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Theological Observer

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

The International Lutheran Theological Conference held at Frankfurt am Main in West Germany from June 28 to July 1, 1966, brought together representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from North and South America, the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of France, the Free Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and three Lutheran free churches in Germany (Altlutherische Kirche, Selbststaendige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, and Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche). Representatives of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod were present as observers. Local pastors as well as other guests from Germany and New Zealand were also in attendance. The following statement prepared by the committee members whose names are affixed represents the official report on this conference.

Results in Summary

1. There was a general consensus among members of the conference on the doctrine of the church: its nature, its marks, and its unity, although some emphasized the hidden nature of the church more than did others. From this emerges a *Problem for further study*:

What is the relation between *ecclesia stricta dicta* and *ecclesia late dicta*? What are the limits (if any) of Luther's dictum: *abscondita est ecclesia, latent sancti*?

2. There was further no doubt at all among the members of the conference that the true treasure and resource of the church are the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the blessed sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as these are understood and confessed in the Lutheran Confessions. The conference further agreed that the means of grace as resources of the church are powerful means to bring about repentance and faith. So they

are constitutive for the church, and by their true administration churches are to be evaluated and judged. God instituted the office of the ministry for their use and administration, so that office is the highest office in the church.

3. Discussion on the third section of the conference theme, "Church Fellowship and Relations with Other Churches," centered almost wholly on the attitude to be taken by orthodox Lutheran churches to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). There was not complete unanimity of opinion among members of the conference concerning all the points raised. However, this much agreement can be registered:

- a. Orthodox Lutheran churches have the duty to bear witness to the Gospel in its truth also to churches whose errors they cannot overlook or condone. They should seek out and create opportunities for doing this.
- b. Orthodox Lutheran churches have to be careful in their relations to other churches not to violate the principle that church fellowship cannot be exerted as long as it does not exist, not even partially.
- c. No member of the conference advocated an immediate linking up with the LWF, although the reasons behind this agreement were not of the same nature.

Considerable differences of opinion existed among conference members concerning the nature of the LWF. The view strongly held by some that the LWF by virtue of its confessional paragraph and its churchly purposes was "church" in the sense of the New Testament and that therefore membership in it involves a confessional loyal church in denial of the truth of the Gospel seemed unacceptable to others, who, arguing from the constitutional changes adopted at Helsinki, maintained that no untrue witness was involved in membership and who further insisted that the LWF provides a fine oppor-

tunity for the witness which orthodox Lutheran churches owe to other churches.

The question was raised whether membership in the LWF might be possible for an orthodox church if it made its position towards other member churches quite plain upon joining and if it were accepted by the LWF under these conditions. This the conference believed to be a suggestion worth pursuing further by the churches they represent. A combined approach to the LWF in that sense by the churches concerned might be also worthy of consideration.

Problem for Further Study

The discussion made plain that—

1. Further study should be given to the meaning of subscription to the Doctrinal Basis of the LWF and its relations to subscription to the Lutheran Confessions in the member churches.

2. Further attention should be given to the possibilities and limits of responsible witness to other churches and the problem of cooperation with them in such a way that the Confession is not damaged.

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CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN ISRAEL

The following report on the Christian presence in Israel will be of interest to readers concerned about the Christian church in the Israeli sector of the Holy Land. This little article appeared originally in the January 1966 issue of Bible et Terre Sainte and subsequently in English translation in the January 1967 issue of Catholic Mind. It is with the permission of the latter journal that the translation is reprinted here. The author, Fr. Jean Roger, an Assumptionist, is secretary of the Society of St. James, a pastor at Beersheba, and a well-known guide in Israel. Although this article was written prior to the Arab-Israeli war in June of this year which altered Israel's political boundaries, the basic observations here presented are still valid.

Every Christian pilgrim to the Holy Land

comes to find, above all, the places that bear witness to the great events on which our faith is founded. Yet, especially after Vatican II, how can we by-pass the living stones that make up the church of the Lord in his own country, without showing interest and sympathy toward them?

True, when we speak of Israel today, we have in mind especially the Jewish people in its "recovered land." We recall its gigantic effort to make the desert flower again and to make the Hebrew language live once more. Still among this population of more than two and a half millions, there are Christians belonging to 24 denominations and to different rites, with their problems, hopes, prayers.

The 55,000 or so Christians in Israel are in large part Arabs. (In fact, some 200,000 persons in the country are Arabic.) They are full-fledged citizens of the country (both Hebrew and Arabic being official languages); yet they are a minority, with all the psychological problems of a minority. They have the right to vote, and their representatives sit in Parliament. They are members of unions and benefit from social security. Certain restrictions on their freedom of travel are on the way to being lifted. Their intellectual level is progressively rising, and a good number of young Arabs are working for degrees in official institutes of higher learning.

The largest Christian community of Israel belongs to the Greek Catholic Church, also called Melchite or (less unhappily) "Uniate." The restoration of the Greek Catholic hierarchy in the Near East goes back to 1727, and the members of this church can be considered descendants of those vast Christendoms that flourished there before the Muslim conquest in the seventh century.

This community numbers 22,000 members, all Arabs. At its head is the Archbishop of Galilee, George Hakim, a gifted, vigorous personality. His main preoccupation is the recruitment of clergy; in fact, for his 26 par-

ishes and many extra-parochial duties, he has only 19 Arab priests and four foreigners. To cope with this need, Archbishop Hakim founded a little seminary at Nazareth ten years ago. On July 24, 1965, he had the joy of conferring Holy Orders on two young Arabs trained in this seminary.

Under Archbishop Hakim's energetic leadership, new churches have been built in Galilean villages; the Salvatorian Sisters have founded a primary school and hostel for girls; nuns have laid the groundwork for the contemplative life in the Oriental rite; Père Gauthier has accomplished a great deal in his work of building homes for the poor and establishing the "Companions of Jesus the Carpenter."

The Latin community is less numerous, with only 10,000 members in 12 parishes. It owes its importance to the large number of religious institutions throughout the country. It is under the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, situated in the Jordanian part of the Holy City. The vicar general for Israel is Msgr. Hanna Kaldany, whom the Holy Father personally appointed bishop on the Mount of the Beatitudes, January 5, 1964. He holds a doctorate in canon law and has been previously head of the ecclesiastical tribunal in Israel. Under his jurisdiction are seven diocesan priests, 151 religious men of 13 orders or congregations, and 635 religious women in 17 institutes.

In the first place, we must mention the Franciscans of the "Custody of the Holy Land," who have charge of most of the shrines. They are now completing the great basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth and are planning a new shrine of the Primacy of Peter at Tabgha and one at Magdala.

A great effort of adaptation was demanded of the members of different religious institutes in Israel, following the demographic change that came with the foundation of the new state: the emigration of a large number

of Arabs, the principal beneficiaries of the clergy's services, together with the massive immigration of Jews from more than 90 different countries. The Latin institutions are more often situated in Jewish areas than are the Melchite institutions. Their effort at adaptation varied considerably in success and in speed. Today, 18 years after the independence of Israel, more and more religious speak Hebrew. In certain places, mass is celebrated in Hebrew with the active participation of the faithful. Catechism is taught the young Christians in this language which has become theirs.

The pioneer in the effort of Christian integration and Christian encounter with Israel is the Society of St. James, a diocesan activity comprising ten priests and religious of different religious communities, and five laymen. Also living in this spirit are the Dominican Fathers of Maison Saint-Isaïe, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion, the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld. A favorite area of dialogue is that of higher studies, in which many profound contacts have been established. The Second Vatican Council's declaration on the Jews has contributed greatly to dispel misunderstandings and to improve the atmosphere of contacts. While contacts between Jews and Christians in other countries have repercussions merely in these countries, what goes on in Israel matters everywhere, since all Judaism, Zionist or not, has its eyes on Israel.

Among other Christian groups, let us mention the Maronite Church (united with Rome; 2,800 members), the Greek Orthodox Church (16,000 members), several Monophysite Churches (Armenian, Coptic and Syrian, 1,500 members). All of these are Arabic-speaking. The different Protestant Churches (Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist and others) number about 2,000 members. Interesting contacts are set up with several representatives of the latter, both in

the Biblical and religious realm and dealing with the matter of working out a religious vocabulary in Hebrew.

To sum up: the Christians of Israel are more and more aware of their duty as witnesses amid their Jewish brothers. The Lord said: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Galilee and even to the ends of the earth." Heretofore the Church has obeyed principally the last part of this command.

In our time, the first part has come into its own. The duty of the Christian living in Israel or visiting there as a pilgrim is to show his Jewish brothers, by an attitude of brotherly sympathy, the true countenance of the church: that of the Sermon on the Mount, of Vatican II, of unselfish, all-embracing love. This will be the true Christian presence in Israel.

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