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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

ECHOES OF THE ANCIENT Gnostic HERESY

Under this heading the Rev. Donald C. Ziemke, student pastor in the Lutheran Student Foundation, University of N. Dak., Grand Forks, N. Dak., in the *Lutheran Quarterly* (May 1962) offers an interesting study on Egyptian papyri, discovered more than 12 years ago, in which he discusses also the fascinating "Gospel of Thomas," which contains a series of very appealing "sayings of Jesus." Some of these sayings are almost word for word like those in the Four Gospels. Others reecho the New Testament language, but give it a twist not found in the gospels, while still others are radically different in style, language, and theology from the New Testament, as the writer shows by a number of examples. Our chief interest, however, centered in the concluding paragraph, which reechoes the old Lutheran *sola Scriptura* principle:

The first test to be applied to any newly discovered material with a claim to authority is to take its measure against the standard of the New Testament. Leaving aside any other consideration, nothing can be added to the basis of the faith which is at variance with that basis. . . . The basic question, that of the authority of the New Testament, is still central. The church, when it finally decided on a canon of the New Testament, said that everything preached and taught in the church had to conform to the content of those books. And the experience of countless men and women in the church has proved that those books *are* [italics in the original] the means through which God confronts man and offers him salvation. This holds good now as well as it did then, and there is good reason to say that no book or parts of a book, no matter what the age or claim to authority, at variance with the basic foundation of the church's doctrine and theology, may be part of the authoritative teaching of the church.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

ANOTHER LOOK AT RACHEL'S THEFT OF THE TERAPHIM

Under this heading the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (September 1962) examines a relatively new explanation of Rachel's theft of her father's household idols. On the basis of the Nuzi tablets, especially that of Gadd 51, H. H. Rowley in *Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age* had suggested that Rachel by carrying off the teraphim wanted to preserve for Jacob the chief title of Laban's estate. This theory, the writer, Moshe Greenberg of the University of Pennsylvania, regards as highly problematical, and he prefers another explanation, intimated by Josephus in his *Antiquities* (18, 9, 5), namely, "it is the custom among all the people in that country to have objects of worship in their house and to take them along when going abroad." So Rachel, in taking her father's house gods, followed a common custom. This no doubt was done for the purpose of worship, Rachel believing, as the author indicates, that through them she might have children. However, Rachel was not the only one who carried off household gods from Mesopotamia, for, as we read in Gen. 35:2 ff., Jacob at Bethel commanded his household: "Remove the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves. . . . So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had with them, and their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was at Shechem."

The fact that the author of Genesis is silent about the motive of Rachel's theft may be explained by the fact that since carrying off the household gods was a common practice, the readers needed no special explanation of this theft.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

DEATH OF SLOVAK THEOLOGIAN

Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia, Volume IX, No. 6 (June—July 1962), p. 38, reports the sudden death of Professor Jozef Berger, professor of systematic theology at the Slovak Protestant Theological Faculty in Modra, on June 11 at the age of 61. During World War II Dr. Berger spent several years in German concentration camps. After 1945 he became superintendent of the Lutheran Church in Czechoslovak Silesia and directed its reorganization. He became a theological professor a decade ago. His literary work included a study on Andreas Frycz Modrzewski (Modrevius) (1503—72), a student of Melanchthon and an influential Polish political reformer; essays in the history of Slovak Lutheranism; and compendiums of Lutheran ethics and dogmatics for his theological students. In the postwar period his paintings, based on recollections of his concentration camp experiences, attracted considerable attention in art circles.

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

THIRD EUROPEAN MISSIONS CONFERENCE

Representatives of most of the Lutheran Free Churches of Europe met in Zehlendorf, a suburb of Berlin, Germany, from Sept. 25 to 27, to discuss the principles and methods of their home mission efforts. This Third European Missions Conference was attended by pastors from France, Belgium, England, Germany, and the United States.

The theme of the conference, "Leiturgia and Home Missions," was developed in a series of brief lectures on "Leiturgia and Liturgy," "Our Liturgy as the Link to the Church of the Apostles," "Our Liturgy as a Witness of Our Faith," "Is Our Liturgy a Help or Hindrance in Our Home Missions Work?" "Liturgy and Architecture," "Liturgy and Music," and "Liturgy and Liturgical Vestments."

Particularly under the leadership of the pastors from England it was pointed out that

in home missions activity it is necessary to evaluate everything in terms of the purpose of drawing a person to Christ. This principle determines everything, it was stated, even the design of the church building, the vestments, the music and liturgy, location of the chancel and altar. The pastors of the conference were especially interested in learning how to approach people outside the church, a phase of church work which is not so highly developed in the churches of Europe as in the Lutheran Church of England or in the United States.

Having met in Great Britain in 1960 and in France last year, the conference planned to meet next year in Helsinki. In this way the respective church bodies have the opportunity of getting acquainted with one another and, wherever possible, of helping one another.

PAUL E. SCHULZE

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

Moline, Ill.—Two Minneapolis men were elected here to head the National Lutheran Editors' and Managers' Association at its 49th annual meeting in Moline and neighboring Rock Island, Ill., on Sept. 26, 27.

Dr. Edward W. Schramm, editor of the *Lutheran Standard*, official publication of the American Lutheran Church, was named to the presidency of the editor's section. He succeeds Dr. Albert P. Stauderman of Philadelphia, associate editor of the *Lutheran*, news magazine of the United Lutheran Church in America. Named to head the managers' section was Albert E. Anderson, assistant manager of the ALC's Augsburg Publishing House.

The editors also elected W. Herbert Kent of Minneapolis, editor of *Greater Works*, a publication for the ALC's men's auxiliary, as vice-president, and Neil Mellblom of New York, staff writer in the News Bureau of the National Lutheran Council, as secretary.

Elected vice-president of the managers' section was Lowell Hake of St. Louis, Mo., marketing manager of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Concordia Publishing House.

Business actions taken by the Lutheran managers included an agreement to issue similar editions of a new translation of Luther's catechism in 1963. Translations are now being prepared by boards of parish education of the ALC, the Lutheran Church in America, and Missouri Synod.

The managers also agreed to continue underwriting the Lutheran Library Association. A grant of \$2,000 was voted for 1963. A total of 650 churches now hold membership in the association.

A report stated that a total of 8,800 copies of *Telling the Good News*, a public relations handbook for congregations, have been distributed. The book, jointly edited by public relations departments of the Missouri Synod, ALC, and ULCA, was published last spring by Concordia Publishing House.

Mr. Anderson, new president of the managers' section, predicted an increase in joint Lutheran publishing ventures in the future.

Neuwiller, France. — French Lutherans wrestled here with the question how two churches in a country can organically express their doctrinal unity when one is a free church and the other has ties with the state. The occasion was the general assembly, Sept. 21—23, of the National Alliance of the Lutheran Churches in France (ANELF), in which are associated the 240,000-member Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine and the 42,000-member Evangelical Lutheran Church of France.

The two churches were one up to the

Franco-Prussian War in 1870, but Germany's acquisition of Alsace and Lorraine at that time placed them under different flags — a situation that continued till the close of World War I in 1918. Meanwhile, France in 1905 had passed a law severing the organic relationships between church and state which Napoleon had defined a century earlier.

Thus, in seeking closer connections with each other, their problem is that "the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France lives under the system of church-state separation and the Church of Alsace and Lorraine is subject to the (Napoleonic) Organic Articles of 1802," according to the French Protestant Press Service.

The press service said the church representatives here "studied the possibilities of creating a common assembly of synodical character which would restore and deepen the unity that existed before 1870." At the same time, in a message to all French Lutheran congregations, the ANELF declared that "our meeting has manifested the unity of French Lutheranism" and expressed "the unanimous desire to see this unity assume a more and more concrete form in the future."

"Despite their organizational differences," it added, "our two churches, from the parish level to the higher planes, are invited to undertake similar work on all matters affecting the spiritual life of the church."

Earlier in the meeting the alliance's commission on theology reported on its study of a report titled "Wherein Lies the Unity of Churches Having Different Structure?" The report was prepared by Professor Voeltzel of Strasbourg.