

Concordia Theological Monthly



S E P T E M B E R ♦ 1 9 5 7

BRIEF STUDIES

[EDITORIAL NOTE: In publishing this memorial address we depart from our policy of not including sermons and addresses in our journal. It is not primarily the unusual situation that prompts this deviation. It is true Prof. Paul Riedel had not reached his 35th year of life and not completed his first semester of instruction in philosophy at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., when the Lord abruptly cut short his promising career. The reason for publishing this address is rather the concise and penetrating manner in which the Christian world view is set forth.]

IN MEMORIAM PAUL RIEDEL, 1921—1956

1 Cor. 13:9-12

A few days ago I discovered in my files a letter from Paul Riedel. Professor Riedel wrote it almost ten years ago. In this letter he analyzed Joachim Wach's stupendous three-volume work on hermeneutics titled *Das Verstehen*, which he had studied critically. But the letter contains also some personal observations by Professor Riedel indicative of his judicious mind. One of these observations I bring to your attention in this memorial service. It touches the basic thoughts which I wish to leave with you.

According to Wach, so Paul Riedel writes in his letter, "Verstehen" needs to be analyzed historically, philologically, and psychologically; it is conditioned by sociological and other environmental factors; and the cultural sciences, including theology, must contribute to the task of working out both the general and the special problems of hermeneutics. To these theses by Wach Paul Riedel adds the following meaningful comment: "The method of a descriptive science like sociology should vary from that of a normative one like theology. This might help the anthropologists to understand that they have not *understood* (underscored by Paul Riedel) man when they have measured his skull."

This is a theologically sound observation by Mr. Riedel. We do not yet understand man when we are able to measure his skull. And theologically we do not understand man correctly when we understand only his behavior habits. Joseph R. Royce, associate professor of psychology at the University of Redlands, Calif., writes in the January 1957 issue of the *American Scientist*: "If we contemplate what we know about behavior in 1880 with what we know now, the extent of our progress is quite staggering. . . . If we look at the absolute number of incontrovertible facts and valid generalizations concerning behavior, or if we contemplate in what way psychology has helped us

to 'understand' human nature thus far, we are not particularly impressed" (p. 73). There has been only one person who fully understood man, but He knew not only the size of his skull and his behavior habits but also what is *in* man. This person is the God-man, Jesus Christ. Of Him the sacred writer says: "He knew all men and needed not that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:24,25). And by His Spirit Jesus revealed in the sacred prophetic and apostolic writings what is in man and how man is to be understood theologically.

Professor Riedel had an almost passionate desire to understand man. Of this he gave evidence already in his student days. This accounts for his interest in man as he is understood by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists of every classification. Therefore he was interested also in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and other classical humanists of the eighteenth century. Therefore he was interested, too, in the nature and destiny of man as defined by Professors Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich and by other theologians. But Paul Riedel never forgot that, in order to understand man theologically, and therefore truly, one must, above all, view man as he is reflected in Scripture in the perfect mirror of God's inexorable Law. And one must understand man also as being a child of God, redeemed by God's grace through the blood of Jesus Christ. One must finally have learned himself to live in the presence of God, to be constantly aware of both His judgment and His grace, to depend entirely on His forgiving love, in order to be able to understand the people with whom one deals and to whom one ministers.

Like Paul of Tarsus, Paul Riedel had also learned that this understanding of man, as he is under God's Law and under God's grace, must be the major concern of the Christian theologian and that the Christian pastor must ever be eager to communicate this understanding to his parishioners. That is why Paul Riedel had a clear vision of the purpose of the holy ministry. That is why he loved the vocation he had chosen. That is why his parish in Paramus, N. J., learned to love him. They loved him as the Philippians loved Paul of Tarsus, and they gave inspiring evidence of that love in the days of their former pastor's fatal illness. They knew that their former pastor had been truly concerned to have them understand who and what they were in the sight of God. They had learned that through the power of the Gospel they could live truly God-pleasing lives, truly love the brethren, forgive one another in love, and truly hope for eternal glory. Paul Riedel shared the sentiments which Luther wrote on a sheet of

paper just two days before he died: "Let no one think that he has fully exhausted Holy Scriptures who has not for a hundred years shepherded congregations with the prophets." Like Luther, Paul Riedel knew that even our most exhaustive and accurate theological understanding of man and our most thorough and scientific study of Scripture will not help people unless Christian pastors shepherd their congregations with the prophetic and apostolic writings and attempt to reduce the divine message of these writings to terms which Christian people can understand and by which their Christian faith and life are nourished, confirmed, and preserved.

Like Paul of Tarsus, Paul Riedel also knew that our theological understanding of man and of all divinely revealed verities is always fragmentary, oftentimes painfully limited, and discouragingly superficial. He had learned that it is impossible in this life to probe to its source the abysmal depths of man's proud, stubborn, and rebellious heart and that it is equally impossible for us to understand and gauge the full dimensions of God's love in Christ. He knew that all our theological knowledge results in no more than faint and fleeting reflections of the true realities, that our life is hid in Christ and therefore hidden from the view of man, and that it is understood by God only. He believed that he would, after all our present knowledge and understanding had passed away, see Him face to face whose adorable image he had seen only in the sketchy portraits of the New Testament. He had learned that God understood him from eternity and that this God had enrolled him through Baptism in the fellowship of the saints, that this God knew all his frailties, failures, and sins, but that this God also richly and daily forgave all his iniquities. He knew, like Luther, that this God is both the efficient and the final Cause that moved Him to call Paul Riedel in the most promising years of life into eternal glory. And he knew, finally, that he would experience in his own mortal body the glorious mystery of the resurrection and would at last understand as fully as God had understood him.

Paul Riedel was scheduled to conduct chapel exercises today, January 18. He had made a memorandum of it on a sheet of paper in his study at home. He had begun to assemble thoughts for his chapel address. He had jotted down on the same page on which he had noted that he was to preach today a quotation from Augustine's *Confessions*, Book 7. This quotation reads: "These thoughts I revolved in my miserable heart, overcharged with most gnawing cares, lest I should die ere I had found the truth." God be praised: Paul Riedel had found and confessed the truth before he died, the truth that is in Christ

Jesus, our Lord. We shall remember him not only as a former student, a pastor, a teacher, and colleague at our seminary; we shall remember him, above all else, as one who learned, loved, and lived the Truth. Amen.

St. Louis, Mo.

PAUL M. BRETSCHER

January 18, 1957

LUTHER AND BARTH ON BAPTISM

Kerygma und Dogma, edited by such prominent European theologians as Dr. G. Gloege of Jena, Dr. R. Prenter of Aarhus, Dr. E. Schlink of Heidelberg, Dr. O. Cullman of Basel, and others, devotes its issue of July 1956, which just reached our desk, to a discussion of the theology of Karl Barth, in particular its relation to Luther's theology. In one of the articles Dr. Ruben Josefson of Uppsala, under the general heading "Wort und Zeichen," points out the fundamental difference between Barth and Luther on Baptism. Christian Baptism, according to Barth, is essentially a sign (*Abbild*) of the renewal of a person by his participation in Christ's death and resurrection which takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit. Barth thus reaffirms the doctrine of Calvin, though in his repudiation of Infant Baptism he is more emphatic than was the Geneva theologian. Against Romanism and enthusiasm Luther asserted the importance of Baptism as a means of grace by virtue of the divine command comprehended in it and the divine Word connected with it. This Word is primarily that of divine promise. The writer gives special attention to Luther's motivation of Pedobaptism. Here Luther has left many questions open, since Scripture itself does not speak with definiteness on such important points as, for example, on the infant's faith. Nevertheless, according to Luther, the divine promise demands faith in Baptism, and the divine work in Baptism demands faith in the gift which is imparted in Baptism. What takes place in Pedobaptism is regeneration, and this means the removal of the baptized person from the kingdom of Satan, sin, and death and his translation into God's kingdom of life and salvation. That, however, does not mean that we should search out what takes place in Pedobaptism, though Luther presupposed the child's faith in Baptism.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER