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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

WHAT ABOUT BAPTISM?

Under this heading, Hugh T. Kerr, in *Theology Today* (April 1956), scrutinizes the meaning and function of Baptism in its present estimation by American churches in general. Lutherans, who regard Baptism as an efficacious means of grace, may find here a special challenge. He writes: "It is a mark of our times that there is so much discussion and so much confusion about the Sacrament of Baptism. Strangely enough, the subject has not yet become a matter of ecumenical study as has, for example, the Lord's Supper. But individual denominations are disturbed over the theology and practice of Baptism, and several special commissions have been set up to study the matter. Two printed reports have recently been published: one by the United Church of Canada and another by the Church of Scotland. . . . What is the reason for contemporary discussion of Baptism? Partly it is due to the fact that the rite has become perfunctory and hence meaningless. Partly it arises from theological reflection—how can faith be related particularly to infant Baptism? . . . But there is a deeper reason. In our day the whole category of 'sacrament' has lost much of its classic significance. We simply don't know what to make of 'a visible sign of an invisible grace.' . . . But even deeper is the confusion of modern scientific-rational man over the whole question of religious symbolism. Modern man wants to get *behind* the symbol to the reality symbolized, as if the symbol were in the way. But we are coming to see that symbols can participate in the reality which they represent and that when they are bypassed, the reality itself has a way of fading. . . . Our concern over Baptism, therefore, is something more than an academic or even practical concern for the restoration of a traditional ceremony; it strikes at the very structure of the faith and the ways in which it can be re-presented."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS

Under this heading, *Time* (May 7, 1956) reports on the serious problems facing the Evangelical Church in Communistic East Germany with its approximately seventeen million members. In the past this church has stood as a massive roadblock before the Soviets' march to Communize the country. At the end of April the Communists waged a "fight superstition" campaign to undermine the church's standing with the young Germans. Chairman Otto Nuschke of the satellite German Christian Democratic Union Party pressed the church

to take a loyalty oath to the state. The crisis has become so serious that a "topflight Protestant prelate in Western Germany" recently said: "I cannot see further than twelve months. They will be very critical." *Time* Correspondent Denis Fedor from West Berlin commented: "The Protestant church in East Germany has begun to fight its last-ditch battle. It is a battle of attrition and infiltration. . . ." By now the East Zone government has made it all but impossible for the Evangelical Church's leader, Bishop Otto Dibelius, to administer his church from his bishopric in West Berlin. No pastors are permitted to enter the zone from West Germany; it is difficult enough to move a pastor from one parish to another within the East Zone. Church revenue, cut 30% in 1953, was cut an additional 4% at the end of 1955. The only solicitation for contributions allowed is the collection during services. East Zone pastors now get far less than do workers—an average \$31 a month—with new cuts in the offing. Religious education is still permitted, but hours for it are set so that children have to give up their free time and pay extra in transportation. Church attendance is systematically harassed by well-synchronized rallies, workers' meetings, free concerts. Pastors' children are barred from university study, and higher education is virtually impossible for children who have not participated in the new ritual of Youth Dedication . . . the state's secularist substitute for confirmation.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

NEW LIGHT FROM OLD MANUSCRIPTS

Prof. Bruce M. Metzger, under this title in *Theology Today* (April 1956), offers an excellent overview of the values which the Qumran Scrolls have contributed to modern scientific research in the field of Bible background knowledge. He writes in conclusion: "It is obvious that the Dead Sea Scrolls are a most important acquisition of new information. They add a significant increment to our knowledge in various fields—the text of the Old Testament; the development of Judaism in the intertestamental period; and aspects of the background of the early Christian Church. They throw welcome light upon certain phrases and usages of technical terms in the New Testament. . . . Despite certain extravagant statements and unwarranted deductions to the contrary, published by one or two scholars who have never been distinguished by sobriety of judgment, thus far there appears to be no evidence that the teachings of Jesus and the beliefs of the Qumran community, have any greater affinity than is to be found between his teaching and the beliefs of other Jewish groups previously known. Furthermore, it remains an undeniable fact that the New Testament

never once mentions the name 'Essenes,' though the other Jewish sects of that time are referred to repeatedly. It is therefore as parallel but independent movements that this Jewish sect and early Christianity may be compared. Affinities and similarities between the two are to be explained partly as due to the parallel development of contemporary sociological movements, and partly as due to mutual dependence upon a common religious background and heritage, that of the Old Testament and its development during the intertestamental period. In short, by enriching our understanding of the varieties of Judaism current at the time when Christianity arose, the Dead Sea Scrolls have given us material for a better understanding of the New Testament and the early Church."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE LOST TRIBES

What became of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as a result of the Assyrian captivity? Herbert Armstrong in a brochure *The United States and the British Commonwealth in Prophecy* discovers the "lost tribes" in Great Britain. The attempt to prove this assertion is so fantastic that we quote a part of the argument as an example of a new low in Biblical interpretation. On page 17 f. the writer says:

The Hebrew for "man" is "iysh," or "ish." In the original Hebrew language vowels were never given in the spelling. So, omitting the vowel "e" from "berith," but retaining the "i" in its Anglicised form to preserve the "y" sound, we have the Anglicised Hebrew word for covenant, "Brith."

The Hebrews, however, never pronounced their "h's." A Jew, even today, in pronouncing the name "Shem," will call it "Sem." Incidentally this ancient Hebrew trait is also a modern British trait. So the Hebrew word for "covenant" would be pronounced, in its Anglicised form, as "Brit."

And the word for "covenant man," or "covenant people," would, therefore, be simply, "BRIT-ISH." And so the true covenant people today *are called the* "BRITISH." And they reside in the "BRITISH ISLES!"

The House of Israel not only was to lose its identity, but its name. It was to be called by a new name, since they no longer were to know their identity as Israel, as God said plainly in Isa. 62:2, referring to these latter days.

To Abraham, God said, "In ISAAC shall thy seed be called," and this name is repeated in Rom. 9:7 and Hebrews 11:18. In Amos 7:16 they are called "The House of ISAAC."

They were descended from Isaac, and therefore are Isaac's sons. Drop the "I" from "Isaac," (vowels are not used in Hebrew spelling,)

and we have the modern name, "SAAC'S SONS," or, as we spell it in shorter manner, "SAXONS!"

Anyone who has completed a beginner's course in Hebrew knows what a phonetic monstrosity such an identification is. He also knows that the words "covenant" and "man," when found in a construct relationship, mean "a covenant of a man" and not "a man of a covenant" or "covenant man."

WALTER R. ROEHRS

BRIEF ITEMS FROM NEWS BUREAU
OF NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

New York.—The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Communist-ruled Latvia may have to revise its 1956 church calendar in the light of the criticism now being leveled at the late Marshal Stalin by the present Russian regime. Both Stalin's birthday, December 21, and the day of his death, March 5, are marked as "special days" in the yearbook of the Latvian Church, along with observances of "The Day of Struggle Against Colonial Regimes," February 21; "The All-Union Day of Physical Culture," July 18; "The Coalminers' Day," August 26; "The Tankists' Day," September 9; "The Artillery Day," November 19; and similar events.

A supply of the 1956 Latvian church yearbooks was brought to the free world by Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, president of the United Lutheran Church in America, who visited the Soviet Union in March as one of nine American representatives seeking contact with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Hong Kong, China.—Hope for continued and possibly expanded Lutheran World Relief aid to this refugee-jammed crown colony on the border of Red China was expressed during the five-day visit here of Bernard A. Confer, executive secretary of Lutheran World Relief, and the Rev. Werner Kuntz, executive director of the Board for World Relief of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The visitors, here on a world-tour study of relief needs, were met by the Rev. K. L. Stumpf, director of the Hong Kong office of the Lutheran World Federation's Department of World Service.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

Atlantic City, N. J.—Lutheran social-mission leaders urged here that all parties in the controversy over desegregation "uphold due process of law and maintain public order." The resolution was adopted by the Board of Social Missions of the United Lutheran Church in America. It will be submitted to the denomination's 20th biennial

convention in Harrisburg, Pa., October 10—17. The board declared that the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the public schools "is in harmony with Christian convictions."

Montpelier, Vt.—Attorney General Robert T. Stafford contended in a petition filed with the Supreme Court here that there is "neither legal nor constitutional authority" for making state grants to local school boards for tuition of students attending nonpublic schools. The petition was in reply to a suit by the South Burlington School Board aimed at forcing the State Board of Education to grant aid to local districts for students attending private and parochial schools. It was signed by six of the seven members of the Board of Education, Mr. Stafford, and Deputy Atty. Gen. Frederick M. Reed.

The suit is expected to prove a test case for the 95 other Vermont communities that, along with South Burlington, lost a total of \$19,290 in grants as a result of Attorney General Stafford's ruling last December prohibiting further payment of such aid.

South Burlington, which has no high school of its own, was the hardest hit, losing \$1,548. It had been sending 150 young people to a public high school, 62 to Cathedral High School, and two to Mount St. Mary Academy in nearby Burlington.

New York.—Membership in the United Lutheran Church in America reached an all-time high of 2,270,655 at the end of 1955, an increase of 64,560 over the previous year, it was announced here.

Dr. R. Epling Reinartz, church secretary, said reports from 32 synods in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Virgin Islands also showed that financial giving by the denomination's 4,383 congregations had reached a record \$83,070,939 in 1955. This represents a gain of \$6,784,476 over 1954 and an average contribution per communing member of \$74.75 as compared with \$70.44 the previous year, he said.

Dr. Reinartz pointed out that the ULCA has added 460,579 members, or 25.5 per cent, since 1945. He reported that the Church has 4,369 pastors as compared with 4,293 a year earlier; its 4,485 Sunday schools have an enrollment of 783,116, a gain of 26,258 over 1954; and the total value of church buildings, parsonages, schools, parish houses, and other properties is \$452,836,255, an increase of \$38,450,703 during the year.

The ULCA is the largest Lutheran denomination in the country.

Tallahassee, Fla.—St. John's Presbytery appealed to the state Supreme Court here to set aside a county court ruling upholding the right of a St. Petersburg church to withdraw from the presbytery and

the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. (Southern) and retain the church property. It asked the high court to direct the congregation of Central Presbyterian Church in St. Petersburg and its pastor, Dr. E. R. Barnard, to turn over the property to the presbytery.

Last October Judge O. L. Dayton, Jr., of Pinellas County Circuit Court ruled that the church property belonged to the withdrawing congregation, not the presbytery or the denomination. Late in 1953 the presbytery deposed Dr. Barnard after he had failed three times to appear before it to answer charges of trying to divide the church. A few months earlier Dr. Barnard notified the presbytery that a majority of the congregation wishes to become independent because of the denomination's Modernism.

In the appeal, attorneys for the presbytery contended that the government of the Southern Presbyterian Church is "republican in character" and that individual churches are subordinate members of the presbytery and of the General Assembly, highest body in the church. "An (individual) church is as much bound by the actions of the superior church judicatory," they said, "as any county in the state would be by an action of the legislature."

Munterville, Iowa.—A new day is dawning for the family-sized farm and for rural church activities, Dr. Martin Schroeder, director of Lutheran Refugee Resettlement in Nebraska, said here. Speaking at the Iowa Conference convention of the Augustana Lutheran Church, he said the strongest influence favoring a renaissance of the small farm is that so many industries are shifting from metropolitan areas to smaller communities where owners of small farms can supplement their incomes by nonfarm employment. Another important factor, Dr. Schroeder said, is "the inspiration coming from dedicated farm leaders and the resident rural ministry."

"Our rural youth, instilled with love for the soil through farm youth organizations, will not forever go empty-handed when the time arrives to establish themselves on the land," he said. "There are too many of them and too few who control the land by sheer financial power."

Geneva.—Seizure of 30,000 Bibles and devotional books at the Madrid office of the British and Foreign Bible Society by Spanish authorities on April 24 came after two similar confiscations of Protestant literature, it was reported here. The Ecumenical Press Service, operated by the World Council of Churches, said the other confiscations took place in the Spanish capital on April 20.

It said police "suddenly descended" on a printing shop where copies of the Scriptures, hymnbooks, and the monthly newsletter of the Spanish

Evangelical Church were being printed. All these materials, the press service stated, were impounded and the doors of the printing plant sealed. The police then raided an establishment where the Scripture volumes were being bound and confiscated all the finished Bibles they found there, the agency added.

Speyer, Germany.—Full Communion and pulpit fellowship with the Congregational Union of England and Wales was approved by the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate at its annual meeting here. Dr. Hans Stempel, synod president, said plans for such a fellowship began taking shape in the first postwar years when British Congregational parishes gave assistance to the Palatinate Church.

The fellowship will become operative, following its ratification by the Congregational Union, at solemn services to be held simultaneously here and in London, Dr. Stempel said. Theological questions and practical problems related to the agreement as well as methods of deepening relationships between the two groups will be discussed at a conference to be held soon in London, he said.

The synod also voted to intensify efforts to achieve a similar fellowship "among all member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany."

Maywood, Ill.—The Rev. James A. Scherer, former missionary in China and Japan, has been named dean of the new School of Missions to be established next September on the campus of Lutheran Theological Seminary here by the United Lutheran Church in America.

Mr. Scherer, a native of Fort Wayne, Ind., has been studying for his doctorate at Union Theological Seminary in New York since his return last fall from Japan, where he had served as a missionary for three and a half years. He was a teacher with the Yale-in-China Association at Yali Middle School, Hunan Province, China, 1946—49.

Geneva.—There are approximately 71,500,000 Lutherans in the world, according to estimates in a new handbook compiled here by the Lutheran World Federation. Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist, executive secretary, said the figure represents about 32 per cent of the world's Protestants.

The estimates do not include Lutherans in areas where there is no organized Lutheran church or mission, small Lutheran congregations in such countries as Belgium and Mexico, or German and Scandinavian Lutheran churches outside the home countries.

Philadelphia.—A warning against overemphasizing Communion was sounded in a statement by the executive board of the Lutheran

Ministerium of Pennsylvania issued here for the "guidance of those who are responsible for the administration of Communion." The statement was prepared for consideration at the ministerium's 209th annual convention at Buck Hill Falls, Pa., from May 21 to 24. The ministerium has 546 churches in eastern Pennsylvania and Delaware.

The executive board's statement emphasized that Communion must remain secondary to "the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached." It observed that "nuptial Communion is in conflict with the purpose and nature of the Sacrament and constitute a misuse of Communion." The same holds true, it added, for Communion for special groups—like the choir—or at retreats.

The board also criticized "several innovations" which, it said, had been introduced "in a few isolated instances" in connection with the administration of Communion. It named specifically sanctuary lamps, holy water, and incense.

Recalling that in 1936 the ministerium adopted a statement rejecting such things as "repeated use of the sign of the cross" and the "kissing of stoles," the board said: "It now seems necessary to add that the use of sanctuary lamps, holy water, and incense belong to the same category."

Palembang, Sumatra.—A statement contrasting Communist teachings with those of the Bible on six important points was read from Batak Protestant Church pulpits throughout Sumatra. It concluded by quoting the Church's Great Synod as rejecting Communist teachings completely and calling upon any members of the denomination who may have embraced Communism to disavow it.

The statement was adopted by the Synod at its recent meeting at Sipoholon Seminary, Taroetoeng, 500 miles northwest of here. The Batak Church, founded in 1861 by German Lutherans, has 631,534 members.

"Our Church rejects Communistic teaching," the declaration said, "because there is no other redemption but by Christ. We reject their method of forcing people to complete obedience to their doctrine with no questions allowed, for we ought to obey God rather than man.

"That is why every congregation member and especially workers of the church ought to shun Communist doctrine and every movement which is founded on that doctrine."

The statement pointed out Communism teaches that religion is "a product of human thought—so, therefore, God is created by man." The Scriptures emphasize, it said, that "God was in the beginning" and "created man and the whole earth."