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ARCHIVES

BRIEF STUDIES

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AS EVALUATED BY A SEARCHER

In our times a number of scholars, scientists, and other intellectuals, heretofore independent, have gone shopping for the organized church. Three of them, James Pike, William Pollard, and Chad Walsh, eventually joined the Episcopal Church. In *I Chose the Episcopal Church* Chad Walsh, who is professor of English at Beloit College, Beloit, Wis., and author of such widely read books as *Campus Gods on Trial*, *Early Christians of the 21st Century*, and *Stop Looking and Listen*, narrates how in his own case he stopped looking when he found what he was searching for in the Episcopal Church.

Asked whether in his search for a church home he had also probed into the theology and liturgy of the Lutheran Church, Professor Walsh replied as follows to the undersigned:

"You asked about my 'church-sampling' period. It happens that I rather quickly narrowed the field down to the Lutheran and Episcopal churches. I already had a slight Lutheran background, having attended Marion (Va.) College as a day student for two years. However, while there I still considered myself an atheist and insulated myself from religious influences as much as possible. I suppose, though, enough Lutheranism must have penetrated my armor for me to have a feeling of especial interest in the Lutheran Church when, at about the age of 29 or 30, I became convinced that orthodox Christianity is true, and that I should join a church.

"There was a period of about a year during which I see-sawed between the Episcopal and Lutheran churches. I had the feeling I couldn't go badly wrong with either. I recognized the many things they have in common, such as firm theology, a sense of the 'Church,' and liturgical, God-centered worship.

"I am not wholly clear in my own mind just why I made the choice I did; certainly some of the reasons are rather accidental, such as a close friend who introduced me to the Anglican tradition. However, as best I can analyze it at this distance of time, I think I decided on the Episcopal Church for these reasons:

"(1) I felt it had a slight liturgical edge. In particular, the language of the Book of Common Prayer seemed to me a little more perfect than that of the Lutheran services. (I suppose the English scholar was

operating in me at this point; certainly I would not defend this as a basis of choice, but I guess I can help you most by confessing my naivete).

"(2) The Lutheran Church struck me as being especially associated with certain ethnic groups, especially the German and Scandinavian. Since my own background is British Isles, I felt a little bit like an outsider.

"(3) I had a stronger sense of historical continuity with the primitive church in the Episcopal Communion. It is true that I had no very definite theories at this time about the apostolic succession of bishops, but at the very least the succession gave me a sense of visible continuity reaching both backward and forward in time.

"(4) I admired the uncompromising honesty of Lutheran preaching, with its emphasis on sin, judgment, redemption. But I often wished that I could hear more said about the love of God as well as the wrath of God, and about the original goodness of man and creation as well as the subsequent corruption. All in all, the Lutheran Church struck me as a little 'beetle-browed' and dour. What I missed in it was any strong note of joy and reverent gaiety.

"(5) I never studied the matter sufficiently to be sure of the Lutheran attitude toward the Bible, but I got the impression that it tended toward a greater degree of literalism than I can accept, and that by many Lutherans the theory of evolution, for example, is regarded as incompatible with the biblical faith.

"(6) At the same time, I sensed an earnestness in the Lutheran Church, a determination to make Christianity a 24-hour-a-day faith, and a strong sense of responsibility of one Christian for another. I must admit that this seemed more evident in the Lutheran than the Episcopal Church.

"(7) At the risk of revealing my ignorance still further, I should add that I sensed at the time, and still sense, that a great deal more intellectual ferment seems to be going on in European Lutheranism than in American. I often get the impression that many of the thoughtful Lutherans I know have a defensive cast of mind, that they are trying to build walls to keep difficult questions from entering their minds, rather than welcoming the questions and exploring them as means of deepening their understanding of the Gospel."

RUDOLPH NORDEN

[ED. NOTE: This letter is printed with the permission of the writer. In publishing it we want to share with our readers the reactions of an intelligent, cultured man to our church without discussing the validity of his appraisal.]

AN OUTSIDER COMES IN AND LOOKS BACK *

Prior to our coming to Canada my wife and I had become disturbed about the Church of England for the following reasons:

1. The lack of clear Gospel preaching in the majority of churches. Many sermons were primarily the opinions of the minister.

2. The doctrinal confusion. On the extreme "right" were the Anglo-Catholics, who emphasized the Sacrifice of the Mass and the necessity of its daily offering, in fact, a return to pre-Reformation theology.

On the extreme left were those who indeed claimed the Bible as their sole authority but whose interpretation was essentially Zwinglian or Calvinist.

In the middle were a group of sincere people who attempted to compromise between the two schools.

3. The numerous Modernist clergy and their toleration within the church.

4. The toleration of Masonry not only among the laity but also the clergy.

When we came to Canada, we found the Anglican Church far more humanistic than in England. Always in England, in spite of the confusion, one could usually find a church where the minister had at least something of the Gospel to offer.

We listened to the Lutheran Hour which we had heard over the short wave when in England, and we were much impressed. I should add that as an Anglo-Catholic I was intensely suspicious of any form of Protestantism because I associated it with (a) revivalism, (b) emotional worship without order, (c) no real Sacraments, and (d) a puritanical view of life. However, we decided to attend a Lutheran church in Lent.

We were at once impressed by the thoroughly Biblical preaching and, in addition, by the clear, authoritative answers given to any of our questions during our period of instruction on the basis of Scripture.

I began to read my Bible with new insight and found a power in it I had never known before.

The transition from Anglo-Catholicism to Lutheranism is not as great as it might seem, once I was satisfied that the Lutheran doctrine of the ministry was correct. As an Anglican I believed in Baptismal regeneration and the Real Presence, and it wasn't difficult to shed the "almost transubstantiation" doctrine of Anglo-Catholics.

* ED. NOTE: The writer is senior physician at the Hospital for Mental Diseases, Province of Manitoba, Selkirk, Man.

In brief, then, the Lutheran Church has given me the following which I had never had before:

1. Conviction and "power unto Salvation" in the Word as the sure guide in faith and morals.
2. An understanding of what a perfect and simple whole Scripture is in the light of Christ and justification by faith.
3. A purified and strengthened belief in the Sacraments.
4. The ability to test the doctrines of any other church in the light of the Word.
5. A living faith to teach my children.
6. A complete unity of faith in my family.
7. An appreciation of the high standard of scholarship in the Lutheran Church.
8. The end of disputations in search of true doctrine.

H. B. KIDD, *M. B. B. Chir.*