

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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Meditation

OSCAR CULLMANN

Laurentius Valla: Renaissance Critic and Biblical  
Theologian

MARVIN W. ANDERSON

A Critique: "Two Levels of History"

DAVID W. LOTZ

Homiletics

Book Review

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# Editorial ✠

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We salute the new year of God's grace with three articles that deal with time and history. Marvin W. Anderson has addressed himself to a historical question about the origins of the Lutheran Reformation with reference to philological reforms associated with the name of Lorenzo Valla. David W. Lotz looks at the understanding of history associated especially with the name of Rudolf Bultmann. Oscar Cullmann speaks to the whole question of the historical character of the Gospels and the message the church offers to the world in this day.

Professor Cullmann's plea for sober evaluation of contemporary Biblical studies and a fraternal attitude of trust and respect among Biblical scholars is always in order. Presumably there is tension and occasional ill will among the members of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*. Otherwise an astute observer such as Professor Cullmann would not have found it necessary to speak to this subject. One occasionally notices a certain dogmatism in the proponents of newer Biblical studies. But the primary benefit in Professor Cullmann's meditation is his appeal to fraternal trust on the part of those who seek to understand and proclaim the Word of God to perishing man. Where this two-way trust is not present, the church's task is endlessly complicated. There are some in every denomination who have seen the importance of this atmosphere of Christian trust and have decided to destroy it as the most effective way of upending their denomination so that they can rebuild it along their own lines. But such men are always a minority. We need to remind ourselves again with St. Augustine that love is the hallmark of the church on earth. Those who do not manifest love are not in the church, according to his definition.

The article by Anderson will not lend itself to an easy evening's reading. As a matter of fact, our first reaction was to return the article to Dr. Anderson on the assumption that no practical parish pastor would ever read an article with so many footnotes. The fact that most of the footnotes are in Latin simply confirmed our initial reaction. But staff members goaded us into reading it a second and a third time, and we discovered that it is one of the finest and most helpful articles the CTM has ever had the privilege of publishing. What are its merits for the busy parish pastor? We see two distinct ones, and each reader will undoubtedly find additional merits. In the first place, Dr. Anderson's careful study of Luther's dependence on the philological discoveries of humanists like Lorenzo Valla will invite each reader to rethink his view of Luther and Luther's attitude toward Scripture. When a Lutheran pastor rethinks his view of Luther, he often finds himself engaged in the painful process of taking another look at himself, for many Lutheran pastors have consciously set out to mold themselves in the image of the great Reformer. Thus Anderson's study will help them — and others — understand the authentic meaning of *sola Scriptura*. It also makes clear the full impact of Luther's repeated observation that all theology is grammar. It enables one to understand that the Reformation was inevitable, given Valla's philological insights, and would have come to pass

almost willy-nilly had there been a man named Martin Luther or not. Valla had taught scholars how to understand the Bible on its own terms in the light of material available to him and his humanist contemporaries.

The second merit of Dr. Anderson's article is that it makes it evident that another reformation of the church today is inevitable in the light of a similar category of philological, grammatical, and historical discoveries that have been made by a legion of scholars over the past one hundred years. The renewal of the church is directly related to discoveries that are philological and historical in character. Another generation of scholars, like Luther's generation, has been trained by secular scholars to read the Bible on its own terms. Anderson's study makes it excitingly evident that the Lord of the Scriptures never leaves His Scriptures to be twisted out of shape by readers — even the best intentioned of readers — who are reluctant to understand it on its own terms.

Some of the most interesting parts of Anderson's article are in the footnotes. Footnotes 67 and 71 on the relationship between Luther and Valla add much to the body of the article. Footnote 73 on the relationship between faith and reason will invite both the pastor and the professional theologian to do some careful rethinking. Take a look at numbers 62 and 96 also. A lifetime of scholarship is compressed in a few sentences here. The bibliography contained in the footnotes is one of the best on Valla in the English language. This article will from this time on be a point of departure for all serious studies of the work of Valla, particularly as his findings affected the development of the continental reformations.

But Dr. Anderson's article still raises the question: Is it of any value to the busy parish pastor? Could not his findings have been boiled down to a paragraph that the pastor could have accepted or rejected as he chose? Not at all, for Dr. Anderson's conclusions depend on his careful step-by-step sifting of the evidence. There is no room left for an emotional appeal either for or against his conclusions. Generalizations have been one serious barrier to effective communication among human beings. The kind of study that this article represents leaves no room for generalizations.

Mr. Lotz adds his voice to the growing number of people who affirm that Bultmann's understanding of history is incorrect. Bultmann's neat distinction between *Historie* (that which actually happened) and *Geschichte* (the theological and/or philosophical interpretation of the meaning of the event) is being challenged and rejected by a growing number of scholars. But if Bultmann's understanding of history was incorrect, what is the correct understanding? Lotz briefly but succinctly evaluates several options but refuses to choose among them. His article thus becomes a question rather than an answer. The question addresses itself to the basic issue confronting proclaimers of the Word today, namely, what is the relationship between Christians in the year 1968 and the Biblical accounts of the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth?

Some readers will be disappointed by the lack of a clear answer. But because theology is a mental discipline and must therefore move in clearly defined logical steps to be effective, it is necessary first of all to explore the weaknesses of a position that has held the field for more than a generation.

Lotz's article, then, becomes a commentary on the relationship between theology and faith. We have a friend who repeatedly affirms that he has never let theology interfere with his religion. This man is a very astute theologian, and there is a great deal of wisdom in his observation. One valid definition of theology defines it as the art of asking meaningful questions about God and about man's existence. Obviously the questions are raised for the purpose of producing answers, but the steps toward the answers are as important as the answers themselves. The function of the theological journal is to invite its readers to think along with theologians. While every good theological question has practical implications, there remains a gulf fixed between theology and living personal faith. When some attempt unwisely to bridge this gulf, confusion and disorder usually result. The fact that we print Lotz's article does not indicate confusion or uncertainty on the part of the staff. It simply indicates that we think the question is valid and of such significance for our readers that they want to think about it themselves and work out their own solutions to it. Perhaps his article and this editorial will prompt some alert reader or group of readers to produce a very workable answer to the question that he so carefully raises.

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