

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Ecumenical Movement
HERMANN SASSE

The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth
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Preaching for the Church
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Homiletics

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February's Festivals

The two minor festivals of February focus attention on two important tasks that faculty and field, the editors and most of the readers of this magazine, share with each other.

I

The Presentation of Our Lord and the Purification of the B. V. M. on February 2 enjoins us to set forth our Lord as the Light both for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to God's people Israel.

This month's issue brings an article by Professor Hermann Sasse of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, with which the American Lutheran Church in this country is in communion. In it he reminds us once more that the population explosion of the 20th century is rapidly outrunning the Christian missionary effort. This means that in spite of the most colossal evangelistic effort in history there are, and there will prospectively continue to be, percentage-wise, more and more pagans and fewer and fewer Christians in our shrinking world. Are we concerned enough about this increasingly adverse ratio to try to arouse the interest, to evoke the prayers, to recruit and train the people, to secure the funds, and to try to draft the administrative programs that the situation demands? Or shall we let the dimming light grow dimmer still?

This raises another problem. God has not committed the responsibility for missionary effort exclusively to one denomination, in our case to The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. He has given it to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. This consideration raises the question: To what extent are we and other denomina-

tions guilty of unwarranted competition in missions, with its almost inevitable overlapping, waste, rivalry, and proselytism? As Professor Sasse observes, the search for an answer to this question at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910 was a major factor in bringing about the 20th century ecumenical movement. It may have been this concern that recently led our Synod's Board for Missions in North and South America to apply for membership in the Division of Home Missions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.

But the problem is not limited to holding up the Light for revelation to the Gentile world outside the church. It involves our other task of holding up the Light to one another for glory to God's New Testament Israel. The ecumenical movement of the 20th century, as Professor Sasse stresses, is not an abstraction. It confronts us very concretely in its organizational aspects — the World Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and at the denominational level, the Lutheran World Federation. Professor Sasse compares in significance the contemporary ecumenical movement and the reformatory movements of the 16th century. If he is right, we cannot escape the effect of the ecumenical movement on the Christian world in which we live. God leads men to the Light and calls His New Testament Israel into existence by the proclamation of the Holy Gospel and by the administration of the Holy Sacraments. The church, which is Christ's body, is present wherever the new Israel exists. From this it follows that the mutual testimony of Chris-

tians to the Light for glory to God's people Israel must be given both inside and outside the Lutheran World Federation, inside and outside the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A., and inside and outside the World Council of Churches.

As is well known, we are not for the time being giving a corporate witness in matters of faith and order *inside* these organizations. There remains for us the relatively more difficult obligation to devise intelligible, relevant, and effective modes of communicating our testimony to our fellow Christians in other communions from *outside* these forums of witness. (In the process we shall share with them in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit which they have received for the common good.) This is particularly necessary on the local "grass-roots" plane, which is the ultimate level and object of ecumenical effort. Happily, it is also particularly possible there. As long as Biblical and symbolical principles are safeguarded, the manner in which we accomplish this is of minor importance; the important thing is that we do it. In these encounters it is likewise needful for us to remember the words of Bishop Palmer that Professor Sasse quotes approvingly as expressing "true ecumenicity": "We come here expecting to learn, and that must mean hoping to be corrected if we are wrong."

It is also a part of the Lutheran ecumenical outlook that we do not forget at any level the possibilities in the realm of interdenominational co-operative effort, the "Life-and-Work" aspect of the modern ecumenical movement. As Professor Sasse insists: "Lutherans do not refuse to co-operate with other churches in such matters

as do not involve the recognition of heresy." Here we have vast scope for constructive Christian doing!

II

The other festival of February is the anniversary of the heavenly birthday of St. Matthias. His elevation to the apostolate grew out of a concern that the church has felt from the beginning, the perpetuation of the ministry that our Lord instituted.

In that task the editors of this journal (together with their colleagues at our other seminaries) and the readers of its pages are more intimately associated than ever before. Members of a theological faculty are constantly kept aware how limited their contribution to the formation of our future ministerium actually is. They discover daily how unalterably their students have often been informed by other influences — their pastor-fathers, the pastors who instructed them for confirmation, the pastors of the parishes to which they have belonged, their instructors in religion in their preparatory schools, the pastors under whom they acquired the practical experience that is a part of the seminary curriculum, and the reflection of parallel influences in the lives of their fellow seminarians. With the increase in the number of years of preparation for the seminary and with the intensified emphasis upon the "practical experience" elements of the in-seminary program, the relative influence of the seminary faculties will decrease as the relative influence of the other teachers of our seminarians increases.

To an ever greater extent, therefore, we must regard the mission of our clergy not only as that of ministering to the present

generation of lay Christians but also as that of participating in the preparation of our future clergy. Thus on our clergy also—and not only upon our theological faculties—rests the responsibility for training these future clergymen well. That means, of course, in fullest accordance with Biblical and symbolical principles, which the teacher has not learned by rote but which the Holy Spirit has taught him through his personal research and reflection.

It also means that in the practical realm of preaching, worship, the administration

of the Holy Sacraments, individual and group counseling, and parochial leadership, the teacher will loyally exemplify the principles for which our Synod stands, and that he will consciously, constantly, and conscientiously be concerned about acquiring new skills and perfecting old competences. Here, as in every other aspect of our service to Christ and His church, whatever the place and the mode of our ministry, we are all in it together!

Oremus pro invicem!

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