

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 42 Number 1

JANUARY 1978

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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LEWISVILLE, MISSOURI
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Theological Observer

LUTHER IN LUND

It is one of history's remarkable facts that the giant of the Reformation continues to excite world-wide interest and respect. The Fifth International Congress for Luther Research brought an imposing array of nearly 200 scholars from every continent to Lund, site of Sweden's second oldest university (founded in 1666). The Luther Congress has been meeting on a six-year cycle. The last time it convened at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. It is scheduled for Wittenberg in six years, behind the Iron Curtain, if enough space for a couple hundred Luther scholars can be found there.

The Congress is a motley gathering - many nationalities, denominational loyalties (including Roman Catholics), and political leanings (including Marxists) - but joined together by a scholarly interest in Luther. Noteworthy in the business of the Congress were the reports which told of Luther research. For example, the Weimar edition is being updated under the direction of Gerhard Ebeling, now living in Zurich, Switzerland; Japanese Luther scholars announced that they are working on approximately one-third of a projected 36-volume edition of Luther's works; Prof. Erico Sexauer of our own LCMS Brazil District reported that volume 8 of a translation of Luther's works into Spanish is already in process, with 9 and 10 planned. Sexauer is himself responsible for most of this translation. The American edition will reach completion when an index has been prepared. The completion of the more than one hundred volumes of the Weimar edition is scheduled for about 1998 with the appearance of a definitive index. Prof. Helmar Junghans, of Karl-Marx-Universität, Leipzig, editor of the *Luther Jahrbuch*, informed the delegates of certain policy changes in future editions of this important annual account of all notable publications on Luther. In the future, publications making a merely incidental reference to Luther will receive no mention in the *Jahrbuch*.

Major essays, each with respondents, and in-depth seminars, occupied the morning, afternoon, and evening sessions, from Sunday, August 14, to Friday, August 19. Delegates could choose any of ten seminars. Bernhard Lohse led the seminar on "theologia crucis - theologia resurrectionis"; Otto Pesch on "Luther's Doctrine of the Two Realms"; Leif Grane on "Luther and Latomus"; Marc Lienhard on "Luther's Religious Anxiety and the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper"; Heiko Obermann on "Luther and Staupitz"; and Bengt Hägglund on "Law and Gospel in the Antinomian Controversy." Such scholars as Ebeling, Albrecht Peters (Heidelberg), Johannes Boendermaker (Amsterdam), and Lauri Haikola (Helsinki) attended this last seminar.

The discussion on Luther's six disputations against the Antinomians (especially Agricola) led quite naturally to a spirited discussion concerning the uses of the Law as Luther understood them. In the seminar, as well as in the plenary meetings, it was evident that a considerable block of delegates would not recognize the occurrence of the third use of the Law in Luther's theology. The undersigned, Hägglund, Peters, Boendermaker, *et al.* found themselves arrayed in support of Luther's use of the concept against Ebeling and Karin Bornkamm, the daughter of recently deceased Heinrich Bornkamm. There is a strange, really antinomian, sort of opposition, in view of the fact that Luther is so explicit in upholding the concept of the Law's special use for the Christian as a guide and norm for godly living. The issue is not whether Luther ever tabbed it the *usus tertius*, or "puerilis," or "paedagogical," or whatever. Brilliantly plain is his use of the concept in his catechisms and the Galatian commentary.

Prof. Gustav Wingren, of Lund, president of the Congress for the past six

years, gave the opening address on Sunday evening on "Luther and the Situation of the Church Today." He made an appeal for a Luther who would touch more nearly on the present church situation, on the grounds that "the church institutions of today display in general a great similarity with the Church against which Luther directed his criticism in the sixteenth century." Wingren rightly averred: "In every single statement he (Luther) makes, he draws from the Biblical writings. In every sentence, he hurls the message of these writings into the midst of his times." But then he went on brashly to assert that "in no church is he really at home, not even in those which bear his own name." According to Wingren, this is so because we have not entered "as intensely into our own society" as Luther did into his. The emphasis came down on a "gospel" for an alienated society. Wingren disavowed "social-gospelism" but in the end he called for that kind of "liberation" of the human situation which is integral to the social gospel. For Luther, on the contrary, the emphasis was always on the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's meritorious suffering and death. Of course, such Scriptural "blood-theology" is not popular in scholarly circles today.

Prof. Eberhard Jüngel of Tuebingen, delivered a massive essay on "The Significance of Luther for Contemporary Theology." He emphasized that theology always has the task of presenting accurately the truth about God, man, and the world. These perceptions arise not out of theology itself, but as theology engages itself with contemporary issues in the world "only with the guidance from the Bible texts," as Luther contended. It was a good and a true emphasis. "Theological discernment develops exegetically (from Scripture) or not at all." Faith clings to God who reveals himself in His Word.

Needless to say, the kind of Biblical authority with which a congress like this works is one in which historical-critical methodology is always implicit. Thus, locating the Word of God is a slippery matter. This became especially evident in the programmed disputation between the Roman Catholic scholar Prof. Albert Brandenburg and Prof. Eric Gritsch of Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary on "Luther's Success and Failure as a Reformer of the Church." As disputations go, it was more polite and harmless theological chit-chat than real grappling with issues. Brandenburg admitted that the Gospel occurs but rarely in Rome's decrees and councils, though Luther has it on every page. He insisted, nevertheless, that this Gospel "most certainly (was) never lost in our church" and is not now. Weijenborg, a colleague in the Vatican, was closer to the facts with his frank statement that "Luther's gospel was not the gospel of Rome."

A number of speakers, such as Erwin Iserloh, Wilhelm Dantine, Otto Pesch, Albrecht Peters, and the reviewer joined the fray in the discussion. It was my contention that Luther was immovable on any point of doctrine, since all doctrine was given by God clearly. This was especially true of his plain identification of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. "Luther-research will run dry and sterile, if it does not now face up to the fact that the Reformer was always bound by the text of Scripture; he knew no other authority; and it is this same stance that the formulators and signers of the Formula of Concord also took unabashedly and unequivocally." Gritsch was quick to counter: "As to Herr Klug—we have seen each other before at the LCUSA April meeting on the Formula of Concord in Chicago. He belongs to the Missouri Synod. What he stated concerning Scripture is so close to fundamentalism that I cannot and need not distinguish between them. That should suffice." Of course, it was no answer, but a put-down, the kind which scholarly circles find embarrassing.

Regin Prenter, the Danish dogmatician, now a parish pastor, had not been at the previous sessions but came to deliver the last lecture of the sessions, "Luther As Theologian." With artless simplicity, outstanding brilliance, and measured strokes, Prenter drove home one basic theme, namely, that "Luther is never able to detach the Gospel, that needs to be proclaimed and defended,

from the individual Biblical texts that witness to it, so as to develop it into a reasoned system of doctrine." It was without question, at least in this observer's opinion, the crowning climax of the Congress. In citing Prenter as a theologian who openly recognizes Luther's commitment to Scripture and its authority, one cannot claim that Prenter operates entirely with the kind of theological commitment that Luther had to the verbally inspired prophetic and apostolic text. In fact he jibed at orthodoxy for its stance on this point, claiming a gulf between Luther and men like the authors of the Formula of Concord on the doctrine of Scripture. Be this as it may, Prenter at least acknowledged that for Luther there is no Word that establishes doctrine other than the Biblical Word. Prenter's concluding statement is worth noting: "Luther, as theologian, is a Biblical theologian, who is aware of the limitations of all theology, and this not merely theoretically, and who permits everything he produces as an interpreter of Holy Scripture to be determined by this awareness."

Prior to the Congress' sessions, there was also a three-day meeting of the Luther Academy. This little group of about fifteen Confessional scholars is distinctly Lutheran in its membership and goals. These men have all taken a stand against such a compromise document as the Leuenberg Concord, as well as against philosophical-theological trends in European theology (from Schleiermacher to Barth and Bultmann, etc.) which have damaged Christian theology in European universities. This they have done in spite of opposition within their own territorial churches and the Lutheran World Federation. It was a distinct privilege and pleasure to converse with men like Prof. Dr. Bengt Hägglund, of Lund; Professor and Territorial Superintendent Dr. Joachim Heubach, of Schleswig-Holstein; Prof. Dr. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, of Muenster; Pastor Dr. Ulrich Asendorf, of Hannover; Prof. Dr. Tuomo Mannermaa, of Helsinki. A useful dialogue is stirring through the efforts of the Ratzeburg Luther-Academy, in much the same way as through the Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel and Bekenntnis, the parent, originating body.

E. F. Klug

THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), a group of Protestant scholars committed to the concept that "The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the word of God written and therefore inerrant in the autographs," has a greater influence than its membership of a thousand or so might indicate. Its presidents, for instance, are men whose books and articles have been required reading at our seminaries: John Walvoord, Harold Kuhn, Roger Nicole, Laird Harris, Gordon Clark, J. Barton Payne, Kenneth Kantzer, Carl F. H. Henry, Harold Lindsell, Richard Longenecker, Bruce Waltke, Samuel Kistemaker, and Walter Kaiser, Jr. The ETS has provided a significant impetus to conservative scholarship in America.

The major American Protestant denominations lost their Biblical moorings in the conservative-liberal controversy of the 1920's. Like dominoes falling in succession, each church body came under the influence of newer Biblical ap-proachers and eventually surrendered its Reformation heritage. The Missourian Lutherans and Southern Baptists may be the only exceptions to this historical process. Within the past two or three decades, however, conservative theology has made some significant advances in American Protestantism. Members of the ETS have been in the vanguard of the advances. Noteworthy contributions have come from successful conservative publishing ventures. *Christianity Today*, whose two editors were ETS presidents, has shown in a popular way that the liberals are not the only ones entitled to intellectual respectability. Previously conservatives, a a group, were seen as simpletons, while liberal

theologians in all denominations were regarded as the scholars and intellectuals. *Christianity Today* has helped to dispel that negative image. Certain publishing houses have also made possible the dissemination of conservative theology - Moody, Eerdmans, Zondervan, Baker, InterVarsity. The revivalistic caricature of conservative Protestant publishers has proven to be erroneous. From these presses come the dissertations of scholars who are generally members of the ETS and who have studied at some of the most prestigious European and American universities and seminaries. ETS members have also contributed to the stature of conservative seminaries. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, for example, established about fifteen years ago, proved that conservative theological schools could not only survive, but so prosper that students had to be turned away. Most liberal seminaries wish they had enrollment problems of this sort. As a group of scholars, the ETS has been in no position to venture forth into the great enterprises which only a denomination or corporation could accomplish. Its activities are still limited to annual national and regional meetings and the quarterly production of its journal. The society provides a place for the exchange of ideas among scholars committed to Biblical inspiration and inerrancy.

These concepts, of course, have likewise been at the heart of the Missouri Synod's theology since its inception. The recent change in theological direction within the Missouri Synod is probably the most significant reversal of the trend toward liberalism among American Protestant denominations. Various authors have traced the causes for this reversal from their individual perspectives. Adams in *Preus of Missouri* focuses on the personality of one man as a major cause; Danker in *Seminex* in *No Room in the Brotherhood* favors a political interpretation; Marquart of the Seminary in *Anatomy of an Explosion* sees the seeds of reform in the history of the Missouri Synod itself. The rise and success of conservative American Protestant theology in the past three decades may also have been a contributing factor. Conservative theologians of the Missouri Synod have had to rely for current scholarly support on the works produced by so-called "evangelical" authors - while disavowing the Calvinistic and Arminian leaven in such works. *Christianity Today*, for example, helped to alert Missouri Synod pastors to the grave dangers to the church posed by such neo-orthodox theologians as Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann. With any great historical upheaval it is difficult to pinpoint any one cause. What has happened in the Missouri Synod certainly is not simply the result of the greening of the intellectual respectability of conservative Protestant scholarship in America. Still, members of the ETS have provided many of the intellectual tools used to accomplish the reform.

In a letter of October 14, 1977, to the membership, ETS president, Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, professor of Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, states that "evangelicals (conservatives) are still weakest in creative contributions to exegetical, Biblical, and systematic theology." He finds conservatives bogged down in "surveys, history of interpretations, or defensive apologetics." Hesitatingly he agrees with the indictment of G. Ernest Wright: "One of the most striking characteristics of the conservative wings of the church during the century has been the weakness of their Biblical scholarship . . . with rare exceptions . . ." The ETS, then, has provided a necessary impetus to conservative theology in American Protestantism and has been of much value to the Missouri Synod. The call of the ETS president to more intense and creative Biblical and systematic scholarship should likewise serve as a challenge to Missourian Lutherans to start making more contributions to contemporary theological scholarship.