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Liturgical Developments in Europe

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DESPITE the many serious impediments imposed by destructive warfare and total defeat, the Germans have published perhaps more liturgical literature during the past few post-war years than the people of any other nation. This is significant already because it indicates clearly that they do not regard liturgics as an area which is rather nonessential in character. The ravages and dispossessions of war and defeat drive man to the stark realities and basic needs of life and existence. In days of scarcity and want, man craves not dessert and luxury; on the contrary, he is then perfectly satisfied and altogether happy with substantial food and the simple, ordinary comforts of life. The Germans are convinced that liturgical worship practices belong to the vital necessities of the Christian life. At any rate, amid all their wants and discomforts of life they are not tempted to resort to revivalistic and theatrical worship practices in order to seek and receive the strength and sustenance they need from above.

Germany's largest and most widely known liturgical group is the *Evangelische Michaelsbruderschaft*. This organization, however, is an offspring of the former *Berneuchener* group, which was organized in 1923 and whose members were active in the youth movement (*Jugendbewegung*) which played such an important part in the religious renaissance of Germany about thirty years ago. The *Berneuchener* were sacramentalists; their zeal was in no small measure a reaction against the religious indifference of their day. They published much liturgical literature, and among their leaders we find men like Rudolf Spieker, Ludwig Heitmann, Wilhelm Staehlin, and Karl Bernhard Ritter. The *Berneuchener*, however, never sought to function as a well-organized body. When eventual developments brought to light that they would be able to function with better results if better organized, they, in 1931, changed their name and called the organization *Die Evangelische Michaelsbruderschaft*. While the name *Berneuchener* was derived from the baronial estate *Berneuchen* near Neudamm in Neumark, where from

1923 to 1927 the group met annually for a week, the name *Michaelsbruderschaft* was derived from the name of the archangel who battles for God against the powers of darkness. The objectives of the *Michaelsbruderschaft* are set forth in the words:

“Die Evangelische Michaelsbruderschaft ist erwachsen aus der gemeinsamen erfahrenen Not der Kirche; sie ist begründet in dem Glauben an die der Kirche Jesu Christi gegebene Verheissung; sie ist gewillt, ihre Glieder zu rechten Streitern im Kampf der Kirche zu erziehen und zusammenzuschliessen.” Cf. Ernst Jansen, *Die Evangelische Michaelsbruderschaft*. Kassel, 1949, p. 7.

Much excellent literature has been written by members of the *Michaelsbruderschaft*, chiefly in pamphlet form and published by the Johannes Stauda-Verlag in Kassel. Sacramentalism still plays a most important part in the thinking and activities of its members; however, the sermon is not neglected. In the Foreword of his *Vom Wagnis der Predigt* (Stuttgart, 1950), Wilhelm Staehlin expresses the hope that the publication of this booklet of 63 pages will help to disprove the legendary claims of his adversaries, who insist that his liturgical interests have made him indifferent towards the delivery of sermons in the liturgical service of worship.

One finds among many members of the *Michaelsbruderschaft* a healthy respect for Christian doctrine, a live interest in the arts and in music, an insistence on working in the world and among people as a leaven, a live interest in Christian education, a profound and active concern for the welfare of the souls of men, an awareness of the very real and serious shortcomings of a State church, an interest in the development of German free churches, and a profound recognition of the ecumenical character of the Church.

From September 4 to 8 the *Evangelische Michaelsbruderschaft* convened at the university in Marburg to observe its twentieth anniversary, to worship, to grow and profit by the discussion of vital problems, and to enjoy Christian fellowship. No fewer than 350 members attended the conference. Guests were present from Holland, France, England, Denmark, and the United States. The consecration and devotion of the group were indeed remarkable. One noted that no loitering was done during the sessions; there was no “cutting” of the numerous daily devotional exercises; one observed no dozing and inattentiveness during the reading of various

dissertations; there was no propagandizing and electioneering between sessions, no gossiping, likewise no general exodus before the conference had reached its close. Much time was devoted, not to the discussion of problems of a liturgical character, but rather to the problems of Christian stewardship (*Diakonie*); however, stewardship was discussed not in its relationship to money matters and financial problems, but rather from the standpoint of Christian service. It was emphasized that Christians should honor and esteem for their work's sake not only the members of the Christian clergy, but likewise all others who devote their lives to Christian service, e. g., teachers, deaconesses, church musicians, lay workers of various kinds, custodians and janitors, etc. Taking the term in its original and best sense, all such full-time servants of the Church constitute the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Christendom. Weight was added to these thoughts by the fact that they were spoken by a Lutheran bishop, D. Dr. Wilhelm Staehlin of Oldenburg, the title of whose dissertation was "*Hierarchie, von der Ordnung der Aemter und dem Dienst in der Kirche.*" Other papers read were based on the topics *Christus und die Welt*, by Prof. D. Heinz-Dietrich Wendland of Kiel; *Die Liturgie als die Gestalt des Gebets der Kirche*, by Kirchenrat Dr. Karl Bernhard Ritter of Marburg, and *Der Mensch zwischen Himmel und Erde*, by Prof. D. Adolf Koeberle, professor of systematic theology at the University of Tuebingen.

The spirit and practice of Christian fellowship were evident throughout the conference, though no paper related to this particular topic was read. Visitors were not given the opportunity to feel strange; while one did feel isolated by not partaking of the Lord's Supper with the *Bruderschaft*, it did not take long to discover that none other than the eminent liturgical scholar Prof. D. Friedrich Heiler occupied the same pew in the balcony with the writer and likewise did not partake of the Sacrament. Since the Eucharist, like the Lord's Prayer, is intended only for those who are members of the household of the Christian faith, it is indeed not surprising to note that an organization like the *Michaelsbruderschaft* seeks to foster the spirit and practice of Christian *koinoonia*. All members of the *Bruderschaft* addressed one another with the German familiar forms of address, regardless of what their calling, profession, or station might be; one found among them not only

bishops and pastors, but likewise physicians, lawyers, judges, men of high political rank, artists, authors, and common laborers. The doctrine of the universal priesthood was referred to repeatedly and related to the fellowship of Christian people.

The sermons and chapel addresses were Christ-centered and thus were quite different from sermons one must still hear in Lutheran churches of Germany. The liturgies used were elaborate, but by no means theatrical or pompous. A confessional service conducted in the chapel of the University on the evening of September 4 lasted an hour and a half and proved to be very solemn and impressive. The music was churchly and very well done; Gregorian chant and the Lutheran chorale were used almost exclusively, though a polyphonic setting of the Kyrie sung by a small choir proved to be refreshing, particularly from the musical point of view. All services of worship were very well integrated, and no one part suffered because of overemphasis of another. One does hear expressions from members of the *Michaelsbruderschaft* which many others who hold membership in the Lutheran Church will not readily subscribe to, e. g.: that the Apostolic Succession is needed in the Lutheran Church of Germany and other countries, as they have it in Norway and Sweden; that Lutherans should build cloisters and monasteries in which men may work and produce for the Church without being disturbed by family ties and other hindrances; that polyphonic music is baneful and foreign to the ideal service of worship; that theological differences are not to play too strong a role in determining whether one is to be admitted to the Lord's Table; finally, that Luther possessed very little genuine liturgical acumen and hence helped to introduce the spirit of sectarianism into the Lutheran Church. Such claims are made, of course, also by many who are not members of the *Evangelische Michaelsbruderschaft*. Such claims explain why some do not wish to be identified with any kind of liturgical movement, since it is believed quite generally that liturgical groups and movements too often do not know where to draw the line and come to a halt. While one hears similar reactions also in Europe, one notes, however, that the rich literature written by members of the *Michaelsbruderschaft* is used diligently and even with enthusiasm also by many who refuse to hold membership in this body.

A small, select group of those who had been present at Marburg journeyed to Assenheim after the Marburg sessions to discuss there, on September 8 and 9, certain problems of ecumenicity as well as of liturgical development in other lands. This *Oekumenische Tagung* was arranged largely for those who had been honored guests at the *Tagungen* in Marburg. While several guests, including the writer, were unable to attend, others, according to the official record, submitted rather thought-provoking and interesting reports. The Rev. B. von Schenk submitted a comprehensive report regarding the liturgical and educational practices of his parish, Our Savior's Ev. Lutheran Church of New York. He likewise discussed present-day liturgical tendencies among Presbyterians and Methodists, as well as among certain Lutheran church bodies in America. Pastor Wiebe Vos of Holland, secretary of the Commission on Faith and Order (*Ways of Worship*) and a graduate of Oxford University, where he had been a pupil of the liturgiologist William D. Maxwell, gave an historical account of liturgical developments in Holland. He showed how the ecumenical interests of Holland have helped to dampen and modify much of its Reformed antiliturgical spirit and activities and pointed particularly to the effective work done by his former mentor, Prof. Van der Leeuw. Today also the leading spirits of the Reformed Church in Holland are grappling with the problems of liturgics, new literature is being written, and a Council for the Solution of Problems of Worship has been formed which has helped to prepare the *Ontwerp Dienstboek voor de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. In this book not only various Calvinistic orders of service may be found, but likewise a Lutheran-Catholic mass which includes the *Anamnesis* and the *Epiklesis*. A 64-page liturgical periodical is today published and read in Holland; its editor is the successor to Prof. Van der Leeuw, Prof. J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink. Though warned that liturgical worship would drive people out of his church, Pastor Vos stated that his experience has been the contrary and that his church attendance has grown steadily and considerably.

An interesting report was submitted by the two guests present from Copenhagen, Denmark, namely, Pastors Borregaard and Lissner. While they were happy to state that in Denmark the old traditional vestments and paraments are still used, they regretted

to state that, unlike Norway and Sweden, Denmark had lost the Apostolic Succession already in 1537 and had never regained it. Church attendance is very poor among the Danes. Two sacramental movements have taken place in Denmark within the last century: The first was the work of the *Grundvigianer*, who are so sacramental that they reject at least part of the Bible as a "pope"; the second was instigated by an inner mission group which has strong pietistic leanings, which, true to the policies and practices of Pietism, conducts services of worship in private homes and small assembly halls, but which sends its members to the clergy and to the church when they wish to receive Holy Communion. The *Grundvigianer* are unliturgical. Among the Danish Barthians, as well as among other groups of Denmark, there exists a strong aversion to Holy Communion, some going so far as to say: "The way to the Lord's Supper is the way to hell." Pastor Borregaard reported also concerning the activities of the Danish liturgical Fraternity of St. Ansgar, which has a membership of fifteen theologians and twenty laymen, and Pastor Lissner spoke of his *Theologisches Oratorium*, which has a membership of eighty clergymen and a few students of the two universities of Denmark.

Before final adjournment took place, some thought was given to the suggestion that a Eucharistic Congress take place in Germany next year which is to be modeled after those conducted by the Roman Catholic Church in the United States of America.

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