg professor of systematic theology qualified his general conclusion by mentioning three possible kinds of Christian ministry that might Biblically be open to women:

1. They might under rare circumstances be called as "prophets" by direct divine action, even though not by church law authorizing their ordination and appointment as regular parish preachers.

2. According to the Reformer Martin Luther they might serve as spiritual heads of congregations which contained no men or at least no men qualified and divinely inspired to preach.

3. They might be installed as assistant ministers of congregations having men as head pastors, performing certain subordinate functions, of which Dr. Brunner offered a suggested list of "mays" and "may nots."

Stockholm.— After smoldering for several months Sweden's dispute over the ordination of women has burst into flame, setting off a new crucial period in the life of this country's national Lutheran Church.

In rapid succession late in January:

1. Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren of Uppsala, primate of the church, announced at the close of a bishops' conference, where the matter had been discussed anew, that it had been decided to delay no longer in admitting women theological graduates to the Swedish Lutheran ministry.

2. Led by Bishop Bo Giertz of Gothenburg, the church's "confessional front" organization met and planned ways by which church members could be encouraged to show their non-

recognition of any women pastors that may be ordained.

3. In various Swedish press organs and in three legal complaints Bishop Giertz was publicly accused of inciting the people to disobey a law passed by the national Riksdag and ratified by the church assembly.

In announcing the ordination decision at a press conference Archbishop Hultgren acknowledges that the bishops were divided both on the principle of equality of sexes in the ministry and on the practical desirability of ordaining women at this time.

He said, however, that the danger of the church's being split over such a move was considerably less than when the new law first made it possible a year ago. He voiced conviction that any further indecision on the bishops' part would harm rather than help the church.

The prelate said applications of three theologically trained women have been accepted and that each would be ordained by a different bishop in March.

Dr. Hultgren himself will officiate at the rite for the most outstanding of the candidates, Dr. Margit Sahlin, director of the St. Catherine's Foundation and a Central Committee member of the World Council of Churches. The other two ordaining bishops will be Dr. Helge Ljungberg of Stockholm and Dr. Ruben Josefson of Härnösand.

Bishop Giertz, for his part, characterized the present situation of the Church of Sweden as "the most serious one [it has faced] since the Reformation" — a situation "I had hoped we would avoid as far as possible."

Speaking as head of the Bible- and Confession-Centered Church Fellowship, he said that as long as its members are able to stay in the national church and work for what they believe is right, it is their duty to do so. He reiterated, however, that the group still considered that the final alternative would be

to form a free Lutheran Church in this country.

The fellowship, at its meeting immediately after the Archbishop's press statement, mapped a program of counteraction for church people opposed to the introduction of women ministers. It counseled refusal to accept the conduct of worship services or pastoral acts at the hands of women pastors. For Baptism, weddings, and funerals, people were advised to ask for the privilege of using the services of another pastor.

Spokesmen of the organization stressed that it was fighting not against persons but against a kind of ordination which it believes cannot be valid, because it contravenes Biblical command. They said the cause to which the fellowship is dedicated is the church's faithfulness to Scriptural doctrine.

One of its leaders, Dean G. A. Danell of Växjö, declared: "We emphasize obedience to God rather than to man and the fact that nothing is more dangerous than to go against one's conscience."

Confessional front spokesmen said it has already received from different parts of the country many messages of support and contributions.

Much of the press comment, however, has been unsympathetic. Some papers have argued with the authors of the legal complaints that public officials — which includes bishops of the state church — cannot be permitted to lead a public campaign to hinder the implementation of a national law.

Archbishop Hultgren, in announcing plans to ordain the first Swedish Lutheran women clergy, said the theologically trained aspirants had delayed applying for a full year to avoid splitting the church. The first application was received in January, shortly before the bishops' conference.

The primate's statement that he himself would ordain one of the women was interpreted as a gesture to signify that the church officially accepted the new law.

Bishop Ljungberg will officiate at the rite for Miss Elisabeth Djurle, a 28-year-old student counselor at Uppsala, who has also been serving as parish worker in a Stockholm congregation. The council of this congregation is supporting her application with an offer of regular pastoral employment.

Bishop Josefson is to ordain Miss Ingrid Persson, who has been working at a nursing home in Uppsala and who is to take over a pastorate in the diocese of Härnösand.

The third candidate, Dr. Sahlin, who is 46, will be ordained in the chapel of St. Catherine's Foundation, of which she will continue as director.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

Glen Head, N. Y. — The first junior-senior Lutheran parochial high school on the East Coast will be ready here for students this fall.

A \$1,000,000 institution, the school will be operated on a 33-acre site by the Lutheran High School Association of Nassau and Suffolk Counties of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

The Rev. Elmer F. Eggold, executive director of the association, said plans provide for an initial enrollment of 400 to 500 students in grades 7 through 9. One additional grade (10—12) will be established each succeeding year to complete the curriculum, with an anticipated enrollment of 800 to 1,000 in the six-year program.

More than 100 pupils have already been registered for a future elementary division, Mr. Eggold noted.

Construction of classroom facilities is scheduled to start early this spring. Only a few rooms in an existing mansion on the property will be used for classes, the association director said.

There are more than 30 Missouri Synod congregations, with nearly 26,000 baptized members, in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Mr. Eggold said interest in parochial education implies no criticism of the public school system. He pointed out that his church teaches that every church member, as a part of society, has a responsibility to support public schools.

The denomination operates a total of 1,284 parochial elementary schools and 27 high schools in the United States and Canada.

Geneva. — European Lutheran settlers in South Africa, who have worshiped in their mother tongues for many years, now sense a need to begin tying their church life linguistically to the country in which they are living.

This was reported here by Director Bengt Hoffman of the Lutheran World Federation's Department of World Service on returning to his office from a four-week official visit to that country.

Most church leaders of South Africa's 30,000 Scandinavians and German evangelicals, he said, have come to realize the necessity of introducing religious facilities in English and Afrikaans for their younger generation.

"It is the key to the future survival of the Lutheran congregations among South Africans of European descent," he declared.