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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN LITANIES

In the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (July 1956) Erica Reiner publishes a number of ancient Babylonian and Assyrian litanies which she calls the "Lipsur Litanies" because "their main characteristic consists in the litanylike repetition of the word *lipsur* (absolve) or similar formulae at the end of each line or each section." Stemming from the time of Abraham or before, they depict very graphically the hopeless polytheism of his day. Some of the litanies are intercessory, while some are petitions in which an individual asks the deities to absolve him from his sins. The litanist confesses his sins directed against both the gods and the neighbor. At times there is no distinction between what really is sin and what merely seems to have been a convention. Thus the petitioner asks Shamash, "the supreme judge of the great gods," to absolve him if "while crossing the square, I stepped upon (somebody's dirty) washwater which did not drain away." But in his intercession the priest prays also for such sins: "If NN, son of NN, has committed murder or had intercourse with the priestess of his god." To render his intercession more effective, the priest calls the attention of the gods to his "good works," as when he declares: "I poured in grain which soothes the gods of heaven and earth." But the reader's attention is peculiarly directed to the earnestness of the prayers and their utter hopelessness. We select at random the following lines: "May my sin be consumed like a flame. May my sin be shattered like a potsherd. May a bird take my sin up to the sky; may a fish take my sin down to the abyss." What is said of sin, is repeated of the curse resting upon sin, as, for example: "May the curse be shattered like a potsherd." But throughout the litanies no mention is made of divine mercy or of any promises of the gods to accept the prayers. No wonder God called Abraham to the pure religion of Jahweh, which was qualitatively different from paganism.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

The *Anglican Theological Review* (October 1956) contains an article entitled "Note on the Gifts in Baptism and Confirmation," in which the author first discusses various views expressed on the subject and in which he then considers, in particular, the problem how the Holy Ghost may be received again in confirmation (which he regards as a Sacrament) after the personal reception of the Holy Ghost by the

baptized in water Baptism. He reaches the conclusion that in Baptism the Holy Spirit comes to communicate the divine life of our Lord to men. This means their incorporation into our Lord's body and is primarily an incorporation into His death and resurrection. In confirmation, however, the Holy Ghost, though dwelling in us, is given us for a different purpose. In confirmation, the new purpose of the bestowal of the Holy Ghost is that of the formal reception of the Gifts (*capital in original*). "Our reception of the Gifts at confirmation may be thought of as perfecting us for our constant, continuous, and all-embracing proclamation in word and deed of the good news of the incarnate Lord."

As the reader studies this presentation of Baptism and confirmation, he may gratefully review Luther's clear and Scriptural presentation of the nature and purpose of Holy Baptism. He may be grateful, too, that Luther declined to recognize confirmation as a sacrament and that the Wittenberg Reformation of 1545 advocated an evangelical use of the rite, in which the personal indoctrination and the public profession of the faith by the catechumens after due public examination, together with public intercession for the *confirmandi*, were the principal parts. The somewhat ambiguous expression "to renew and confirm the baptismal vow," by the way, was understood in the sense of the catechumens' own public confession of the vow which they made at Baptism through their sponsors.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

STATEMENT CONCERNING THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION

1. The Word which God has given to men in the writings of the prophets and apostles is a perfect Word, complete, clear, reliable, and inerrant, a Word that will remain forever.

2. However, the inspired originals of all the Biblical books have been lost, and the copies made from them by scribes show inaccuracies of various kinds, although none of these inaccuracies affect an article of faith. Similarly, translations made from these copies are to some extent inaccurate. Through study complete accuracy in text and translations can be more and more closely approached, but it is likely that it will never be fully achieved.

3. The RSV is an American revision of the KJV, the Bible used for hundreds of years in English-speaking countries. In many ways the RSV is an improvement on the parent version. It is a modern book in form and encourages the modern person to read it; it takes into consideration the results of generations of research into such things as the original languages, the geography and history of the Bible lands,

the witnesses to the original texts; it is generally much more accurate than the KJV. In language it compares favorably with the dignity of the KJV. It is not a perfect translation, and there is much to criticize. But if we are to use only a perfect translation, we shall never have a Bible at all.

4. The RSV has been attacked on the score that modern liberal theology has been worked into it. We believe, however, that there is no real foundation for this charge.

5. We recommend the RSV for use by pastors and laity in private study, in school, and in Bible-study groups in conjunction with the version so well known to us already.

6. We do not, however, favor the use of the RSV in the services and worship of the church, where other factors besides those of clarity and accuracy come into consideration. (These factors include such things as uniformity, avoiding offense, rival versions.)

7. Finally, it must be recognized that it is a matter of Christian liberty what version a congregation uses in its services. But the very fact that it is a matter of Christian liberty will lead every congregation to use a translation which is generally conceded to be a good one, and not to act in a way radically different from that pursued by sister congregations.

This evaluation of the RSV appears on page 145 of the Official Report of Proceedings of the Eighteenth Triennial Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. Assembled at Glenelg, South Australia, March 8—14, 1956.

W. R. R.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

Enugu, Eastern Nigeria. — A new universal primary-education plan initiated by the East Nigerian government is meeting stiff opposition from Roman Catholics who have denounced it as a "godless monopoly of education." In some areas they have staged public protests against the scheme. Under the plan all new schools opened in the region are to be controlled by the government and managed by local officials, who are free to invite religious bodies to supply faculty and staff on a temporary basis. The government will make no grants to mission schools, although missions will be permitted to extend existing schools at their own expense.

Roman Catholic school officials are circulating a pamphlet opposing the plan. "Secular education is not enough," it states. "Education must have a religious basis and a spiritual doctrine of human nature and human destiny."

Chicago.—District officials of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in a pastoral letter, called on members to “create a demand for morally clean literature.” The letter was issued in connection with the national observance of Universal Bible Sunday, December 9. It charged that “literary poison” in novels and magazines is receiving wide circulation in the “best seller” category. Signers of the letter were the Rev. Arthur Werfelmann of Elgin, Ill., President of Synod’s Northern Illinois District, and the Rev. Arthur A. Yoss of Riverside, Ill., Chicago-area representative of the denomination’s English District.

They encourage Lutherans to support the American Bible Society, sponsor of the annual Thanksgiving-to-Christmas Scripture reading. The letter also urged “our Christian people to read and study the Bible privately and collectively.”

St. Louis, Mo.—Enrollments in the 1,226 elementary parochial schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod now total 125,751, it was announced here. Dr. August C. Stellhorn, Secretary of Schools, said 31 schools and 6,572 pupils were added during the past year.

The largest number of schools—113—is maintained by congregations of Synod’s Northern Illinois District. Three high schools are operated by the Lutheran High School Association of Chicago. The greatest student gain for the current year was registered by the Michigan District, which added 1,002 pupils to its 107 schools.

Chicago.—Pressure from the Roman Catholic Church was charged as a television station here canceled its plans to present the world TV *première* of *Martin Luther*, full-length dramatic film on the leader of the Protestant Reformation. Protestant church leaders claimed that the showing had been protested by the Roman Catholic Church and called the cancellation evidence of “a violation of the freedom of the press.” Station WGN-TV, operated by the *Chicago Tribune*, announced, however, that the withdrawal of the program, on the eve of its scheduled presentation under commercial sponsorship on December 21, was motivated by “an emotional reaction to the plan” to show the film.

The station’s sudden decision to cancel the film led to a meeting of some thirty Protestant churchmen of metropolitan Chicago, a few hours after the film’s cancellation on December 20. Representing several different denominations, the group named an “action committee” of eight members, who later in the day held a press conference at which they issued a statement denouncing the late-hour withdrawal of the film. The special committee charged it “constitutes an admission on the part of the television station that it is vulnerable to pressures

which we are convinced, on the basis of our discussion with WGN, have been mobilized by the Roman Catholic Church to secure the banning of this film."

A spokesman for the Chancery Office of the Roman Catholic archdiocese in Chicago said that it had made no formal protest to WGN. He declined to comment on the charges made by the Protestant group.

The statement also declared that the decision to cancel the picture was an admission "that only such news, information, education and entertainment as are satisfactory to a particular denomination may be presented to the public by WGN."

It was recalled that when the film was first issued, a statement about it was released by the Legion of Decency, Roman Catholic organization that classifies films for Catholic viewers. "This picture," the Legion said, "offers a sympathetic and approving presentation of the life and times of Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century figure of religious controversy. It contains theological and historical references and interpretations which are unacceptable to Catholics." The Legion of Decency gave *Martin Luther* a separate classification, reserved for films which are "not necessarily morally offensive to Catholics, but require, for their proper interpretation, specialized training."

The motion picture was defended by the Protestant churchmen as historically authentic, not sectarian, and "far less controversial than many other television programs which have been telecast by WGN without protest from us, although their content and point of view was favorable to the Roman Catholic Church."

"*De facto* censorship of this character," their statement said, "violates the principles of civil and religious liberty as defined in the First Amendment to the Constitution."

The statement was drawn up by a committee composed of Dr. William Rest, head of the Northern Illinois Synod, Evangelical and Reformed Church; Rev. Birger Dahl, superintendent of the Northern District, Rock River Conference of the Methodist Church; the chairman, Dr. John W. Harms, executive vice-president of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago; Dr. O. V. Anderson, head of the Illinois Conference, Augustana Lutheran Church. Also, Dr. Martin Piehler, executive secretary of the Northern Illinois District, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod; Dr. Kenneth Hildebrand, pastor of Central Church; Dr. Harold Fey, editor of the *Christian Century*, nondenominational Protestant religious weekly; and Clifford E. Dahlin, executive director of the Lutheran Council of Greater Chicago, who is the committee's secretary.

Robert E. A. Lee, executive secretary of Lutheran Church Productions, Inc., which made the film, agreed with Station WGN-TV that the cancellation had not been ordered by Community Builders, a Chicago housing development and construction concern, which was to have sponsored the showing. "We are led to believe the sponsor had resisted any substitution," he said. Mr. Lee said he was "shocked to learn" that the station had canceled its scheduled world television *première* of *Martin Luther*.

"This last-minute reversal of the station's carefully considered program judgment can only be interpreted as surrendering to sources who seemingly want to suppress certain pages of history," he said. "Efforts at thought control, wherever they are exerted, are un-American and are to be deplored." Mr. Lee noted that "a great many responsible institutions and individuals" throughout the country had commended the station for "its splendid example of enlightened program service" in scheduling the showing of the Luther film.

"It is regrettable that the general public must now conclude to the contrary that the station is now allowing the sectarian pressures of a single group to dictate what is in the public interest," he said. Mr. Lee urged WGN-TV to fulfill its contractual obligations as "an unequivocal demonstration of its conviction that the public is entitled to see also on television a serious motion picture like *Martin Luther*."

The film "already has earned the highest endorsement and praise not only from professional critics but also from huge cinema audiences in Chicago and throughout the world," Mr. Lee pointed out.

Jerusalem. — Extensive surveys tending to support the modern theory that Moses took a northern route through the Sinai Peninsula on his way to the Promised Land have been completed by two teams of Israeli scientists. One team, consisting of archaeologists, historians, philologists, and geographers of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, returned here from a week's exploration of the famous Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai. The other team, made up of archaeologists of the Israeli Department of Antiquities, was back after investigating ruins in the Oasis of Kadesh Barnea, near the Israeli-Egyptian border north of Sinai, where the Twelve Tribes rested 40 years.

At St. Catherine's the scientists scrutinized and photographed manuscripts dating from the sixth century onward. Examination of the monastery buildings disclosed remains of a basilical church built by Emperor Justinian in the fourth century, with only a chapel of the Burning Bush — a Crusader addition — still substantially intact.

The geographers surveyed a granite area between the monastery and the South Sinai coast. The archaeologists examined the ruins of a large fortified settlement at Wadi Feiran in ancient Paran, northwest of St. Catherine. Paran, which reached its prime in the Byzantine period, was inhabited from the middle of the Iron Age to the early Arab period. The scholars, headed by Dr. Benjamin Mazar, president of the Hebrew University, reported they had found absolutely no remains of a middle Bronze Age claimed to have been contemporary with the Jewish exodus from Egypt.

The second team found large quantities of pottery at Kadesh Barnea dating from the patriarchal period, as well as remnants of a tenth-century-B.C. Judean fortress which had apparently been destroyed by the Babylonians. A wall three miles long protected the whole Kadesh area against nomadic inroads.

Chicago.—Delegates to the 44th biennial convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America unanimously voted continued study, "in a spirit of repentance," of a doctrinal dispute that has agitated the group for some years. At issue are such matters as church-sponsored Boy Scout troops, the doctrinal propriety of military chaplains, joint prayer with Lutherans outside the Synodical Conference, "unionism," Biblical inspiration, conversion, and justification.

The committee was instructed to draw up a common doctrinal statement to serve the Conference. The statement will be circulated among conferences and districts of the synods, who will be asked to report their evaluations to the 1958 Synodical Conference convention.

As a result of the controversy the Norwegian Synod suspended relations with the Missouri Synod, while the Wisconsin Synod is continuing relations under a "vigorously protesting fellowship."

Committees and officers of the Synodical Conference were asked to study the advisability of calling a world conclave of theologians from its affiliated groups. The conclave was suggested as a means of settling some of the controversies over doctrinal matters. Dr. John W. Behnken, St. Louis, President of the Missouri Synod, opposed any immediate plans for a conclave. He said the Conference had its own theologians and should be able to settle the questions without outside help.

Dr. John S. Bradac, 67, pastor of St. Paul's Slovak Lutheran Church, Whiting, Ind., was elected President of the Conference. He succeeds Dr. Walter A. Baepler, president of the Missouri Synod's Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Ill.