

THE SPRINGFIELDER

Vol. XXX

Autumn, 1966

No. 3

THE SPRINGFIELDER is published quarterly by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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Indexed in INDEX TO RELIGIOUS PERIODICAL LITERATURE, published by the American Theological Library Association, Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

Clergy changes of address reported to Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, will also cover mailing change of *The Springfielder*. Other changes of address should be sent to the Business Manager of *The Springfielder*, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Address communications to the Editor, Erich H. Heintzen, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Editorials

What Kind of Seminary? (II)

THEOLOGIANs have an uncanny knack for asking questions which they don't bother to answer. Perhaps this is the New Methodology—it goes hand in hand with the New Theology and the New Hermeneutic. Someone, sometime, ought to analyze this methodology. Why do theologians raise questions which they don't answer?

One observation, maybe the obvious one, is that they don't know the answers. They really are probing the issues and want to encourage dialog. Or maybe they do know the answers; but they don't want to state them, at least at this particular time before these particular readers. Then, too, they might belong to the cautious school of thinkers and operators who wait for others to answer before they venture their own mental verbalisms.

Another possibility is that they take seriously the dictum of Wittgenstein: "*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darueber musz man schweigen.*" Or they just don't think their searching questions have to be answered. They are not fact-seeking questions at all; they are *Anreizfragen*. This latter category at least qualifies for a methodology status if not for a dogmatic one.

So the New Theology has its *Entmythologisierungstheorie*; the New Hermeneutic has its *Sachgebundenheittheorie*; the New Methodology has its *Nichtbeantwortetefragentheorie*.

The above introduction is little more, of course, than a methodology to broach the whole subject of the responsibility of the seminary in asking and answering theological questions. What kind of questions ought it ask—or lead its students to ask? Some particularly pointed issues are posed in the realm of theological discussion today. And what kind of questions ought it answer—and lead its students to probe for answers? For these issues simply cannot be ignored or met with an indifference bred by an unenlightened reactionarism.

Before we can make any kind of meaningful reply we ought to remind ourselves of the questions with which contemporary theology is sparring. It is addressing itself to the plight of modern man (though H. Thieliicke doesn't like the expression): the problem of existence, of acculturation, of secularism, of a world "come of age." It is addressing itself to the "inner" problems of theological man (though Shubert Ogden wouldn't like this expression): the validity of biblical presuppositions, the historical foundation of the faith delivered to the saints, the thrust and authority of divine revelation, existentialist interpretations of the Gospel, mythological form and kerygmatic proclamation, the tensions between faith and understanding.

Modern theology concerns itself with philosophical man (this Paul Tillich would like): to his penchant for logical analysis, verification, situational ethics, consistency-truth; and it surely is speaking—in dialog to be sure—to ecumenical man (everyone seems to like this) who seeks some sense of unity which transcends the hard issues of order, authority, and sacraments.

The one great question of our time, and perhaps *the* contemporary problem which by its very nature seeks its solution with unremitting urgency, is the whole matter of the intelligibility and credibility of the Gospel. That the Church and its ordained prophets must proclaim the Gospel is assumed without qualification or reservation. But how proclaim this Gospel to secular man? to the man who, as Erich Frank puts it, would like to believe but simply can't believe! How can the theologian-preacher effectively function with "religious" language when contemporary scientific man demands some kind of empirical anchorage for a meaningful understanding of God and the divine-human encounter?

The seminary of today must ask the questions which create a theological sensitivity to these and related issues; of even greater moment, it seems to me, is the responsibility to answer the questions posed by these issues. The seminary simply cannot react with the "way of silence" be that way "theistically qualified" or not!

The seminary must answer the concerns of modern man, theological man, philosophical man, and ecumenical man. It must do this by thoroughly grounding its students in a genuinely biblical anthropology which is free from classical accretion and scientific speculation; by leading its students carefully into a thoroughly biblical epistemology which recognizes the bald historicalness of Incarnation and Resurrection and the reality of a cognitive-fiducial relationship to them; by reminding its students that the scandalous character of the Gospel will never be removed by playing "language-games" or rejecting ontological categories; by insisting that its students demonstrate their deepest loyalties to catholic Christendom by unyielding allegiance to a truly catholic confessionism rooted in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, which our Lutheran Confessions hold to be "the pure, clear fountain of Israel."

A seminary which heeds this responsibility to its students will produce prophetic messengers who not only know the questions; they also know the answers—or at least have the kind of foundation upon which they can stand in evaluative judgment upon both.

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