

Concordia Theological Monthly



D E C E M B E R • 1 9 5 6

THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

We are pleased to submit the following two items recently received by the Board for Missions in Foreign Countries from the Rev. Herbert M. Zorn, one of our missionaries in India. The items indicate that our missionaries are not only aware of the peculiar pattern of Lutheranism in that country, but also are alert to God-pleasing ways and means to implement and deepen Biblical truth in the hearts of all Christians with whom they are in contact. The Rev. Marcus Ward's suggestion deserves, so it seems to us, very careful thought. It would surely be a wonderful thing if the groups involved could develop a catechism reflecting fully and clearly the great Biblical truths which Luther expressed in his unsurpassed Enchiridion.

P. M. B.

THE PATTERN OF LUTHERANISM IN INDIA

Christianity in India has its main origins in the Western world. The Syrian Christians, claiming spiritual descent from the Apostle Thomas, are the only major exceptions to this, though Roman Catholicism and the Anglican Church have affected them considerably.

Protestant and Lutheran Christianity dates its beginnings in India to Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau in 1706. The influence of these early men and of other Lutherans like Schwartz and the early representatives of the Basel Mission is felt by many of the Protestant Christians in India today. A sizable section of the Church of South India came into being and gained its first, highly indoctrinated adherents under Lutheran missionaries like Schwartz and Ringeltaube. The bishop of the North Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India is Bishop Lipp of German Lutheran origin, and many of the churches in that area use Luther's Small Catechism as their textbook for confirmation. All this indicates a mixed influence bearing upon the Indian Protestant Christians of today.

Among Lutheran Christians, too, this mixed influence within the general pale of Lutheranism is evident. The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church traces its ancestry back to Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau and the Danish-Halle Mission. The Leipzig Mission took over this work and prosecuted it alone until World War I; then the Church of Sweden Mission stepped in to take over the responsibilities of the exiled German missionaries. The TELC today has missionaries both from the Leipzig and Church of Sweden Missions. The flavor of its polity and theology has been affected accordingly. In other cases the situation developed differently. In the case of the Gossner Evangelical

Lutheran Church, World War I drove the missionaries out, and it was forced to proceed as best it could, with some help from the ULCA Mission. After the war, a few Gossner missionaries returned, but this church is very largely independent and has had a vital growth. The Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church was begun by the Schleswig-Holstein Mission. During World War II the missionaries were interned and here again the ULCA stepped in. However, immediately after the war, the ULCA Mission returned the work to the former missionaries, without a bill for services rendered. The South Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, now the working area of the ALC, was begun by the Hermannsburg Mission in the last century. Again, the First World War drove the German missionaries out, and it was taken over permanently by the ALC. Our own Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission (MELIM) is one of the few Lutheran Missions that has had a continuous influence from just one foreign mission organization; and even in it the pioneers were Missourians by adoption, and Australian Lutheran missionaries have had a hand in the work. As a result of these different influences, it is difficult to tag the Lutheran Christians here in India with the same label that is borne by their present parent organizations.

But a further fact influences this matter, namely, that the missionaries from these various sending bodies are not necessarily representative of the average of their sending bodies. Even within our own MELIM, technically speaking, men are usually called objectively out of the graduating classes to foreign fields, but considerable weight is given to the desire of individuals for such work. In the case of the ULCA and ALC calls are usually extended only to such men as have volunteered for the work or otherwise indicated their willingness to go. In the case of the European church bodies, it is usually from a group of pious Christians within the churches that the missionaries are chosen and sent. Mission organizations are often of such a nature that they can take men from different churches to represent them in foreign fields. The Church of Sweden is the established church of that country; but its mission is not supported by taxes, and its missionaries are not appointed to foreign fields in the same way that they would receive appointments in the country of Sweden itself. Their expressed willingness to go is of the essence. The same applies largely to the German and Danish Lutheran bodies working in India. It is probably valid to conclude that the spirit of consecration and dedication to the Gospel is higher among these missionaries than among the average of the clergy of their sending churches.

When these missionaries come to India, unaverage as they are, they are placed into situations which affect their approach even more. They are separated from the home church by thousands of miles and return on furlough only once in five years on the average. Fellowship even among themselves is restricted by distance and travel difficulties. They find themselves not in the midst of a vast, though divided, Christian community, as they would in the West, but surrounded by a large group of non-Christians, many of whom may well be outright anti-Christian. They find their task not so much to define and defend the Gospel against the subtle perversions of other Christians as to state it clearly, vividly, and unmistakably to people of utterly different faiths.

And yet we must remember that the missionaries are not the only factors in determining the polity and doctrine of the new church. In our day the vast majority of pastors and other religious workers are Indian Christians, and that majority is increasing. True, they have grown up under the influence of foreign missionaries. But they live in different situations with different influences and need different emphases. They are citizens of a free country. The influence of the missionaries can no longer be that of a rubber stamp. Its impress may well be blurred in some areas and more sharply defined in others. Some of this may be good, some bad; but it is an inescapable fact.

For the reasons stated above we must use carefully the expressions so common in our parlance: Missions of the Missouri Synod, ULCA, ALC, Leipzig Mission, etc. If we mean to indicate the origins of the Indian churches concerned, well and good; but if we mean to describe them in background, expression, doctrinal approach, polity, etc., let us remember that the pattern is not that consistent. We are dealing with young churches in their own right. Let us honor them as such.

THE CATECHISM APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING AND UNITY

The occasion was one of the conversations between the Church of South India Theological Commission and a group of Lutheran representatives of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India and of the Missouri Lutheran Mission. The subject was the question of what was necessary for union. The representatives of the CSI asked that doctrinal unity should grow out of a situation of union, arguing that this was the only way in which doctrinal unity could grow. The Lutherans argued for doctrinal unity first and then union to grow out of that. At this impasse, the Rev. Marcus Ward, then professor of the United Theological College in Bangalore and a member of the CSI who hailed from the English Methodist Church, offered a sugges-

tion as a partial solution to the problem. "How would the Lutheran brethren feel," he asked, "if the Church of South India were to work up a catechism satisfactory to the Lutherans which would be used as a basis of instruction for all catechumens and confirmands in the Church of South India? Would that not constitute a continuing confession of what the church teaches and what its people learn?" (Quoted from memory; statement was made in Madras, November 1951.)

Without arguing the question of whether this is enough for union or whether it can really constitute sufficient unity, we can see some merits in this suggestion. Real unity may be indicated by a confession, but it *is* not that confession. It is rather made up of attitudes, interpretations, and understandings of words and their context which are governed by an understanding of the Gospel. Often the question reduces itself to how these attitudes, interpretations, and understandings can become one among people who have been separate for many years.

The "catechism approach," suggested by Rev. Ward, could well assure a closer direction within a church of the instruction of confirmands and members of each congregation. One of the strengths of the present North Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India is the indoctrination that it still receives through the use of Luther's Small Catechism in its confirmation instruction; this has been inherited from its early Lutheran missionaries in the Basel Mission. One of the phases of co-operation between our MELIM (Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission) and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Arcot Lutheran Church is the standardization of the translation into Tamil of Luther's Catechism, the Confessions, and the Liturgy. As this work continues in the churches, the degree of unity in approach and understanding cannot fail to be favorably affected.

Is it not also possible that this type of "catechism approach" might overrule the laws of gravity and trickle upwards to the point of influencing favorably those who take the lead in matters of union and unity? Two men from different church bodies will have different backgrounds and understandings of words and approaches. Perhaps there will be real doctrinal differences; but if they have taught or been taught the same "catechism," some of the apparent differences will cease to be differences, and the real differences will show up in clear light. This clarity is essential for doctrinal unity, for from it a discussion of God's Word can point directly to an equally clear truth.

Finally, an aggressive program of this sort will begin to answer the vexing problem: "What if we do agree on a common confession? How do we know that this seeps down to the instruction and discipline of

the churches concerned?" We would know because it is this sort of a catechism that forms the basis for such instruction and discipline.

Let them use Luther's Catechism! Fine! But even we have expanded it for the purposes of instruction. No, let such a project be part of a joint effort to understand the same language and speak the same words in stating the blessed message of salvation. Luther's Catechism will have its profound influence, not because it is Luther's but because of its simplicity and clarity. But let the effect come of itself, not of our insistence.

Prof. Ward's words carry a significant message for those who wish to work for unity among Christians, Lutherans and others.

NOTE: The 1956 meeting of the CSI Theological Commission and the representatives of the FELCI and MELIM held in Bangalore decided to ask the southern seminaries (including two CSI seminaries and our Concordia Seminary in Nagercoil) to study the question of the possibility of such a catechism project and to report to their respective bodies.

THE SACRIFICE MOTIF IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the June issue of the *Lutherischer Rundblick* Dr. H. Martin of Marburg presents a review of an article which recently appeared in the conservative Swedish periodical *Nya Vaektaren* (the *New Watchman*). Under the title *Das Opfermotiv des Abendmahls* the article discusses Aulén's recent book on the Lord's Supper, entitled *Given for You*, in which Dr. Martin shows that Luther's doctrine of the Holy Supper was a complete repudiation of the Roman Mass. To this Aulén agrees. At the same time he rejects also the Anglican view, now current in Sweden, that in the Sacrament the church offers up Christ in a "more Protestant" way by presenting to God anew the sacrifice, made once for all, by Him. Aulén emphasizes the fact that since Christ's sacrifice has been rendered to God once for all, it can in no wise be repeated. He admits that evidently no one in Sweden intends to return to the Roman doctrine of the Mass, but he asks why some are so eager to use expressions that may occasion misunderstanding. Over against the Anglo-Catholic view that in the Eucharist we offer up Christ's sacrifice, he maintains that this cannot be justified, much less the view that there Christ Himself is offered up. Luther centered his doctrine of the Holy Supper in its gift of the remission of sins and taught that there is no other way to God except by His forgiving grace; for only "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." Dr. Martin asks whether the doctrine of the Real Presence will perhaps

be revived in the Swedish Church, which has established altar fellowship with the Anglican communion. Luther fought not only against Romanism but also against Calvinism and crypto-Calvinism. Will Swedish theologians under the leadership of Aulén do the same?

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BRIEF ITEMS FROM NLC NEWS SERVICE

Dubuque, Iowa.—Arrangements have been completed to move Trinity Seminary from Blair, Nebr., to the campus of Wartburg Seminary here. Effective September 1, the two schools will operate jointly.

North Adelaide, S. A.—A proposal by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia for pulpit and altar fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia is being studied by the latter body.

Doctrinal agreement was reached by the two groups three years ago, but a stalemate arose in their negotiations toward merger because of conflicting views on practical issues. Major disagreement centered in the UELCA's membership in the Lutheran World Federation. The ELCA is affiliated with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States, which has turned down membership in the LWF.

However, the Church Council of the UELCA took the attitude that since doctrinal unity had been attained between the two bodies, "a positive step towards the creating of a closer fellowship should be made." The UELCA proposed pulpit and altar fellowship, it said, "in an earnest endeavour to be obedient to the word and the will of the Lord of the Church 'that they may be one' and in consideration of the progress that has been made to end the tragic divisions within the Lutheran Church in Australia."

In reply to the UELCA's request that it "take the requisite steps to declare itself in pulpit and altar fellowship with the UELCA, the ELCA's general convention referred the matter to its Executive Council and Intersynodical Committee for further consideration and appropriate action. At the same time, the convention re-affirmed itself "in favor of a complete, God-pleasing amalgamation of the two Lutheran Churches in Australia." The Intersynodical Committees of the two groups were urged to continue negotiations "so that, with God's gracious help, they might achieve complete unity in spirit, in doctrine, faith and practice."

The convention also authorized the calling of a special convention to consider the documents of union "when complete unity has been

established, not only in doctrine, but also in those practical matters still under discussion by the Intersynodical Committees."

In explanation of the words "complete unity in spirit, in doctrine, faith and practice," the ELCA's Intersynodical Committee said in part: "The paragraph does not demand perfection in the personal faith and the sanctified life of individual Christians, nor does it insist upon perfection in the mode of presenting Divine Truth. It simply asks that doctrinal consent or agreement which, according to the Scriptures and Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, is the basis of church fellowship. In this doctrinal agreement there is necessarily included agreement concerning practice that is in harmony with the professed doctrine."

Dr. Max Loehe, president of the UELCA, expressed regret that "it was not possible for the ELCA Convention to accept our proposal." He pointed out that altar and pulpit fellowship is already being practiced between the two church bodies in some areas, namely, in New Zealand, and among native evangelists on the mission field of New Guinea. He also noted that doctrinal unity of the two groups is being shown in the fellowship practiced between their respective congregations.

Muskegon, Mich.—The American Evangelical Lutheran Church voted here to participate in merger discussions initiated by the United Lutheran Church in America and the Augustana Lutheran Church. In a unanimous action at its 79th annual convention, the AELC accepted the joint invitation of the ULCA and Augustana to meet with them and other interested Lutheran church bodies "to consider such organic union as will give real evidence of our unity in the faith and proceed to draft the constitution and devise organizational procedures to effect union."

Oslo.—Work has been started on a constitution for a Lutheran Church in Ethiopia, to be known as "The Mekane Jesu Church." A report to the annual meeting of the Lutheran World Federation's Commission on World Missions at nearby Hurdals Verk stressed that it was of the "greatest importance to try to rally the support of all the five Lutheran missions for this project."

Now active in Ethiopia are the Swedish National Mission Society, which pioneered missionary work in the country in 1865; the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, the Hermannsburg Missionary Society of Germany, the Danish Lutheran Mission, and the True Friends of the Bible (Swedish). A sixth mission will soon be launched by the American Lutheran Church, which is planning to begin work in the Wollo Province and in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia.

London.—Translation into French of ten volumes of the major works of Martin Luther will be made possible by a grant of \$8,600 over a two-year period from the Lutheran World Federation's Commission on World Service.

New York.—Lutheran Churches in America reached a combined membership of 7,372,938 in 1955, it was reported here by the National Lutheran Council.

According to the annual statistical summary compiled by the NLC's Division of Public Relations, Lutheran Churches in the United States and Canada gained 255,032 members during 1955. This was an increase of 3.6 per cent over the previous year and the same percentage of gain as in 1954.

Comprising the third largest Protestant denominational grouping in America, the Lutheran Churches are exceeded in numbers only by the Baptists and Methodist. Of the total Lutherans, 7,150,704 are located in the United States and 222,234 in Canada. The latter are affiliated with the churches in the U. S.

The Council's summary is based on statistics supplied by sixteen Lutheran church bodies, plus the Negro Missions conducted by four groups associated in the Synodical Conference. Thirteen of the bodies recorded increases in membership, one showed a loss, and three remained the same, as their figures were taken from previous years.

The gain in baptized membership of 255,032 for 1955, distributed among the 17,398 congregations, represents an average increase of 14.6 new members per local church, as compared to 14.4 in 1954. The average increase over the past six years has been 12.1 members per congregation. Confirmed or adult membership advanced by 134,965 persons to a grand total of 4,932,692, a gain of 2.8 per cent. This would indicate an average accession of 7.7 adult members per congregation in 1955, compared with 8.1 the previous year. The average over the past six years has been 6.5.

For the 11th consecutive year, the highest numerical increase was made by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Its gain of 75,244 baptized members, or 3.76 per cent, over 1954 boosted the synod's total membership to 2,076,379. Over the past 11 years, it has added 636,008 members, an average of 57,819 annually. The Missouri Synod is the second largest Lutheran body in America. Among the major bodies, the Evangelical Lutheran Church showed the greatest advance on a percentage basis. Its 43,287 additions represent a gain of 4.5 per cent and sent the ELC over the million-mark in membership. With 1,004,239 members, the ELC is the third largest Lutheran body.