

7-1-1964

Theological Observer

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Recommended Citation

Piepkorn, Arthur Carl (1964) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 35, Article 43.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol35/iss1/43>

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

A ROMAN CATHOLIC OBSERVER'S APPRAISAL OF HELSINKI

The English language edition of the Roman Catholic quarterly *Unitas*, organ of the Unitas Association, devotes 16 pages of its Autumn 1963 (Vol. XV, No. 3) issue to an article by Lorenz Volken on "The Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Helsinki." Both descriptive and interpretative, the article addresses itself to what Volken, an on-the-spot observer, regards as the Assembly's "main concerns": (1) justification today; (2) the nature of the church and of the Lutheran World Federation; (3) its ecumenical attitude; and (4) its pastoral-missionary outlook.

As Volken sees it, the climax of the discussion on the report on justification on Friday, August 9, "turned out to be a kind of Good Friday for the Assembly" as well as its "most difficult moment" (p. 193). Volken holds, however, that the decision not to publish the proposed document on justification as a statement of the Assembly as such does not mean "that the debate was useless. On the contrary, the effort to arrive at a precise new consensus on a fundamental point of doctrine revealed important new attitudes and doctrinal positions. For one thing, it became quite evident during the course of discussion that the Lutheran attitude towards the [Roman] Catholic Church's doctrine on the question of Justification is quite different now from what it was in the time of the Reformation. The old assumptions — such as everything that Luther said was right because he said it, or: [Roman] Catholic doctrine is unbiblical and unevangelical — were nowhere in evidence. On the contrary it was widely recognized that within the [Roman] Catholic Church today biblical studies are flourishing and a fertile, penetrating theological thought is at work"

(p. 194). In the discussion Volken sensed a "noteworthy readiness to admit a certain relativity" (*ibid.*) of the position of the doctrine of justification in the Sacred Scriptures and of the variety in the ways that the New Testament authors who use the term — not all of them do — speak of it. He saw "evidence of a wider view of the biblical foundations of Justification in the constant recurrence of the problem of the 'new life' and the 'new man'" (p. 195). He also records a "rather general conviction" that "it was more the 'classical' presentation of Justification which lost its importance than the doctrine itself" (*ibid.*). It is his own feeling that "the biblical foundation for the subjective participation in Justification was generally underestimated." (*Ibid.*)

While criticizing Gerhard Gloege's presentation of *sola gratia* and *sola fide* in his major lecture as "too onesided" (*ibid.*), Volken concedes that if a theologian of his own denomination "were to lay aside an important aspect of the doctrine of his Church, he could do the same [as Gloege did], basing himself on the Bible and the Church's tradition" (pp. 195, 196). Under the latter head, Volken has in mind especially Canon 25 of the Council of Orange of 529 (which a Lutheran, of course, would regard as precisely in his tradition also). This canon includes such statements as: "No one could either love God as he ought, or believe in God, or do what is good for God's sake, unless the divine mercy first came to him. . . . [In the case of] the multitude of ancient holy ones . . . faith . . . was not conferred by a good of nature . . . but through the grace of God. Even after the Lord's coming we know and believe that it was not had through the free will of those desiring to be baptized, but was given through the generosity of Christ . . . In every good work, we do not

begin it and then afterward are helped by God's mercy, but He Himself, without any preceding merits in us, previously inspires in us both faith and love, so that we faithfully desire the sacrament of baptism and after baptism with His help can perform those things which please Him." He also cites Chapter 7 of the Decree on Justification (1547) of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, which declares that "the unique formal cause [of justification] is the 'righteousness of God, not that by which He Himself is righteous, but by which He makes us righteous,'" and he refers to Chapter 8, which declares that we "are said to be justified freely because none of those things which precede justification, whether 'faith or works, deserve the grace of justification.'" Similarly, he cites the familiar words of St. Thomas Aquinas on 1 Tim. 1:8: "Hence the hope of justification is not in [moral precepts], but in faith alone (*sola fide*): 'We conclude that a man is justified through faith without the works of the Law' (Rom. 3:28)." (P. 196, fn. 2)

Volken takes particular note of the concluding sentences of Helge Brattgard's lecture: "No longer do we say 'faith without works.' We say 'faith and works,' 'works which are produced by faith.'" Volken observes: "That 'and'—so often roundly condemned as [Roman] Catholic—should be so frankly pronounced in a main lecture was something new, even though its underlying meaning is not so new as one might imagine." (P. 196)

Volken also notes appreciatively the way in which the reports repeatedly linked "the reality of Justification with that of the Church," in that they stressed that a Biblical presentation of justification requires a presentation in a Biblical context, and "in its biblical context, they continued, Justification has its effective power only when it functions in the Church." (Ibid.)

In pointing out that E. Clifford Nelson,

along with other theologians at Helsinki, spoke in his "remarkable lecture" (p. 199) of the church as a "spiritual body" and as the "Body of Christ," Volken sees this "as a new fact," and gently chides Lutheran theologians for having forgotten their own heritage, in that in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession "the Church is—*in forma*—defined as *Corpus Christi*" (p. 197).¹ Hence we really have in this "new fact" a "revival of the concept." (Ibid.)

While Volken holds that "the LWF does not want to be a church or a World Church, but a free association of independent Lutheran churches" (p. 191), he feels on the one hand that "such was the underlying trend toward unity in doctrine, mission and worship that it was difficult for a person in Helsinki not to have the impression that he was experiencing the expression of a Church" (ibid.), but on the other hand he concludes that "a phenomenon like the LWF" is not "really biblical" (p. 198). Of more than passing interest is his observation: "Lutherans seem to oppose the LWF to a 'super-church' and to a 'Vatican-Church' with equal conviction and [for] similar reasons. They are probably very right to reject radically what they imagine by these terms." (Ibid.)

In the area of ecumenical work, Volken sees only one "official result"—creation of The Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research—"but it was a great one" (p. 199). The Foundation will initially concern itself with the Roman Catholic Church. He notes one of the justifications for its establishment: "It is our unavoidable task [as Lutherans] to bring the insights which

¹ Volken does not specify his reference; presumably he has in mind Apology VII, 5, 12, 29 and the quotation from *De unitate ecclesiae* (ascribed to St. Augustine) in IV, 400. Tractatus 67 refers to the church as the body of Christ in its allusion to Eph. 4:8, 11, 12. See this writer's "What the Symbols Have to Say About the Church," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXVI (1955), 721—763, esp. 749, 758, 759.

we owe to the Reformation into the conversation also with the Roman Catholics" (p. 200). The spirit in which it was founded he deems "of incalculable importance. What better proof can we have that the LWF takes the doctrine and the life of the Roman Catholic Church seriously and has such a high estimation of its riches than that it hopes to discover something worthy of long research?" (p. 201). Characteristic of the ecumenical attitude at Helsinki, Volken points out, was the fact that "there was very little said of the mistakes of other confessions; never were they accentuated. It was encouraging to see that the tendency was toward collaboration with what others did in a real Christian way. The underlying motivation responsible for this atmosphere was certainly the growing sense of responsibility that was strongly felt in the Assembly for the world which needs reconciliation in Christ." (Ibid.)

After summarizing the actions illustrating the pastoral-missionary outlook of the Helsinki Assembly, Volken concludes: "All Christian Confessions are today more or less conscious of the world-wide mission of the Church, and the LWF, not being indifferent toward this work, expresses the same Christian intentions that God evokes in all of us to bring us nearer in a common work for the Christianization of the world." (P. 202)

Volken devotes the last three pages of his article to "comprehensive considerations." He cites the resolutions respectively condemning discrimination on the basis of race, color, or religion and hailing the recent nuclear test ban agreement. In connection with the study of the commission on Latin America he notes "that the relations between Lutherans and [Roman] Catholics in this delicate area have considerably and surprisingly improved under the ecumenical influence of John XXIII and continue to do so" (p. 203). He commends the "deft

stroke" which proposed Ephesians to the Assembly for all the Bible meditations, since this letter contains "a key to each one of the Assembly's major concerns: the radical gratuity of Justification (2:8,9) and the full reality of the human acceptance of that Justification, seen particularly in the exhortation to 'walk worthily' (4:1; 2:2); the imperative to 'put on the armor of God' (5:11-18) and the mentioning of the fruits 'of the light' (4:9); the notion of the Church as a body (1:23; 4:4); the ecumenical outlook shown in the 'reconciliation' of those who were far (*makran*) 'in one body' (2:12 to 17; 4:4); the mission of the Church to preach the Gospel to all peoples (2:7-9); the theme of the Assembly, 'Christ Today' (1:10)" (pp. 203, 204). He records the failure of the Assembly in "its major objective: the doctrinal expression for today of the Lutheran rediscovery of the Pauline message of Justification did not measure up to general expectations" (p. 204). He asserts that the "collisions between contrary theological opinions and positions," even when they touched on "'classical' Lutheran attitudes, should not be considered a sign of internal weakness. They can also be thought of as an expression of sincere and courageous vitality" (ibid.), the paradoxical weakness of 2 Cor. 12:10. He found the Americans "more administration-minded" than "the more doctrinal-minded European (principally German) churchmen." (Ibid.)

Volken concludes: "The real results of an Assembly like that of Helsinki cannot be adequately measured only by considering its written and approved statements. The attentive observer of the Assembly could not fail to see how really Christian the attitude of the majority was. There was present too much sense of Christian responsibility, of charity, of worship, of openness and even humility [for such an observer] not to be convinced that God was with the Assembly and will bless its results. . . . One who

paid attention in Helsinki to the underlying spirit both of the important theologians present and of the majority of all the participants . . . is inclined to believe that the LWF, by means of the Fourth Assembly, has taken a significant step forward toward the 'Una Sancta.'” (P.205)

Volken takes no note of the presence of observers from nonmember bodies beyond referring to the fact that he was asked “to express publicly what [he], as a [Roman] Catholic, thought of Justification, of the Lutheran *'simul justus et peccator,'* of the relation of Justification to the Church, etc.” (P.194)

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

LWF NAMES REPRESENTATIVES TO VATICAN COUNCIL SESSION

Geneva.—Three delegate observers will represent the Lutheran World Federation at the third session of the Vatican Council this fall, it was announced here by the LWF executive secretary, Dr. Kurt Schmidt-Clausen.

Two observers will be in continuous attendance: Dr. Warren A. Quanbeck, professor of systematic theology at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., and the Rt. Rev. Sven Silen, Bishop of Vasteras in the Church of Sweden. Dr. Quanbeck is now serving as guest lecturer at Gettysburg (Pa.) Theological Seminary.

The third place will be occupied alternately by Dr. Vilmos Vajta of Geneva, director of the LWF Department of Theology, Dr. K. E. Skydsgaard, professor of systematic theology at the University of Copenhagen, and Dr. George A. Lindbeck, research professor of the Lutheran Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research in Strasbourg, France.

By the time the session opens on Sept. 14, Dr. Vajta will have succeeded Dr. Lindbeck as research professor at Strasbourg, and the

latter will have returned to a chair of historical theology at Yale Divinity School.

Dr. Lindbeck's predecessor as the first LWF interconfessional research professor was Dr. Skydsgaard. Professor Quanbeck, Bishop Silen, and Professor Skydsgaard are all members of the Board of Trustees of the foundation of Strasbourg. Dr. Quanbeck is also on the LWF Commission on Theology.

PRAPAT LUTHERAN CONFERENCE MOVED TO NORTHERN INDIA

Geneva.—Place of the Second All-Asia Lutheran Conference next October has been shifted from Prapat, Indonesia, to Ranchi, India, it was announced here by the Department of World Mission of the Lutheran World Federation.

The change was made, explained Dr. Arne Sovik, director of the department which sponsors the conference, “because of the political situation in Southeast Asia which we fear would make it impossible for delegates from a number of Churches to come to a conference in Indonesia.”

Dates of the conference will be Oct. 8 to 18, and the host the 212,000-member Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church. Dr. Sovik noted that Ranchi, which is in Bihar State, is not only the location of the headquarters of that church but also “one of India's rapidly growing cities.”

He voiced regret that it became necessary to give up plans to have Indonesia's 741,000-member Batak Protestant Christian Church as “our generous hosts,” and said it would be a disappointment to many of the conference participants “who would have liked to visit that great Church.”

However, he pointed out that the Gossner Church is “another of the great Lutheran Churches of Asia.”

The First All-Asia Lutheran Conference in 1956 was held in the South Indian city of Madras, in the territory of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church.

INDIAN CHURCHES AT ODDS OVER LUTHERAN-CSI UNION

Bangalore, India.—Now that this country's Lutheran churches and the Church of South India have reached the constitution-drafting stage in their unity talks, the need to proceed slowly confronts their negotiators, lest a fatal gap be opened between them and the constituencies they represent.

When their Inter-Church Commission met here in April, it received and discussed two different draft constitutions for a united church, prepared on its order by separate mixed committees. But it adjourned without taking definite action on either of them.

Instead, it drew up a list of points of issue arising from the two drafts and asked the negotiating churches to discuss these points—not the constitutions themselves—in regional meetings during the coming months.

Basic difference between the two documents is that the one provides for a totally episcopal form of church government while the other offers an arrangement for federating "dioceses" led by periodically elected presidents with others headed by bishops identified with the "historic episcopate."

At the April meeting, most of the commission members expressed the personal belief that—in view of the specific circumstances that would surround the contemplated church union—an episcopal government would probably be preferable.

But particularly the Lutheran representatives stressed that this was not necessarily the view of their churches, and that therefore the ground for a decision on the question had not yet been established.

Among the rank-and-file church members there are many Lutherans who still doubt that the time has come to sit down with CSI representatives and draft a constitution for organic church union.

They question whether the degree of doctrinal agreement the two parties have succeeded in defining during eight years of

theological discussions is sufficient to warrant such a concrete step toward a united church.

The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, located in an area of CSI predominance, is one in which the current of such doubt still flows strong. The TELC executive committee last year expressed the view that the Inter-Church Commission should not start drafting a constitution before fuller doctrinal agreement was reached.

According to a report published in Madras, the head of that church, Bishop Rajah B. Manikam, found it desirable to give a TELC pastoral conference this assurance:

"Therefore, I should like to assure every one of you that in this matter of conversations with a sister non-Lutheran Church, we shall hold on to the faith of our Church and to the truth as given to us, but keep an open mind and be led by His Holy Spirit to discern what His will is for us and for them."

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

LUTHERAN-JEW VIEW EXCHANGE IN ST. LOUIS

St. Louis.—An exchange of viewpoints between Lutherans and Jews was conducted here at Concordia Seminary on May 12. The seminar was the first in a series being sponsored jointly by the seminary and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Speaking on behalf of the Lutherans, Dr. Arthur Piepkorn, chairman of the seminary's department of systematic theology, asked for frank and serious study of the key issues, with an awareness that Lutherans will hold to certain "nonnegotiable theological differences" in their faith. He emphasized that Lutherans will continue to hold that the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was born Son of Mary, and continue a missionary concern for all men.

Dr. Piepkorn cited similarities and differences between the two minority groups. He

also produced evidence, based on comprehensive studies, that no anti-Semitic bias is evident in recent sermons, religious broadcasts, or official publications of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. A brief professional study among present students or graduates of Concordia Seminary, he said, showed almost a vacuum of attitude towards Jews.

Rabbi Solomon S. Bernards, director of the Missouri regional office of the Anti-Defamation League, charged the Lutherans with bias. "Of all the groups in Protestantism, Lutherans, from my vantage point," he said, "have had the most prolonged encounter of tragedy and bitterness with Jews." He cited evidence from the writings of Martin Luther and Lutheran theology.

Rabbi Bernards linked the Roman Catholic and Lutheran religious voices in responsibility, preparing Germany "for the explosion of hate which burst forth during the Nazi era." He protested efforts by Lutheran groups to missionize Jews and listed as a precondition to fruitful relationships in the future the open acceptance by Lutherans and all Christians "that the Christian church has been one of the principal carriers of the virus of anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism."

Responses to the addresses were made by Rabbi Robert P. Jacobs, director, B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at Washington University, St. Louis, and the Rev. Arnold A. Wessler, member of the headquarters staff of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Members of the audience, divided almost equally between Lutherans and Jews, engaged in discussion and then submitted questions for the four speakers. Sponsors of the project were gratified by the frank and charitable nature of the confrontation.

MARTY VOICES OPPOSITION TO AMENDMENTS ON PRAYER

Washington, D. C.—Dr. Martin E. Marty, associate professor of modern church history at the University of Chicago and associate

editor of the *Christian Century*, voiced his opposition to the Becker Amendment and similar legislation at a meeting of the House Judiciary Committee here last Friday. He was one of many religious leaders and church officials invited to comment on proposals to change the U. S. Constitution to permit Bible reading and prayers in public schools.

In his comments Dr. Marty, a clergyman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, listed five reasons for his stand. He argued against the proposed and similar amendments:

- a) because they produce unsatisfactory provisions for our establishments of religious practices or reference in public life.
- b) because they defeat the purpose of their sponsors, which is stated to be the promotion of godliness in our nation.
- c) because they misinterpret American history and fail to understand the means by which godliness becomes militant in society.
- d) because they are unnecessary in the light of existing guarantees and are being proposed on the basis of a misunderstanding.
- e) because most religious leadership which traditionally has first responsibility for promoting godliness in society opposes them.

A. C. STELLHORN, PIONEER LUTHERAN EDUCATOR, DIES

St. Louis.—Dr. August C. Stellhorn, pioneer educator of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, died here May 18 of a heart ailment.

In 1918 Dr. Stellhorn became the first area superintendent of elementary schools. Three years later he took the position of Secretary of Schools, a post he held for almost 40 years.

When he entered semi-retirement at the beginning of 1960, he devoted his time to completing a project which had occupied his attention constantly, writing a history of schools in the Synod. The book was published last year under the title "Schools of

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. Previously he devoted a great amount of time to preparing course materials, textbooks, and articles on education.

In 1948 Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind., conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Education on the educator.

MISSOURI SYNOD EXPANDS ALABAMA ACADEMY, COLLEGE

St. Louis. — Almost a half million dollars in new construction and renovation has been approved for the Alabama Lutheran Academy and College in Selma, Ala., officials of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod have announced. Work will begin on the improvements as soon as contracts can be let and construction started, Dr. Arthur M. Ahlschwede, executive secretary of the Synod's Board for Higher Education, said.

Major items in the construction include a new dormitory for girls. A new cafeteria-dining hall will also be built, and extensive repairs will be made on the administration-classroom building.

The decision, Dr. Ahlschwede commented, is a part of the Synod's program to continue an intensive recruitment and training program for full-time church workers throughout the nation. The integrated institution in Alabama prepares men and women for the pastoral and teaching ministries.

MISSOURI SYNOD BUYS 80-ACRE CHICAGO SITE

St. Louis. — An 80-acre tract of land has been purchased in North Riverside, Ill., officials of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod have revealed. Negotiations were previously completed with officials of the City of Chicago and a Chicago firm which had secured the property as high bidder for a 150-acre tract known as the Gage Farm.

The site, including all improvements, is located at Harlem Avenue and Cermak Road. Negotiations were conducted through the

board of control of Concordia Teachers College at River Forest, Ill.

No specific plans for use have been developed, officials explained. Space for expansion has been sought by the teachers college, and other important proposals are under consideration.

MISSOURI SYNOD LEADER TO JOIN NEW GUINEA TALKS

St. Louis. — Dr. Theodore F. Nickel of Chicago, Second Vice-President of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod and chairman of the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, will participate in inter-Lutheran discussions on foreign fields early in 1965. The decision by the Synod's Board of Directors was made in response to requests from overseas missionaries and the Board for World Missions.

In January, Dr. Nickel will participate in theological discussions in New Guinea, where inter-Lutheran talks have been conducted with the aim of establishing Lutheran unity. Similar discussions have also been held in India and Japan.

While overseas, Dr. Nickel will also visit other mission fields in the Far East, for the purpose of consulting on Lutheran union questions.

PLAN MISSION HOUSE WITH WOMEN'S AUXILIARY GRANT

St. Louis. — A gift of \$125,000 from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, women's auxiliary of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, will be used to build a new home for mission families in St. Louis, Mo. Approval of the construction program was given by the Synod's Board of Directors on May 5.

An old home in south St. Louis, now in use for the same purpose, will be razed to make room for the new four-family dwelling. The site was chosen because of its proximity to a Lutheran church, school, hospital, and

other facilities required by missionary families.

The residences are used particularly by families here on furlough. During their stay they normally transact business with mission officials of the Synod, undertake additional

studies in theology or medicine, or conduct speaking tours.

Authorization was also given for minor repairs to an apartment building, located near Concordia Seminary here, which is used for similar purposes.