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Editorials

Lutheranism—Whither?

WE ARE TOLD that the *argumentum ex silentio* is a weak argument, and so it is; but it seems more than strange that the Cleveland convention of our Synod did not have before it one memorial regarding entrance into either the Lutheran World Federation or the World Council of Churches. This is stranger still, in the face of the fact that 1962 came one year ahead of the LWF meeting at Helsinki to which our church is sending twenty observers, that 1962 marked the opening of what has turned out to be one of the most remarkable Roman Catholic councils in centuries, and that old Missouri is pictured at present as at last having come out of her isolationist shell and about to enter the world of ecclesiastical high society. What is the matter? Why is there so little in the press about the LWF meeting? Why so little about Lutheran participation, both by the ins and the outs, in the WCC? Why, despite all the notices in the Lutheran press relative to the Vatican Council, so little about the significance of this council for Lutheranism; and, even more important, why the total silence in Lutheranism about the significance of Lutheranism for this council? And finally, why, amid all the rolling of the drums, does the Vatican itself seem to hesitate between using the council only for internal liturgical reforms and using it as a genuine device to bring about at least the beginnings of the reunion of Christendom? One cannot escape the conviction that the air is filled with the noise of great questions and the silence of firm answers.

Obviously good answers will not come forth till the correct questions are asked. Hence, to coin a well-worn phrase, we seem to be on dead center.

As a Protestant, it has been my conviction for a long time (and this conviction was strengthened by Hermann Sasse's analysis of things) that this is the day of opportunity for Rome. It is the opportunity of any organization of force to move into a vacuum. But when one sees the advances which Bultmannism and similar isms are making into Rome, one wonders if we may not witness the meeting of two vacuums instead of the explosion and the power which might have been expected.

All of which brings us to the question at the top of the page. Where is Lutheranism headed? In America we are witnessing retreats from this question in many directions. The leadership of two-thirds of Lutheranism has been pre-occupied with the question of organizing two new large churches, with all of the accompanying labor pains of church polity and finances. The leadership of the other one-third has been pre-occupied with dis-organizing the Synodical Conference, with all of the accompanying pains of church polity and self-justification. But if a church is measured by its

theology and its concern for theology, none of us has been building many fires. Some have acted as if union were the answer to all problems, others as if disunion were the answer. Chances are that both are equally in error.

We must confess that the oft-repeated cliché about the great influence Lutheranism was to have on the WCC has remained largely in the realm of the oft-repeated cliché. Eastern Orthodoxy in much less time has made greater headway, at least as far as public utterances of a confessional nature are concerned. Nor has the LWF, both as a separate entity and as a group under the wing of the WCC, created the excitement which one would expect and hope. This is not in any way to disparage anything which has been done, but merely to say again that perhaps we have not been asking the correct questions or asking them with sufficient urgency.

Perhaps the first question we need to ask ourselves is this: do we really believe in Lutheranism? Does our subscription to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions come from the heart and the will, or is it merely something inherited and *pro forma*? Are those who are consumed with the ecumenical urge convinced that the Lutheran message of *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide* is the message which we ought to bring to bear on the ecumenical scene, or are we merely going along for the ride on someone else's band wagon? And on the other hand are all of those who are making a mad rush to separate themselves from the Missouri Synod (which today can well be called the most lonesome church in the world) motivated entirely by a desire for sound doctrine, or is there a certain amount of church politicking and over-concern with questions of casuistry involved in their activities? At any rate, both tendencies have kept the synodical leadership from doing what is much more important, namely, directing a great corps of dedicated workers to higher goals, to greater achievements, and to clearer thinking. The result has been another retreat in several directions.

Now having answered in the affirmative that we are all true believers in Lutheranism, the next question is: what shall we do about the situation? The first step, it would seem, must be that of rededication to our Christian and Lutheran principles: the Christian principles of complete surrender to Scripture, a willingness to forgive and love our brethren, the avoidance of evasion and the espousal of honesty, the shunning of ecclesiastical politicking and double talk, and a willingness to work with the brethren rather than adopting the policy of impatient individualism which fragments the church. And we must rededicate ourselves to our Lutheran principles, that the Bible is God's Word, that it is infallible and authoritative, that it truly does establish articles of faith and norms of conduct, that there is such a thing as true doctrine in opposition to false doctrine or no doctrine, that we are justified by grace alone through faith in Christ, that the Lutheran Confessions are to be taken seriously, that the church is built by the preaching of positive truth, not by doubt or negativism. Then, the second

step must be that we act as if these principles are meaningful in our lives and in our church. There is no place for cynical self-seeking and personal empire building in the church. Those who indulge in such activities must be told gently but firmly to "shape up or ship out." There must be careful theological planning, a positive theological program coupled with a thorough discussion of the financial and man-power needs to accomplish the program. In dealing with others we must adopt a policy of fraternal yet honest straightforwardness whereby we are faithful both to Scripture and our Confessions as well as to the needs and opportunities of all people concerned. If we are to seek closer alliance with the LWF, the WCC, the ecumenical movement, or our fellow Lutherans in America, both to the left and to the right, we must know exactly where we stand, and where we intend to go. The entire Christian church is asking questions, searching for answers. Is it beyond the realm of possibility that our church could give this answer in a positive, evangelical, Biblical, and Confessional way? A great many people tell us that the hope of Lutheranism lies in Missouri. Are we willing to bear the responsibility which seems to be placed upon us? This writer believes we are. Today is the day of our visitation.

J. A. O. Preus

The Use of the Laity

HAVING SAID the foregoing, we are bold enough to suggest one way in which the church, particularly the Lutheran church, might get a great deal more mileage for its money and its efforts. We should make far greater use of the laity. We are still basically a hierachial church, even though it is over four hundred years since Luther rediscovered the priesthood of all believers. We pay lipservice to this concept, but we do not operate with it as we should.

Some months ago a most notable event occurred, but it has failed to excite the interest it deserved. Concordia Teachers College of River Forest sent some of its staff members to examine some of our mission fields to see about the possibilities of using teacher-trained personnel on the mission field. This is an idea with tremendous possibilities. It is commonly said that the Peace Corps took a leaf from the missionary's book, and now perhaps we could take a leaf from that of the Peace Corps. Having recently had the exciting experience of helping to place nearly two hundred young men into parishes, schools and mission fields of our church, I am filled with enthusiasm for the work of the church, but only ten seminary graduates were placed in the entire foreign mission program of our large church. Yet we have hundreds of people, perhaps thousands, who are looking for opportunities to serve their Lord and spread His Gospel. Must we be bound to the concept of

using only ordained men? We must learn to get more people working, and use the theologically trained men for work which others cannot do so well. It costs too much to train ministers to use them in positions which others can fill as well or even better.

The church is busy examining its theology, its methodology, its program. It is worried about its future, its lack of growth, its shortage of clergy. Perhaps now is the time for us all to consider the fuller and more intelligent use of our greatest earthly asset, our laity. Certainly Christianity can be made more meaningful and relevant than merely baking cakes or passing the plate. Many people in our church are busy in attempts to utilize the laity more fully. To them all we say "God bless you and give you wisdom." There are some very encouraging signs. Besides the ten seminarians, eleven teacher-trained people were placed in foreign fields together with two graduates of our Lay Training Institute and one graduate of the Valparaiso Youth Workers Program. Thank God for these workers. We hope many more will be sent.

J. A. O. Preus

The Church on the Campus

AND FINALLY, in this discussion of whither our church is and ought to be going, we must not neglect to mention the campus. The great movements of history have always sprung from great ideas. The religious press has been filled lately with articles about the campus. And the campus for the first time in many a year has begun to show an interest in religion. Even the wise of this world are learning that "man cannot live by bread alone."

With over fifty thousand of our young people on non-synodical campuses, the campus ministry has become big business. Most likely it will get even bigger. On these campuses are the future leaders of our country and, we hope, of the world. Many of these people will also be leading our church. It is not only important that these young people be served, but that they be served well. To judge by the many young men on our campuses who are products of secular campuses and our campus pastors' recruitment efforts, we have an excellent group of workers. Reuben Hahn and his men are the pioneers in what is not only one of the most exciting but also one of the most demanding and responsible ministries of our church. These men deserve our support and our prayer, and they also deserve a great deal more attention than they often get. In many ways the work of campus pastors is frustrating and difficult, for they have an ever-changing congregation of young, peppy, high-spirited, uninhibited people who are largely secularized in their education and often thoroughly materialistic in their outlook. These people must be won or held for Christ, they must be trained under very difficult circumstances not only for positions of secondary im-

portance but for those of great and primary leadership. For these young people are the brains and the thinkers of our age. The church is not training them: the state is. Challenges abound in the church today—missions, inner city parishes, holding the rural church together, labor areas, and finally the campus. The day calls for greatness in all of us. Lord grant it in rich measure!

J. A. O. Preus