

# Concordia Theological Monthly



J A N U A R Y      .      1 9 5 5

# THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

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## SUPPRESSION OF RELIGION IN THE SOVIET UNION

A correspondent in Europe recently sent us an English translation of an article by V. Prokofiew titled "The Reactionary Character of Religion." This article appeared in *Trud* (Soviet Trade Union newspaper, Moscow) August 15. Since we can vouch for the authenticity of the translation, and since the article gives a ghastly insight into the reasons why Soviet leaders are determined to suppress religion in the Soviet Union, we are submitting pertinent paragraphs of the article. Other materials received from the same correspondent inform us that "the anti-religious campaign in Soviet Russia has now been going on for about six months and is becoming more and more violent and frequent . . . that the reason for this is the fact that especially the youth in the Soviet Union is experiencing a religious revival on a large scale in all the various countries of the Soviet Union, including Russia and the Ukraine, and that the churches are crowded every Sunday, mainly by young people, although only a very limited number of churches are allowed to be used for divine services." Mr. Prokofiew writes as follows:

The Soviet people have built a socialist society and are putting into effect the transition from socialism to communism. An important condition of the transition to a higher phase of the communist society is the steady growth of communist consciousness and activity of the Soviet people, the builders of communism. It is the fight with the remnants of capitalism and bourgeois ideology.

One of the baneful remnants of capitalism still remaining in the conscience of a part of the Soviet people is religion. Religion did not exist always. It came into being at a lower level of social development. In the primitive-communal and classless society a belief in supranatural forces, in various gods, was caused by the helplessness of primitive man in his struggle with nature. In an exploiting society, religion first of all reflects the social oppression of the working classes. Being ruthlessly oppressed, feeling desperate because of their failure in a struggle with the exploiters, the workers turn their eyes towards heaven hoping for help.

The reactionary character of religion and its harmful influence are evident in that religion defends and sanctions the exploiting system as one "created by God," declares it to be eternal and unassailable, and paralyzes the will of the workers in their struggle for liberation and undermines the workers' faith in their own strength. To bear the

insults of the exploiters in this life in order to win "eternal bliss in the kingdom of heaven" — that is the basis of the priests' propaganda. Under the conditions of socialism religion is detracting the believers from active and conscientious participation in social and industrial activities. The demand to subjugate everyday life on earth to the salvation of souls for eternal bliss in heaven fetters the will of religiously minded people, poisons their minds and detracts them from the struggle to build a happy and merry life on earth. An ideology of pessimism which despises the joys of life leads these people away from the building of communism and makes it difficult to educate brave and vital people who are not afraid of difficulties.

Labor is playing a decisive role in the development of the human race. Labor made men masters of nature. Labor is the first and basic condition of all human life. It could be said in a sense that labor created man.

Religion teaches its followers to regard labor as a curse, as a punishment to which the human race has been sentenced for the sins of its ancestors.

The observance of religious festivals interferes with the normal functioning of socialist factories and plans as well as with sowing and harvesting the crops. Religion frightens its followers with "God's punishment" for work performed on religious holidays and calls them to go to the houses of prayer, churches and mosques, but not to factories or fields. As a rule religious holidays are accompanied with drunkenness, fighting, and hooliganism which result in absenteeism, in failures of machinery, and in the production of faulty goods.

Contrary to religion, socialism demands active participation in socially useful labor. Our people condemn a critical attitude towards labor. Under the conditions of a gradual transition from socialism to communism when the overwhelming majority of the Soviet people honestly work and obey labor discipline, the disorganizers of production cannot be tolerated because they cause great damage to all the Soviet people.

Labor in our country has become free. For the first time in human history people are working not for idlers but for themselves, for the Soviet society. Liberation of the workers from exploiters and exploitation made labor a matter of honor and glory and played an important part in the growth of the socialist conscience of the Soviet people. Therefore it is clear that the struggle for the communist attitude towards labor presupposes a struggle against religious ideas regarding labor.

Fraternal friendship and mutual assistance of the peoples of the Soviet union is one of the most important sources of strength in the Soviet states. The state management in our country is carried out by the

working class—the standard bearer of the ideology of internationalism and of the friendship of nations. Contrary to this the bourgeoisie in capitalist countries is striving to separate nations, to create hostility among them, and to incite national and racial hatred. Religion gives sanction to this policy.

Priests of all religions unanimously maintain that their religion is the true religion and that all other religions are false religions, that nations who confess the true religion are loved by God and that the others are hated by God. By inciting religious and national hatred and hostility the imperialists aim to weaken the international front of democracy and socialism and destroy it for the purpose of undermining the striving of peoples in the struggle for peace. Because religion preaches the doctrine of priority of some nations and inferiority of the others who are not loved by God, it condemns the human race to eternal slavery.

Religion regards women with particular dislike. Women are not recognized as equal members of society. The history of class society is the history of the enslavement of women, their terrible exploitation. Religious creeds approve the unequal position of working women in a capitalist society. There is not a single religion which does not sanction the inequality of women.

One of the most important achievements of the socialist revolution in our country is the complete liberation of women with the result that they have been granted equal rights with men in all branches of state, economic, cultural, social, and political life. Scores of millions of Soviet women are working shoulder to shoulder with their fathers, husbands, and brothers in all branches of national economy and culture. The dissemination of religious creeds and prejudices put obstacles in the way of women for their active participation in the gigantic struggle which our people conduct for building up the communist society.

Religious ideology is reactionary because religion is always trying to prevent man from knowing the laws of nature and society. Religion repudiates science. It teaches its followers that the "wisdom of the world is madness before God." The churches of all creeds declare that the highest ideal of every religiously minded person is ignorance. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" is the teaching of religion. Religion hates science since it maintains that all knowledge is contrary to the will of God.

The bases of science and religion are absolutely different from one another. In the course of history of human society a relentless fight went on between religion and science. This fight is one of the forms of class struggle. A large number of scientists who were in search of new truth were victims of the churches. They were burned at the stake

or tortured in the dungeons of the Inquisition. All the great scientific discoveries without which the achievements of industry, agriculture, and culture would have been impossible, were made in the fierce struggle against religion. Religion is fighting science also in our day. Every religion teaches man to accept what is taught with bland approval and not to investigate the secrets of nature. Religion asserts the possibility of miracles, that is, the infringement of the laws of nature. Science repudiates the belief in miracles, in the supranatural. There are no miracles because in nature everything is rational. It is true that many laws of nature are not yet discovered but it does not mean that the laws do not exist or that they will not be discovered in the future.

Science, which has made tremendous progress in our country, is boldly unveiling the secrets of nature and finding new ways and means for the full utilization of natural resources. Materialistic science which is based on observation and investigation and not on blind faith is penetrating into the essence of the most complicated phenomena. That is why true science leads the human race forward, gives people confidence, and arms them for the fight.

Religious prejudices are in their very essence hostile to the struggle for the victory of communism. Religious ideas are educating people in the spirit of antiquated morals and serve the interest of the exploiting classes. Religion lowers the standard of men. It cultivates distrust in their own strength, in the success of communism. Religious prejudices are encouraging all other prejudices in the conscience of man.

Our Party teaches that the main principle for a successful fight against religious remnants and their elimination from the life of the Soviet people consists in the active and conscious support of communism by all workers. A great deal of patient educational work is needed to help these religiously minded people to liberate themselves from the darkness of religious prejudices.

The liberation of men from superstition and prejudices calls for a huge promotion effort to acquaint the masses with the program of our objectives. This is carried out by the Party, the trade unionist, the Comsomol, and other Soviet social organizations. Now that no social roots exist in our country which nourish religion the chief responsibility to eliminate the remnants of religion falls upon a scientific-atheistic propaganda and upon the dissemination of political and scientific knowledge.

What should be the aim of scientific-atheistic propaganda? It must lead, above all, toward a gradual grasp by everyone of all the facts of science, toward a knowledge therefore of the structure of the universe, of the origin of the earth, of the beginning of life on earth,

and of the origin of man. A knowledge of these facts will form the foundation for a really scientific approach to a knowledge of nature and society.

The scientific-atheistic propaganda takes its material from various walks of life. It always aims to interest the faithful and by varied means to wake them up from their religious sleep. The forms and methods of this propaganda differ depending on concrete conditions, national peculiarities, age groups of the population, and methods of activities of religious groups and organizations. The scientific-atheistic propaganda must always have a militant and aggressive character.

The Soviet trade unions are faithful assistants of the Communist Party in the task of educating workers and officials. They cannot remain indifferent towards religion which obstructs the rise of culture and the increase of political activities of the workers. A vast network of clubs, places of culture, libraries, cinemas, and independent societies are at the disposal of the trade unions. The XI Congress of the professional trade unions passed a resolution making it obligatory for all trade unions to fight a decisive battle with the relics of capitalism and with various superstitions. It will be to the honor of the trade unions if they will uproot the harmful religious relics and educate the workers in the spirit of the high ideals of communism.

This is plain language. Mr. Prokofiew has well succeeded to make the stuffy Marx-Lenin-Stalin creed intelligible to the Soviet worker. But the propaganda speech makes it evident that after thirty-five years of relentless and oftentimes brutal effort to suppress religion in the Soviet Union to the point of complete extinction, the Communist Party has not succeeded. Religion, specifically the Christian religion, is still a vital and active force in the Soviet Union. Perhaps the situation resembles that in the Eastern Zone of Germany, where the story is told of a policeman on duty in Leipzig on Sunday, July 11, when some 650,000 evangelical Christians gathered for the climax of the 1954 *Kirchentag*. This policeman was heard muttering to himself, "There surely is more religion in the Eastern Zone than I thought there was." Furthermore, Mr. Prokofiew's eulogy on labor must have sounded hollow in the ears of the Russian laborers who know that, in reality, they are slave laborers who under threat of punishment must meet the rigid and exacting requirements of the law. Again, it does seem strange that Mr. Prokofiew completely disregards the fact that the "rights of man," including those of women, were first recognized in the West and not in the East, that it was the West which gave impetus to woman suffrage and which laid the foundations for modern science. But the West happens to be that part of the world where

Christianity is most widely represented. Finally, if the ideal of the Soviet Union is a nonreligious, classless society, this ideal has until now not been realized. Religion is destined to continue to play a larger part in the life of the Russian people, and the Russian worker is destined to draw his check from the Communist Party as long as it is in power and not from a classless society.

P. M. B.

#### THE LUTHERAN CHURCH DURING THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

Those who lived through the First World War, especially in rural communities where church doors of Lutheran houses of worship were often painted yellow and Lutheran parish schools were burned down by misled frantic mobs, will appreciate what the *Lutheran Quarterly* (August, 1954) has to say of the Lutheran frontier communities during the "French and Indian War," which began in 1754 and lasted until 1760. At the beginning, as the article points out, the situation of the German element in British North America was unenviable. Though the German colonists were the least interested in public affairs, they found themselves accused by prominent colonials of open disloyalty and even of being in league with the French. Thus, because of widespread distrust of the Germans, they had to shoulder the burden of proof that they had no traitorous intentions. As the war progressed, the German minority succeeded in convincing British authorities of their loyalty, so that the German settlers from Nova Scotia to Georgia came to be accepted as part of the social fabric of the colonies. (A similar situation prevailed at the outbreak of the Second World War, when the loyalty of Lutherans of German descent was questioned only in rare instances.) Thus the period between 1754 and 1763 marked the first step in the "Americanization" of the German-speaking people of the British New World. Of the German-speaking groups the German Lutheran Church was by far the largest. In 1682 several hundred German Lutherans had arrived at the recently founded city of Philadelphia, and two years later the first Lutheran service was celebrated there. By the time of the outbreak of hostilities in 1754 the Lutheran Church had been able to extend its influence throughout a considerable area of the eastern seaboard and in certain regions even beyond the mountains. When hostilities began, not only the Lutherans but also the smaller German religious groups were distrusted; but the Lutherans had the advantage that they had no doctrinal objection to bearing arms. When the first calls for volunteers went out, Lutherans were quick to offer their services. Indeed, most of the Germans who served in the colonial militia and the Royal American Regiment were of either the Lutheran or the Reformed faith. Among the regulars and

the militia, Lutherans from Maine to Georgia were to be found. Their participation in the military service was unostentatious. German Lutherans, Scottish Presbyterians, and Anglicans fought side by side to put an end to the Indian raids. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's interest in the victory of the British cause was all the greater because in Europe the Protestant nations were in a mortal conflict with the Roman Catholic powers. He even received a call as chaplain into the Royal American Regiment. He declined this because his services were sorely needed in Lutheran churches in Pennsylvania. Lutheran congregations shepherded by him held services of thanksgiving when victories were won, as, for example, when General Wolfe defeated the French at Quebec. The Lutherans at Tulpehocken, N. J., felt the blows of the Indian attacks most severely, and they displayed great fortitude in the defense of their cause. In 1755 the Rev. J. N. Kurtz here conducted funeral services for seven victims of an Indian raid. In its hour of sorrow the congregation opened the service with the singing of Luther's hymn *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*. Here Pastor Kurtz also acted as chaplain to the troops, though not in an official capacity, offering prayer for the troops that departed for the frontier. The Lutheran Church was of course adversely affected by the war. Thus from 1755 until 1759 no conventions could take place. Plans made as early as 1749 to establish a theological seminary and a home for the aged in Philadelphia could not be carried out. Another plan, to transform the Bethesda Orphans' Home in Georgia into a Lutheran college, could not be realized. But, on the whole, the French and Indian War did not greatly hinder the progress of the Lutheran Church at that time; for when sessions were resumed in 1759, the church entered into a new spirit of co-operation, and much material progress was soon to be noted, and that not merely despite the war but also despite the internal controversy between factions in the denomination.

J. T. MUELLER

#### FOES OF FREEMASONRY

The September, 1954, issue of *Thirty-Three*, a monthly published by Lodge No. 33, F. & A. M., in Lansing, Mich., contains an article by Ward K. St. Clair, P. M., Past District Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of New York, titled "Antimasonic Movements: Three Bitter Enemies Still Rampant in America." In this article the author traces in sketchy fashion the chief forces of opposition to Freemasonry since the formation of the Grand Lodge in London in 1717. In our own day, so he writes, there are three enemies of Freemasonry. We quote:

The first and oldest is the Roman Catholic Church. Their opposition



dates from the issuance of the interdiction of the Order by Pope Clement XII in 1738. However, in this country they are willing to compromise and live on a "live and let live" basis, provided we join them in their fight against communism, of which they are deathly afraid.

The second such group is the Communist Party. They are dangerous because they have their members join our Lodges. This has occurred in several Grand Jurisdictions, especially in the South. I do not believe there are any in Michigan, but I urge you to be on your guard and watch very carefully.

The third group and probably the most dangerous is the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church. There are several Lutheran Organizations, but only the Missouri Synod is opposed to us. They are waging a cold, well-calculated campaign. They are ruthless, and I question if they have endeavored to determine just what we stand for.

One instance of their effort occurred several years ago when they were instrumental in getting a survey of fraternal organizations published by the University of Missouri. This survey turned out to be anti-Masonic and was based entirely upon exposes and similar type of information. No place were authoritative sources consulted. This was accomplished with state funds. They will not join our Order but fight us from the outside. They continually are issuing pamphlets and tracts against us and in every way possible try to discredit us.

We submit the above paragraphs not because we fear its inaccurate and its next to libelous statements. Nor are we proud that Freemasonry has come to regard the Missouri Synod as "probably the most dangerous" of its enemies. Our church has gone through evil reports and good reports before and will do so in the future. We are rather submitting the paragraphs because they demonstrate conclusively that the Lord of the church has blessed the witness of those pastors in our Synod and in the member Synods of the Synodical Conference who have testified that Christianity and Freemasonry do not mix and that in spite of its loud protestations to the contrary Freemasonry espouses a religion which is "another gospel" and not the Gospel of Christ. These paragraphs also demonstrate that there are Christians in our church who have recognized the inconsistency of worshiping at the altar of the Lord on Sundays and at the altar of an idol on other days of the week, who therefore severed their connection with Freemasonry and in many cases applied for and received a formal demit. For this we need to thank God. But we need also to implore God to preserve in our midst the pure Gospel and to enable our clergy and our parishioners to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ.

It is indeed regrettable that Freemasonry misunderstands our objections and that it has smeared the name of our church. We should therefore make continued efforts to make clear to Masons why we object to their order. But we also need to remember that we shall never be able to demonstrate the logic of our position to individuals who know only the wisdom of the world and not the wisdom of God. Therefore we must expect to bear reproach for the name of Jesus. Our basic objection to Freemasonry was recently expressed so clearly and so convincingly by the Rev. H. S. Box (Episcopalian) of Scaynes Hill, Haywards Heath, England, in a statement published in the *Church of England Newspaper* (July 30, 1954) that we are reproducing it:

Freemasonry has a method of salvation, an alleged defeat of death, and a liturgical approach to God . . . from which the name and mediation of Christ have been deliberately excluded in order to avoid giving offense to those who deny Christ's claims. . . . For Christians to drop the name of Christ from their forms of worship and to revert to pagan forms in quest of spiritual light is a very dangerous matter; it dishonors the Incarnation, God's supreme and final revelation of truth, by ignoring it and by going behind Christ's back. Nor is it a real excuse to plead that when the Christian takes part in Masonic ceremonies he inwardly retains his faith in Christ, even though he is forbidden to manifest it outwardly. St. Peter could have said much the same thing, and so could the Corinthian Christians who took part in pagan sacred banquets, but it would not have exonerated them. . . .

P. M. B.

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

*Beatrice, Nebr.*—Delegates to the 13th biennial convention of the American Lutheran Church unanimously approved the *Common Confession*, a statement of doctrinal agreement with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The action was hailed by Dr. Edward C. Fendt, dean of Capital University's Theological Seminary at Columbus, Ohio, as "a milestone in Lutheran history."

The agreement is divided into two parts. Part I already has been adopted by both bodies. Part II, intended as a supplement, was endorsed separately by the convention here, which then approved the entire document. The Missouri Synod received Part II at its triennial convention last year and referred it to congregations for study, with action on the document scheduled in 1956.

The ALC's Committee on Union and Fellowship suggested in its formal report that negotiations with the Missouri Synod be continued "in the hope that pulpit and altar fellowship may soon be established

between the two church bodies on the basis of doctrine and practice." However, resolutions brought to the convention floor made no mention of this and gave no indication of the course that will be followed in the future on the matter. Action on the *Common Confession* was taken soon after the delegates had voted unanimously for continued negotiations toward organic union with three other bodies, the Evangelical Lutheran, United Evangelical Lutheran, and Lutheran Free Churches. No opposition was expressed to the proposed merger, which would result in a church of more than 1,800,000 members, either from the floor or during an earlier open hearing.

The convention also reaffirmed a resolution adopted in 1950 stating that "we are committed to the ultimate unity of all Lutherans in America and pledge our wholehearted support to efforts in that direction."

Dr. Henry F. Schuh of Columbus, Ohio, President of the church, was authorized to "encourage efforts to establish official all-Lutheran forums or, as the opportunity arises, to initiate such efforts." A spokesman explained that "forums" meant conferences or conversations on unity.

The convention asked its union committee to meet for further discussions with the United Lutheran Church in America's Special Commission on Relations to American Lutheran Church Bodies in the U.S.A. Gratitude was expressed for "the present degree of understanding and co-operation" between the ALC and ULCA.

The delegates reaffirmed a decision not to seek membership in the National Council of Churches "at this moment." The original action was taken in 1952, at which time it was said that membership in the National Council would "involve a drastic change in the deep-going polity in large areas of our church life," and would "increase the hindrances in present merger negotiations." This year's report said that these reasons for the church's decision have not changed.

Other resolutions on church co-operation matters voiced the ALC's appreciation and support of the National Lutheran Council, Lutheran World Federation, and World Council of Churches.

*Toronto, Ont.* — Dr. Franklin Clark Fry of New York was elected to his sixth consecutive two-year term as President of the United Lutheran Church in America at its 19th biennial convention here.

The delegates also approved a change in the President's term of office from two to six years, provided that two thirds of the church's 32 synods approve.

*Beatrice, Nebr.* — Preliminary plans for a proposed merger of the American Lutheran Church with three other Lutheran bodies were

unanimously approved at the 13th biennial convention of the ALC here.

The merger blueprint had already been endorsed by the other three bodies — the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Free Church — at denominational conventions held in June. Total membership of the four is just under 1,800,000.

Officials said representatives of the four churches will work on the final merger plans during the next year so they can be presented for adoption to the separate conventions in the summer and fall of 1956.

Delegates to the convention also took steps to combat absenteeism at worship services by accepting a recommendation that every one-congregation parish in the church "seriously consider the advantages" of holding at least two services every Sunday morning and of restoring the Sunday evening worship service where it has fallen into disuse.

A resolution condemning the operation of "diploma mills" that grant "earned" and honorary theological degrees for fees ranging from \$75 to \$300 also was adopted by the convention.

The resolution, presented by Dr. Bernard J. Holm, president of Wartburg Theological Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa, said that the church in the future will recognize only those degrees granted by accredited, recognized educational institutions. It directed the denomination's board of higher education to devise ways and means of distinguishing bona fide from spurious degrees.

Another adopted resolution called for the church to co-operate with other Lutheran groups in establishing a fully accredited four-year Lutheran liberal arts college in California, preferably in the Los Angeles area.

*St. Louis, Mo.* — The Missouri Court of Appeals here upheld an earlier decision by the St. Louis County Circuit Court awarding possession of Trinity Lutheran Church in suburban Chesterfield to the congregation's majority group which retained affiliation with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

The appellate court ruling was the latest development in a four-year battle waged by opposing factions. The congregation was split in June, 1950, when The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod adopted a common confession of faith with the American Lutheran Church. A minority of the congregation denounced this common confession as "too liberal" and said it represented a break with historic Lutheran doctrine.

At a membership meeting late in 1951, the latter group withdrew from the church and affiliated itself with the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, formed earlier that year at Okabena, Minn., by Missouri Synod pastors and laymen opposed to the common confession.

Suit to obtain title to the church property was instituted by the Missouri Synod group in the county court in January, 1952.

*New York.*—Almost 3,000,000 copies of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible have been sold since its publication two years ago.

According to the National Council of Churches, RSV sales figures have broken all U. S. publishing records. On the second anniversary of publication, sales of the regular, illustrated, and pulpit editions stood at 2,926,723.

*Cairo.*—Differences between the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Anba Yousaab II and 16 bishops of the church's Holy Synod are believed to have been completely reconciled here as the result of intercession by four prominent Coptic laymen. After discussing the dispute in separate conferences with the Patriarch and the bishops, the laymen succeeded in bringing both parties into a joint discussion where a compromise was effected.

The Patriarch agreed to demands by the bishops that he dismiss certain members of the Patriarchate staff, whom they accused of "corruption," and that he appoint a committee of three bishops to advise him on church questions and supervise the administration of the Patriarchate. These demands had been contained in an ultimatum drawn up earlier by the episcopal group. At that time the Patriarch rejected the request that he dismiss members of his staff but compromised on the other demand by naming Archbishop Anba Lucas of Manfalut and Abnoub as his special assistant to conduct the affairs of the Patriarchate.

The bishops opposed the appointment of Archbishop Anba but finally agreed, however, to his being one member of the committee of three. The others named to the committee are Bishop Anba Athanasius of Beni Suef, senior member of the Holy Synod, and Bishop Anba Cyril of Kena.

Differences between the Patriarch and the bishops are but one phase of a conflict that has been waged for many years between laymen of the Egyptian Coptic community and the hierarchy over administration of the church. This feud was highlighted last July when several hundred youthful members of the Coptic National Association invaded the Patriarchal headquarters here, kidnaped the 76-year-old prelate, and forced him to "abdicate" as spiritual ruler of Africa's 6,000,000 Copts.

Although the Patriarch has asked the government to drop charges against them, 37 of the youths involved in the incident are still under indictment for kidnaping, and 50 others are facing lesser charges.

Intercession in the affair by the Coptic lay leaders was inspired by Minister of Supply Gindy Abdel Malek, only Coptic member of the Egyptian Cabinet.

Meanwhile a special cabinet comprising the Ministers of the Interior, Justice, Religious Endowments and Supply and headed by Mr. Abdel Malek is studying a new constitution and bylaws for the Coptic community prepared by a group of Coptic civic leaders.

*Cleveland.* — A plan to merge the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church by 1957 was approved by the executive bodies of both denominations. Merger of the two groups will create a 2,000,000-member United Church of Christ. The denominational leaders who met jointly here were the executive committee of the Congregational Christian Churches' General Council and the Evangelical and Reformed Church's General Council.

They reaffirmed the Basis of Union with Interpretations, which was adopted by the Congregational Christian General Council in 1948 and the Evangelical and Reformed General Synod in 1947. It was then approved by votes of the regional synods of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and of the local Congregational Christian churches.

A legal barrier to a merger was removed last March when the New York State Court of Appeals threw out a case brought by a group of Congregationalists who held the General Council had no power to effect a merger.

The joint meeting here authorized the appointment of a committee of lawyers to counsel the executive bodies of both churches on concrete merger plans.

*Toronto.* — A reorganization plan for the United Lutheran Church in America, giving the denomination's Executive Board wide, new controls over the work of all national agencies, was approved at the church's 19th biennial convention here. The reorganization proposal was the main item of business at the week-long meeting.

As adopted, the plan girds the 21-member central governing body with authority to "review the actions" and exercise "power of veto" over the church's eight functional boards — social missions, publications, pensions, parish education, foreign missions, education, deaconess work, and American missions. Previously, these agencies were completely self-governing.

The delegates also approved recommendations by a 16-member Com-

mission on Organizational Structure giving the church's president "oversight of the activities of the offices of secretary and treasurer."

The reorganization was aimed at providing more co-ordination, unity, and effectiveness in over-all programs of the church. However, before the changes go into effect, they must be ratified by two thirds of the denomination's 32 synods in the U. S. and Canada.

#### BRIEF ITEMS FROM "NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL NEWS SERVICE"

*Decorah, Iowa* (NLC).—Lutheran Church leaders were urged not to forfeit the church's "God-given advantage" in rural America, as the 1954 Lutheran Home Missions Conference opened its biennial two-day session on October 27 and 28.

The plea was voiced by Dr. E. W. Mueller, secretary of the Rural Church Program of the Division of American Missions of the National Lutheran Council, sponsor of the meeting at Washington Prairie Lutheran Church near here. Theme of this year's conference was "Christ for Town and Country."

Dr. Mueller pointed out that God, working through history, had brought immigrants to America from "Lutheran" countries during the early days, when America was still an agricultural nation, and permitted them to become firmly established in the rural areas.

Between 1880 and 1905, he said, more Lutheran congregations were organized than in any other period in the history of American Lutheranism.

When immigrants began to come from non-Lutheran countries of southern Europe in 1905, they found that most of the land had already been taken up, and so they settled in the cities. Although many Lutherans later moved from the country to the city and established congregations there, the Lutheran Church has never lost its rural strength.

*New York* (NLC).—Nommensen University was formally opened by the Batak Christian Protestant Church of Indonesia in a colorful ceremony on October 7, according to a report received here from Dr. Keith Bridston.

Dr. Bridston, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, arrived in Indonesia in September to begin a four-year term as professor in the Batak Church's theological seminary at Sipoholon in Sumatra, under assignment by the Commission on Younger Churches and Orphaned Missions of the National Lutheran Council.

The new university launched by the 600,000-member Batak Church,

a member of the Lutheran World Federation, is located at Siantar in Sumatra, a small but relatively modern provincial town between Medan and Lake Toba. The grounds of the institution were formerly occupied by a hospital on the estate of a British firm. The old buildings are being razed, and new ones are gradually appearing.

*St. Paul, Minn.* (NLC).—A total of \$4,520,660 was allocated by American Lutheran church bodies to support foreign mission activities on sixty-six fields in 25 countries during 1954, according to statistics compiled by the Lutheran Foreign Missions Conference of America.

The report was prepared by Dr. Andrew S. Burgess, professor of missions at Luther Theological Seminary here, who pointed out that the amount represents an increase of \$860,990 over the \$3,659,670 devoted to foreign missions in 1952.

*Hoekelum, Holland* (NLC).—Orphaned mission fields in Jordan, New Guinea, and Indonesia—supported and supervised directly from the United States for the past seven years—will become the responsibility of the Department of World Missions of the Lutheran World Federation as of January 1, 1955.

That was the decision reached by the department's supervisory board at its annual meeting here, October 25—29, when it unanimously accepted the proposal of the Commission on Younger Churches and Orphaned Missions of the National Lutheran Council in the U. S. to transfer to the LWF "the administration of assistance for all fields for which we have been providing help, except Tanganyika."

CYCOM will continue to be responsible for the former German missions in the Northern, Usambaro, and Uzaramo areas of Tanganyika in British East Africa, as the Territorial Government there has ruled that mission property must be invested in an American corporation.

The LWF's Department of World Missions was established in the fall of 1952 and assumed responsibility for assisting orphaned mission work in India, South Africa, Southwest Africa, Ethiopia, and, if necessary, Borneo and Japan. Work in China, now confined to Hong Kong, was added to the list in 1953. It will now be expanded to include Jordan, Indonesia, and New Guinea.

The department's executive director is Dr. Fridtjov Birkeli of Norway, who assumed the post May 1. Its supervisory board, the Commission on World Missions, is headed by Dr. Fredrik A. Schiotz as chairman. Dr. Schiotz, former executive secretary of CYCOM, is president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States.

L. W. S.