

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 33

Article 30

5-1-1962

Theological Observer

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Recommended Citation

Mueller, John Theodore (1962) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 33, Article 30.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol33/iss1/30>

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

THE LAITY

Under this brief and simple heading the *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (January 1962) comments editorially at some length on the important work which laymen should do in and for the church. The writer stresses in the main four points: First, the layman is called to be a saint. To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves—nothing less is asked of us, whether we be ministers or laymen. Secondly, the layman is called to make the Gospel known to others. The average layman is not required to spend the whole of his energy in evangelism, but he is called to give some of it. It is after all the layman who has direct contact with those outside the church, not the minister, and it is thus the layman who has the most constant opportunity of making the faith known to the world. Thirdly, the layman is called to build up his fellow Christians with whom he worships. He is not an isolated unit but a member of the congregation. But this means that he not only receives from them but also gives. The church does not learn of God only from its ministers; there are some things it can learn better from its laymen. There are people who know from experience what it means to be a Christian in the world of business. It is men who have faced these things in their own lives and have emerged from them as conquerors who are best able by their experience and faith to strengthen others who are placed in similar situations. Fourthly—and this is placed last for emphasis—the layman is to serve God by doing his daily work. The old story of the man who, when he was asked what work he did for God, replied, "I bake bread," and would not be shifted from his answer by being told that he was expected to name some more "spiritual" occupation, em-

phasizes an essential point. The position and work of the laity should receive more attention. JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BASIC SHIFTS IN GERMAN THEOLOGY

Under this heading Prof. J. M. Robinson in *Interpretation* (January 1962) depicts a shift in German theological thought away from the Bultmannian system, not indeed to traditional orthodoxy but to a new form of neoliberalism. In his conclusion he writes:

Perhaps one may say that neo-liberalism is the legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, published also under the title *Prisoner for God*, reflect a profound awareness that the world has "come to age." The secularization of the West is not simply a bad fact the church must oppose, but is itself a result of the Bible's sober this-worldliness, in distinction from other religions (such as the mystery religions) which on the one hand may deify nature and on the other teach escape from the world. Just as Protestantism "secularized" many properties and institutions of the medieval church, such as church-operated governments and universities, it should have a positive relationship to the general secularization of Western culture in our day. Hence Bonhoeffer criticizes mysticism and pietism, and as their modern equivalents existentialism and psychotherapy, and frankly calls for a "non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts." . . . If the shifts in German theology identified in this paper prove to be persistent and not ephemeral, one will in retrospect be able to say that the foundations of the Bultmannian system which gave it its great strength in post-war Germany—its grounding in *avant garde* critical New Testament scholarship and in the latest philosophical trends in German culture—had already by 1961 lost their solidity.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

**BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE
NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL**

Frankfurt, Germany.—American Roman Catholic theologians and churchmen have surprised a noted European Lutheran authority on their church by their willingness to discuss frankly interfaith relations and differences.

This disclosure was made here early in February by Prof. K. E. Skydsgaard, the Danish theologian who for the past two years has been staff director of the Lutheran World Federation's interconfessional research program, which is presently examining modern Roman Catholicism. He told members of the LWF Special Commission on Interconfessional Research that during a recently completed visit to the United States he found in Roman Catholic circles "an astonishing openness for interconfessional conversation."

Dr. Skydsgaard said that at official levels in that church there is a positive acceptance of what has been going on in the way of objective, candid, and critical theological conversations with Protestants. He reported that during his six weeks in North America his contacts with Catholics had been considerably widened through personal encounters and extensive correspondence. These contacts, he commented, had strengthened his conviction that historic positions need to be reaffirmed but that certain relationships should be thought out anew.

It was the 59-year-old Danish theologian's last report to a meeting of the commission as its full-time research professor. On Feb. 1 he resumed his place as professor of systematic theology at the University of Copenhagen, from which he had taken a two-year leave to launch the LWF program. Commission members were reassured, however, that Dr. Skydsgaard would continue to exercise an advisory supervision over the interconfessional research program and that his staff successor would begin work in July. His name was expected to be announced shortly. Meanwhile the

work will be carried on at Copenhagen by the Rev. Gerhard Pedersen, the Danish clergyman who has been serving as research assistant during the past two years.

Professor Skydsgaard, while in the United States and Mexico last autumn, had talks with prominent Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians in numerous localities and met with students and professors at several outstanding American universities and theological seminaries of both faiths. He said he tried to make it clear to them that the LWF program was not motivated by "polemical, anti-Roman" feelings but that "we were trying to conduct a very sober, scholarly study, to get at the various points where we are divided."

Presiding at the three-day meeting here was the commission chairman, Bishop Hermann Dietzfelbinger of Munich, head of the Lutheran Church in Bavaria. Other commission members present were Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren of Uppsala, primate of the Church of Sweden, Dr. Peter Brunner, professor of systematic theology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and Dr. Hans P. Treuenfels of Norwalk, Conn., a layman of the United Lutheran Church in America. Because of illness the other commission member, President Etienne Jung of the Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine, France, could not attend.

Federation staff members from Geneva who were present included Dr. Kurt Schmidt-Clausen, LWF executive secretary, and Dr. Vilmos Vajta, director of the Department of Theology. The commission decided to meet again on Aug. 3—4 at Strasbourg, France.

North Adelaide, Australia.—Plans for a new hymnal under joint auspices of Australia's two Lutheran church bodies were discussed at a committee meeting here in January. A report made public before the meeting revealed that the Hymnbook Committee has thus far selected about 700 from the "thousands of hymns from every available

hymnbook [that] have been thoroughly examined."

The committee, which represents the United Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Lutheran churches of this country, plans to have about 600 hymns in its final recommended list, it was reported. The report added that "a special subcommittee of ELCA and UELCA pastors, including seminary lecturers, has been engaged in liturgical studies."

Oslo. — Norwegian Lutheran parishes having women ministers are to be offered alternative pastoral services by men so that conscientious objectors are not left without care. This has been decided here by the bishops of the Church of Norway following reports that unrest was developing in the

two North Halogaland congregations being served by the church's first clergywoman, Mrs. Ingrid Bjerkas.

The bishops proposed that regular visits to such parishes for preaching services and administration of the sacraments be arranged with ministers employed by church organizations, diocesan chaplains, or neighboring pastors. Arrangements are to be made with the consent of the woman curate involved.

Although similar cases may result from ordination of further women theologians, the immediate need for such a plan was felt with respect to Mrs. Bjerkas' congregations at Berg and Torsken in the far north, where some of her parishioners objected to receiving the church's ministrations from a member of her sex.