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Theological Observer

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Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

On Oct. 24, 1966, at the convention of the American Lutheran Church in Minneapolis the ALC's Evangelical Lutheran Seminary at Columbus, Ohio, conferred the honorary degree of doctor of divinity on Dr. Oliver R. Harms, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Following is the text of Dr. Harms' response addressed to the convention delegates.

There are moments in life when all of us are tempted to say what St. Peter said on the Mount of Transfiguration: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." This is such a moment in my life.

This is truly an historic occasion. I am confident it marks in public a milestone along the way which our church bodies have come through history. This event does honor to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I hold your gesture of goodwill toward me to be a matter of genuine esteem for the church body which it is my privilege to serve and represent. The warmth of friendship and fellowship by which you embraced my representative last Friday and me today is an experience we will treasure all our lives.

I would not be here if my Synod and I did not feel a deep kinship with you. By our candid and forthright confession over a long period of time we have learned to know and love one another as brethren in Christ Jesus and true children of the Lutheran Reformation. The Holy Spirit, and your response now, both prompt us to covet full fellowship with you.

This deep longing and earnest prayer is at the same time an end in itself and a means to an end. Full fellowship must be the objective of our prayers—and of a prayer uttered almost 2,000 years ago by our Lord Himself.

All that Christ did and said was a witness to the perfect and unbroken fellowship He had with the Father. Now in our sad world where all of life bears the cursed mark of

sin, such fellowship exists only where God has touched men with His wondrous forgiveness and imbued them with Christ's own righteousness. If we covet fellowship in the company of the saints, it is for a purpose.

We all need a fellowship in which we might minister the grace of God to one another. We all crave the fellowship of those whose life is in praise of Him who joined our human fellowship so that we might become partners in His divine fellowship.

Yet in moments such as these we are in grave danger. Surrounded by the trappings of our churchly successes, and tensed by our own feeble efforts, we may be tempted to act as though God is our private possession and the church is our personal domain. But it is God alone who creates the glory and joy of the Mount of Transfiguration. Fellowship is His gift to those whose eyes and hearts have been opened by the Holy Spirit to see and to embrace the Man of Nazareth as the Son of God and the Savior of men.

We have a great hope for unity and for the future of the church. Whenever men resist the counsel of man's imagination and the driving of their own ego in order that they might heed the call of Christ's Word, even when it leads them to strange places and strange conduct, there the Holy Spirit creates both the miracle of faith and fellowship. By the Holy Spirit we discover simultaneously who Christ is and who we are. When we learn to know God as Father we always learn to know Christ and His disciples as our brethren.

I must confess that I am not untouched by the circumstances of our time. There is a longing to hold and to wield the rod of Moses or to fire the church with the words of St. Paul. From many quarters I feel many pressures. I sense the high calling of churchly statesmanship that emerges here and there,

now and then. In the midst of it all I surrender to the compulsions of a pastoral heart. This impulse compels me to call men to a daily pilgrimage to the blessed Gospel. This is the place where the crucified and risen Christ proclaims what we are to Him and what we are to one another. This is the place to find healing for all the hurt of life, the place to mend broken lives and shattered relationships.

True fellowship is always vastly more than a vision on a mountain top. It is more than a fleeting dream that comes to us in lonely isolation, that dissolves in the light and heat of daily reality, that dissipates in the traffic and dust of human existence.

By means of His fellowship with God, our Lord was able to pass through every condition of human existence, through every conceivable circumstance that might ever confront contemporary man. So our fellowship in Him and with one another equips us for the task of living life in the valley below the mountain. Fellowship in Christ and with one another is made to survive the tests of life in every dark and tortured valley. By our fellowship we can sustain one another with the grace God gives us freely for self, for our brethren, and for the world.

We dare not forget this last brief phrase — "for the world." The challenge of the church in our time and in our place has been portrayed in many ways. None is more apt, more challenging, or more promising than the mission which Christ Himself has described for His people in His world.

Christ asks us to do more than survive the trials of the world. We have not done enough when we have stuck together with Him and with one another as evil forces have tried to tear us apart or set us against each other. Christ asks us to overcome even as He has overcome.

In this encounter the enemy is not God's creation. The enemy still remains the same, the one Martin Luther so aptly described as

the old evil foe. The shambles in which we find our world and the horror we see in people's lives are a demonstration of his determination. From this tyranny and death God wants us to rescue people everywhere.

Our means to achieve this are given by our God. They are found in the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, in which God revealed Himself, His acts, His will to and for man, the history of the origin of the world and all creatures. Here He gave us an infallible, inerrant record and an unfailing guide. He asks complete surrender to the Word and an energetic effort to share it with people all over the world. This is the only hope for sinful man.

The task before us would overwhelm us if we did not know and trust our resources. God is still our mighty Fortress, our present Help in every trouble. But we need one another. In His wisdom and grace God has endowed us earthly vessels with a variety and plenitude of gifts. They are given to our stewardship that we might minister to one another and together minister to the world. Our fellowship is important. It is a testimony to the goodness of our God. It is a channel by which we share the life of God among us. It is an instrument by which we pursue the high and holy calling God has extended to us as His people. In utter confidence that He still loves and cares for His church and world with the same perfect love we know in Christ Jesus, I commend you to Him.

OLIVER R. HARMS

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORLD CONGRESS
ON EVANGELISM HELD AT BERLIN,
GERMANY, OCT. 26—NOV. 4, 1966

The most persistent question directed to a delegate returning from the recent World Congress on Evangelism is: What will be the outcome of this great congress? What will be the result of it? This question we cannot at the present time answer any more than we can prophesy what the result will

be of the decisions and deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. However, in a brief report we can describe some of the high points of the congress and give our personal reflections on the value of it.

The idea of a World Congress on Evangelism was first envisioned by Dr. Carl Henry in connection with the 10th anniversary of the Protestant journal *Christianity Today*. The careful planning of this large congress was reflected in the fact that everything connected with the meeting went efficiently.

The purpose of the congress was not to form new agencies for evangelization nor to make decisions on the sundry problems pertaining to social order and evangelism. No new organization or proposals were called for. Indeed, the more than 1,200 delegates and observers were invited not as representatives of denominations or mission societies but strictly as individuals who had been active in evangelistic work or who showed a deep interest in it. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss, to share insights and experiences. Such a purpose, which eliminated any preoccupation with deadlines, decisions, and so forth, made the meeting somehow restfully exciting and stimulating, unmarked by partisan debate or struggle for power.

The sessions were devoted to position papers dealing with the basic themes relative to evangelization and to reports called "Windows of the World," which sought to describe the progress and problems of evangelization all over the world. There were also daily "Bible Hour Messages" dealing with the Biblical material most pertinent to the evangelistic task of the church. These "Messages," essentially exegetical studies, were for the most part excellent and edifying. The position papers were generally well done and served to set the tone of the entire congress. The reports on the progress of evangelization in the different areas of the world were of uneven quality. To this delegate the

report on the United States by Clyde Taylor was most discerning, as were the reports on East Africa by J. T. Mpaazei and on West Africa by David I. Alatago. The report on South America sounded somewhat sectarian, and the report on Scandinavia was really quite poor. There was nothing obscurantist about the papers or discussions, however. The position papers in particular were quite scholarly and comprehensive. At the same time there was evident a certain antipathy toward mere pedantic and sterile intellectualism. This was brought out by a reply of Dr. Henry in a press conference: "The arrogant intellectualism of Germany has emptied the churches."

What were the high points of the congress? There were so many that it is difficult to single them out. There is no question that the two addresses by Billy Graham at the beginning and close of the congress were exceptionally impressive. In the first he described lucidly and convincingly the nature and goal of evangelism; in the second he spoke to the delegates of what they must do and overcome in order to carry out the evangelistic mission of the church. These two moving addresses deserve wide dissemination.

Another high point for this delegate was the stirring address of Bishop Chandu Ray of Karachi. This man was born a Hindu and converted in his twenties. He attended a seminary in India and reports that he lost his faith because of the radical Biblical criticism taught there. But through the agency of a humble Christian woman he was helped to return to his childlike faith in the Christ of Scripture. Since that time the story of what God has accomplished through this small, unassuming, and humble man is simply amazing. According to his report, thousands of people in Pakistan, animists, Hindus, and Moslems, have been brought to faith and baptized through his ministry; and it is through his efforts that the Sacred Scriptures were brought to Tibet in our generation. When he began his work in Karachi, there

were no Christians there. But since then, he is able to report, not a week has passed in which someone has not been brought to faith in Christ through his witness. His statistics indicate that today there are over thirty thousand Christians in Karachi, and that in other areas thousands of animists wait to be baptized. Stories like this bring both encouragement and shame to us who have done so little.

Two Auca Indians from Ecuador were present at the congress. One of these had been among the killers of the five missionaries who first attempted to evangelize their tribe. The two appeared to be very happy and friendly even though they were away from their home for the first time and could converse with others only through Miss Rachel Saint, one of the two women who finally reached and evangelized much of their tribe. One was tempted to feel sorry for them and to hope that no spectacular show would be made of these two men so far from home. But such fears proved unfounded once we heard them speak and, through Miss Saint's interpretation, testify to their faith. They offered a moving witness not only of how the Gospel had given them forgiveness and hope of eternal life but also how Christ had utterly changed their lives in their jungle homes from lives of fear and despair to lives of happiness and service to Him.

The congress brought together Christians with great differences—differences of race, of background, of social strata, vast differences in education, and differences in experience, ranging from those who had suffered terribly for their faith and risked everything to proclaim the Gospel to those of us whose lives of service have been relatively quiet and uneventful. Although English was the language used chiefly and the contingent from the United States and Canada represented three eighths of the total, the congress was by no means dominated by Americans. One was struck by the number of non-white

delegates from Africa, the Orient, and India, and also by the fact that these people were so positive and articulate in their witness.

The theme of the congress was "One Race, One Gospel, One Task." Every part of this theme was carefully and thoroughly discussed. The race issue was not avoided. One was encouraged by the spirit of self-criticism, particularly for avoiding in the past involvement in certain social concerns. This was apparent especially among the African, North American, and South American delegates. A Danish theologian expressed the feeling of the congress well when he insisted that the ministry of preaching and the ministry of good works are utterly inseparable for us today just as they were for Christ Himself.

This delegate left the congress with three very distinct impressions. First, there was apparent a tremendous zeal to reach out and bring lost sinners to faith in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. This zeal was coupled with a recognition, as Dr. Henry put it, that "without mass media and technological methods Christianity cannot keep up with the simple population explosion," but also with the understanding that only the Spirit of God can make a lost sinner a Christian. I don't think I ever heard more stress on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the church's mission than I did at this congress. Second, there was a surprising and gratifying appreciation of theology apparent and a unanimity on the nature of the Gospel which alone offers life and salvation. True, controversial subjects such as chiliasm were avoided, and the place of Baptism in the church's evangelical program was not given sufficient attention. There was also insufficient discussion of the place of the church and the office of the ministry as they relate to evangelization, although Dr. Richard Halvorson of Washington, D. C., in a paper entitled "The Methods of Personal Evangelism," did lay great stress on the part local congregations play in the work of evangelization. But the con-

sensus concerning what the Gospel was rang loud and clear, and this was most heartening. Third, there was discernible a unanimous conviction that Christ is the only hope for our lost and dying world, that without faith in Him and His work sinners, considered collectively or individually, are lost eternally. This conviction did not take the form of overt reaction against various forms of universalism today. But there was no question that it motivated the congress and, along with the more positive impetus of the blessings brought by the Gospel, contributed to the spirit of urgency that dominated the congress, urgency to bring the Gospel at all cost to a dying world.

It is my hope that our church, which is totally committed to the task of evangelization, will give serious attention to the 1,000-word statement of the congress and to the many valuable study papers that will soon become available.

ROBERT PREUS

COMMENTS ON SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NCC

The National Council of Churches at its Seventh General Assembly in Miami Beach, Florida, December 5—9, 1966, adopted important statements on social and political issues and witnessed a vigorous theological debate between proponents of the "old" and the "new" evangelism. Although the NCC tries to avoid specific theological statements, preferring to leave such questions to member denominations, the debate about the content and purpose of the Christian Gospel became an unavoidable theological issue.

The advance study material released by the NCC Commission on Evangelism, titled "Crisis and Opportunity in Evangelism," supported the view that has come to be known as the "new" evangelism. Evangelist Billy Graham and the recent World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin emerged as the chief proponents of the "old" evangelism. According to Graham, who addressed an overflow

luncheon gathering at the invitation of the NCC program committee, the Christian Gospel consists of the message of God's forgiveness of individuals for Jesus' sake. The old evangelism derives its authority from the Bible, and its method is basically that of preaching the Word of God. The "new" evangelism is advocated by such men as Harvey Cox (in his book *The Secular City*) and Colin Williams (in *Where in the World?* and *What in the World?*). Proponents argue that the Western world has been so thoroughly secularized in the 20th Century that men are no longer asking metaphysical or traditional theological questions. To gain a hearing, the church must preach a "secular Gospel." The chief message of this secular Gospel is that God is powerfully active in the world in the person of Jesus Christ and His servant church. God's action shows itself in bringing freedom and full manhood to people who are denied these essential human goals because of demonic social, economic, and political structures by which they are imprisoned. The method of the new evangelism calls for an attack on social structures and forces that prevent the realization on the part of all people of "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Many participants in the evangelism section indicated by their comments and questions that they could not agree fully with the position of either Graham or Williams. Some expressed regret that certain members of the NCC were insisting on an "either-or" resolution of the question. Some NCC men argued in turn that the very truth of the Gospel was at stake and that Graham was "dead wrong" in his general position. The Right Reverend Leslie Newbigin, bishop of the Church of South India, took a mediating position, either by accident or design, in the daily Bible studies, which he based on John 17. He cautioned against those who in their desire to speak the Gospel to the world

on its own terms come dangerously close to apostasy, also against those who in their anxious desire to preserve traditional forms and messages come dangerously close to irrelevant sectarianism. According to Bishop Newbigin, this schism today disrupts the unity of the church far more than the denominational structures that are becoming increasingly less important.

The traditional social concern of the NCC was reflected in a long list of major statements on domestic and international issues adopted by the General Assembly. Arthur H. Fleming, the new president, described the function of the NCC as that of providing

means for research and study, for mobilizing Christian opinion, and for mounting programs of Christian action. He assured reporters that government officials pay close attention to mail, citing examples of memos he had received from former President Eisenhower that were prompted by single letters and called for immediate action on his part as Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has no formal connection with the NCC, although it carries on cooperative work with some of its divisions and agencies.

HERBERT T. MAYER