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## Brief Studies

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## BRIEF STUDIES

PROFESSOR GORDON RUPP:  
THE OPTIMISM OF GRACE

One continues to appreciate the vigorous historical writing of Professor Rupp.<sup>1</sup> A Church of Scotland minister gave me a cherished volume of reflections by Gordon Rupp, delivered while he was a Methodist pastor in London during World War II. Professor Rupp writes there of "The Optimism of Grace."<sup>2</sup> Whether in book review<sup>3</sup> or a university sermon, Rupp's catholicity of interest must not be marred by a suggestion of indecision. Therefore I respond to the following statement by Douglas C. Stange:

Gordon Rupp has a number of times put forward hesitantly the idea of redeeming Müntzer, but somehow never really throws his whole heart into it.<sup>4</sup>

Since the latest article cited is in the 1957 *Luther Today* volume, a brief addendum to Stange's note is necessary. The first omission is "Thomas Müntzer: Prophet of Radical Christianity," a lecture by Rupp now published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (Spring 1966), 467—487.<sup>5</sup>

In 1958 Rupp described Müntzer in two

<sup>1</sup> O. Chadwick, "Historical Writing of Professor Gordon Rupp," *Drew Gateway*, 36 (1966), 52—66.

<sup>2</sup> *Principalities and Powers* (London: Epworth Press, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> See Rupp's review of Regin Prenter, "Der barmherzige Richter," in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 76 (1965), 177—179.

<sup>4</sup> "A Marxist De-Lutheranization of the German Reformation," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVIII (October 1967), 598, note 20.

<sup>5</sup> It is also overlooked by Eric W. Gritsch, *Reformer Without a Church* (Fortress Press, 1967). Hans J. Hillerbrand does cite it in "The Impatient Revolutionary: Thomas Müntzer," *A Fellowship of Discontent* (Harper & Row, 1967).

separate studies. Of his death we read, "But he died decently, as Philip of Hesse testified, and for all his fanaticism, we touch in him an appeal for justice which would be trodden underfoot in the terrible reprisals which now followed."<sup>6</sup> Rupp notices his dependence on Hans Huth's natural theology, yet hesitates so to label Müntzer without more detailed study.<sup>7</sup> If Professor Rupp seemed hesitant in 1958, there was good reason. By 1960 Rupp had clarified Müntzer's relation to Hans Huth.<sup>8</sup> One should also read his 1959 article on Andrew Karlstadt, where Rupp concludes that Karlstadt had more influence with Conrad Grebel in Zurich than did Thomas Müntzer.<sup>9</sup>

Though the article "Müntzer, Thomas" in the 1965 *Encyclopedia Britannica* is noncommittal, its brevity may be partly responsible. Certainly by 1966 Professor Rupp had made up his mind about Müntzer.

In Thomas Müntzer, as in no other Reformer, we touch that smothered undercurrent of

<sup>6</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History II: The Reformation 1520—59*, p. 89. Cf. *The Righteousness of God*, 1953, where Rupp has a negative opinion about Müntzer on p. 349.

<sup>7</sup> "Word and Spirit in the First Years of the Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 49 (1950), 20. Cf. Gordon Rupp, "The Bible in the Age of the Reformation," in D. E. Nineham, *The Church's Use of the Bible, Past and Present* (S. P. C. K., 1963), p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> "Thomas Müntzer, Hans Huth and the 'Gospel of All Creatures,'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, 43 (1961), 492—579.

<sup>9</sup> "Andrew Karlstadt and Reformation Puritanism," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. Vol. X (October 1959), 322. Now see the article by Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Andreas Bodenstein of Karlstadt, Prodigal Reformer," *Church History*, XXXV (1966), 379—398, and Rupp, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1965, on Karlstadt.

pain and injustice which would one day explode in modern revolutionary man, onesided, heretical, but something to which the Church, by reason of its own failure of compassion, cannot return an unqualified "No."<sup>10</sup>

Such candid optimism in historical writing is refreshing, a fitting reminder from a Methodist to Luther scholars that reading and listening to Luther as did the Wesleys<sup>11</sup> can still create a compassionate church.<sup>12</sup> Professor Rupp reaches a dimension in writing from which American scholars can learn a great deal and for which they can be grateful when he writes:

None the less, the Word went forth conquering and to conquer, in the end more creative and permanent than are the bloody ploys of soldiers and politicians. Like Jack in the Beanstalk's drab seed, the new form of the gospel grew in the night, a way up which men might climb into the spiritual world, to find at the top new treasures and to fight new giants.<sup>13</sup>

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#### TOWARD LUTHERAN UNION

In an age of Lutheran ecumenical progress, the October issue of the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* will be of great interest to all Lutherans. The number contains several excellent articles on the historical background

<sup>10</sup> "Thomas Müntzer: Prophet of Radical Christianity," 487. Now see Rupp, "Patterns of Salvation in the First Age of the Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 57 (1966), 52—61.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon Rupp, "Introductory Essay," *A History of the Methodist Church in England*, I (Epworth Press, 1965), xxxiv. The entire essay is history written with compassion and optimism.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *The Old Reformation and the New* (Epworth Press, 1967). The optimistic theme may also be observed in Rupp, *Last Things First* (Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 34—36.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon Rupp, "Luther and the Reformation," in Joel Hurstfield, *The Reformation Crisis* (Harper & Row, 1966), p. 29.

of the organization of the National Lutheran Council in 1917 and on the general status of American Lutheranism in those critical years. Herman A. Preus narrates the history of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America and places both its strong confessional orientation and its pietism into the context of European origins. He devotes considerable space to the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood, a chapter of Norwegian Lutheran history which all participants would like to forget. Erwin L. Lueker contributes an impressionistic picture of the general aloofness of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. His article will be more meaningful to "Missourians," but for them it will prove to be nostalgic and accurate.

Helen M. Knubel tells the story of the organization of The National Lutheran Commission for Soldiers' and Sailors' Welfare on the basis of original correspondence. Her father emerges as an ecclesiastical statesman of the top rank, and this is the only way he can be rightly described. Some of his comments on the attitude of the now defunct Synodical Conference deserve to be heard again. Frederick K. Wentz takes the readers behind the scenes as the National Lutheran Council came into being. This kind of historiographic honesty is refreshing; it raises the question of the emotional involvement of those who are still alive. Doris A. Flesner traces the history of the constituent synods of the Lutheran Church in America to and through the formation of the United Lutheran Church in 1918. Like the other contributions, this one, too, will bring nostalgic memories back to those who lived through all or part of the developments.

The chief value of this number lies in the important historical background it provides for the contemporary situation. As one reads the profile sketch of the present American Lutheran Church, for example, one feels strong historical, theological, and psychological parallels with the development of the

Missouri Synod. The two articles by Miss Knubel and Dr. Wentz depict effectively the way in which Lutheran union was deeply effected by crises in American history. God used World War I to bring about a rapprochement.

As Editor Carl S. Meyer points out in his foreword, the contributors concern themselves with American Lutheranism as a whole. They

also draw most of their information from primary sources. Meyer asks the question that will come to the mind of most readers: "Can it be that a survey of the unions in 1917 and 1918, an appraisal of problems then, and an understanding of the Lutheran ethos at that time can contribute in a small degree to the healing of the people?"

H. T. M.