



# **THE SPRINGFIELDER**

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# THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

## BECK BIBLE PUBLISHED

Several months ago I prepared a now antiquated editorial about the proposed publication Dr. William Beck's translation of the Bible. Since then the proposal has become a reality with the Reverend Herman Otten, editor of *Christian News*, already distributing copies. By the time that this piece appears in THE SPRINGFIELDER, the introductory price offer of \$4.95 will already have elapsed. This issue of our journal contains a review article by Dr. Raymond Surburg.

The new translation of the Bible into English simply cannot be overlooked, especially when the translator was a member of our church body. Just how many people have successfully undertaken translating an entire Bible? At Concordia Theological Seminary, there have been two professors who devoted much time to translating the writings of Chemnitz. That is a mammoth feat. Translating both Old and New Testaments is astounding.

There is a risk in translating something as available as a Bible. The uninitiated can check the translation with previous ones. Those conversant in the original languages can very easily make criticisms. Others like myself, will make stylistic comments. (Personally I still prefer the King James Version for public reading since it brings a touch of stone cathedrals into clapboard churches on the prairie.) The possibilities for criticisms are endless. Everybody can get in on the act. But whatever criticisms will be made cannot overshadow the fact that a colleague in the Missouri Synod has translated the entire Bible. How many pastors, teachers of religion, and professors of theology in our times could even wade through a line of Hebrew? Of those who could do it, how many could make it approach idiomatic English?

With almost equal amazement we look upon the publication of the Bible by the Reverend Herman Otten. According to one newspaper report, he proof-read the entire translation. THE SPRINGFIELDER has no professional proof-readers, and the editors frequently hear of its inaccuracies. How could our task even compare with proof-reading a Bible? The translator, Dr. Beck, deserves some type of recognition from his church, even if it is posthumously given. The publisher deserves hardly less. A new translation generally causes a new interest in Bible reading. So until such time as the church confers some formal recognition upon them, Dr. Beck and Pastor Otten will at least be remembered for having contributed to a deeper study of the Scriptures. Perhaps this is the best reward, after all.

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## NAIROBI

Ecclesiastical tittle-tattle over the years has left the distinct impression that the World Council of Churches has metamorphosed from an idealistic organization dedicated to lofty Christian purposes and goals into a kind of pseudo-ecumenical *menage* of church bodies devoted to social and political activism. Reports out of Nairobi, site of the fifth general assembly, early in December 1975, did little to dispel this notion. More than 2300 delegates from 271 denominations and six continents flocked to Kenya's capital, but control obviously still lies with an elite corps of Western liberals, who apparently like

their jobs and each other well enough (and the trips they make in between the sabbatical conclaves) to keep this "ecclesiastical U.N." going. Of course, why should they not be in control? A curious imbalance exists between the hundreds who attend and the few who foot the bill for a meeting like Nairobi. More than three-fourths of the financial support emanates from the United States and West Germany, each of whom contribute 38% of the total. The emerging nations send increasingly large delegations, but the conduct of business is pretty much in the hands of the architects who domicile between the seven-year intervals in Geneva. (A shift in location of some of the WCC's operations to the Netherlands may be in the offing, since Switzerland is making it more difficult to obtain visas.) Conspicuous by their absence are some of the largest and strongest evangelical church bodies who still desist from active participation for doctrinal and other reasons in an organization based on shallow ecumenical footing. The Church of Rome, for political reasons of its own, has once again deferred seeking membership, although it had a large contingent of observers present.

Since the first meeting in Amsterdam in 1948 the solemn assemblies seem to accomplish less and less. Social and political concerns have almost totally engulfed the WCC's program and outlook. The favorite game at present appears to be taking pot-shots at the evils of imperialism, capitalism, racism (where and when diplomatically safe to do so without recriminations), and attacks on human freedom. It is a curiously guiltier-than-thou kind of demonstration, especially on the part of the Western representatives who provide much of the brain-power, financing, and planning. Strangely unaddressed are the rampant and ruthless denials of freedom and religious liberty in Communist-controlled countries. The WCC's liberal leaders literally trip over the Soviets' flowing black robes in their addle-headed fear of offending them and having them stomp out in protest. "There was tacit agreement," according to *TIME* (December 22, 1975), "to spare the delegates from Moscow any embarrassment, and Soviet sins have gone unnoticed." A great deal of attention was riveted rather on the WCC's continuing support for the so-called non-military programs (many of which have turned violent) in behalf of guerrilla movements for "peace" and "freedom."

What happened at Nairobi is a far cry from the initial drive and zeal which first fired the hearts for missionary outreach fifty years ago when the WCC was founded. Weakly, and almost as an afterthought pressed forth by the evangelical thrust that the Lausanne Congress of Evangelical Protestants had mustered in 1974, the delegates at Nairobi managed approval of a document calling for "Confessing Christ." One need not question motives, goals, ideals, to note that past performance on just this point has been nearly nil and that the WCC is nearly bankrupt in defining the nature of the Gospel. It is more concerned with common action by member churches, learning from each other, fashioning programs for social and political involvement and pronouncements, than for simple, straight-forward, effective Gospel preaching to a sin-laden, spiritually dead and dying world. "Doing the Gospel"—whatever that may mean—is considered to be more relevant than preaching the Gospel in the twentieth century.

Nairobi should be a call to evangelical Christians everywhere, especially

Scripturally based and Confessionally oriented Lutheran individuals and churches, to take seriously the failure of the WCC and to renew their dedication to fulfill Christ's mandate to evangelize the world (Matt. 28, 19) and testify to the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. (Acts 20, 24)

E. F. Klug

## ROME CHANGE?

Ever since Vatican II (1962-1965) debate has raged concerning the significance of the *aggiornamento*, or renewal, going on within the Roman church. According to some it has been drastic, a genuine *Revolution in Rome*. That is the title of a book by David F. Wells who holds that radical changes have occurred in theology and doctrine. Insiders, however, challenge this view, insisting that whatever changes have occurred have in no way affected either papal authority or the *corpus doctrinae*. As more years and events fill the gap between us and Vatican II, the weight of evidence shows that Rome has not changed.

Rome has always been a complex piece of machinery, not only to the outsider looking in, but to the members of its own hierarchy as well. A perpetual question in a body so large seems to be: Who really speaks for the church? The *avant garde* gadflies of Rome, like Hans Kueng? He hobnobs with Protestants at their conclaves and, to their pleasure, often seems to suggest that Rome is not only being transformed but virtually being Lutheranized from within, or at least is becoming more evangelical.

Nothing is farther from the truth. Rome's freer attitude towards the so-called "separated brethren," renewed and intensified Biblical studies and translations, publication of new catechisms, use of the vernacular in the Mass, offering of "both kinds" in the Eucharist to the laity with more frequency, congregational singing (even of "A Mighty Fortress"), relaxation of fasting regulations, greater ecumenical involvement, etc., demonstrate only that Rome can be flexible in the areas where canon law allows when it wants to. But it can also be completely intransigent and unyielding on changes deemed inadvisable and unwise to the pontiff. Thus, although priests by the hundreds have renounced their vows in order to get married and the seminaries are struggling to hold their recruits, Paul VI has made it absolutely clear that there will be no loosening of the celibacy rule. Moreover, the Vatican has again just recently issued a *monitum*, a warning, to those engaged in Biblical studies, that they not allow the conclusions of the historical-critical methodology to violate in any way the sacred territory of Rome's official doctrinal stance.

Paul VI has tightened the screws against every trend threatening the papal office or endangering official teaching. Assaults on papal authority and infallibility have been slapped down sharply. Hans Kueng, who had the temerity to produce and publish a challenge to that authority, *Infallibility? An Inquiry*, had his knuckles smartly rapped by a team of "experts," or *periti*, led by his erstwhile friend and mentor, Karl Rahner, who dutifully pulled in his head like a threatened turtle and pledged anew his allegiance (with the dozen or so other scholars who joined him in repudiation of Kueng's views) to papal supremacy *iure divino* in all matters affecting faith and life.

Collegiality, or greater involvement of the bishops in the decision-making process of the church, has more and more declined since Vatican II. In the



years immediately following that conclave Paul VI had seemed to hint at greater involvement, even to the extent of eventually allowing some of the bishops to participate in the next election of the pope's successor. But now Paul has ruled (see TIME, Nov. 24, 1975) that the *status* will remain *quo!* Cardinals only will do the electing, in accord with Alexander III's decree in 1179. The Jesuits, for years reputed to be the brain-trust and the elite corps of intellectuals in the papal service, have also had their wings clipped and been made to feel the unbending papal will—incidentally, not the first time in their history which began with the Counter-Reformation! Early in 1975 (See TIME, March 17, 1975) the pontiff reiterated papal privilege in governing the orders, allowing no constitutional changes that fail to meet papal approval.

It is, of course, true that recent years have witnessed a loosening of the relations of Rome with the rest of the Christian world. Theological dialoguing has been going on with this group and that, even with some of the non-Christian religions of the world. The value of these dialogues is, however, a moot point. It is no surprise, on the one hand, that Rome and the Eastern Orthodox have achieved a new *rapprochement*. They both have a synergistically oriented soteriology. So do most Protestants for that matter; and thus they find themselves drawn to the ecumenical table with Rome. What they all share mutually is confusion of Law and Gospel, a running of sanctification into justification! On the other hand, however, it must be stated that Rome has not budged one inch from the stance adopted at Trent. This must be the real concern, therefore, for Lutherans looking in on the present "renewal" in Rome. For it was at Trent that the terrible ultimatums against the Christian faith were hurled, condemning justification *sola gratia/fide*; upholding good works as necessary to salvation; asserting the vaunted sovereignty of the hierarchy as the church to which Christ supposedly gave His authority; affirming the seven-fold sacramental system for the bestowal of sanctifying grace, or *gratia infusa*, a mechanism described by J. L. Neve, noted scholar of the Confessions, as a "carefully studied intention of constantly holding the faithful in a state of dependence upon the church."

Rome change? Rather *Roma semper eadem!* The verdict brought by Martin Chemnitz in his great, definitive expose of Rome's distortion of Christian truth at Trent is still the same. Wilhelm Pauck, respected Reformation scholar, has expressed it eloquently: Martin Chemnitz shows for all time "that Roman Catholicism could justly be accused of having fallen away from the teachings and practices of the ancient church."

E. F. Klug

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### THE COMMON CATECHISM: A BOOK OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

CATECHISMS HAVE PLAYED SIGNIFICANT ROLES in the life of the church from the very beginning. Along with the hymnal, the catechism is one of the places where theology reaches the layman. *The Didache* might have been the first attempt to put theology into a condensed form. *Luther's Small Catechism* and the *Heidelberg Catechism* not only put theology into terms that all could understand, but they became the battlefields on which the church carried out its controversies. Even the updated translation of *Luther's Small Catechism* has not been without controversy.

*The Common Catechism* is a translation of the *Neues Glaubensbuch* made available in Germany already by 1973. (Edited by Johannes Feiner and Lukas Vischer. The Seabury Press, New York, 1975. Cloth. 690 pages. \$10.95.) It is more a popular theology than a traditional catechism. Both Protestant and Catholic scholars were involved in the project. Such names as Dantine, Dumas, Hahn, Ott, Pannenberg, and Westermann are immediately recognizable to many. The opening statement in the introduction sets the tone for *The Common Catechism*:

This book provides a joint statement of the Christian faith by Catholic and Protestant theologians. The community of endeavor among many Protestant and Catholic theologians has become so much a matter of course that it now seems odd that no such book was written years ago. The various branches of the Christian Church are no longer mainly interested in what divides them, but instead in how they are to understand, present, and live the Christian faith in the world today.

Hardly any of the orthodox and catholic articles of faith survive in the amalgamation. To point out each corpse would be simplistic and nearly impossible. *The Common Catechism* is not the first attempt at this kind of thinking, though the editors claim to have struck on something kind of novel. About one hundred and fifty years ago Schleiermacher attempted, with more success, the same feat with his *The Christian Faith*, a title strangely similar to the catechism's English subtitle, *A Book of Christian Faith*. This is much more appropriate than the original German title, *Neues Glaubensbuch*, as there is very little that is really new. The nineteenth century Berlin theologian wrote a dogmatics textbook in which he tried to create an amalgamated faith for all Protestants. Sections or chapters were begun with quotations from the various confessions and, through a kind of thesis-antithesis approach, a common Protestant statement of faith emerged. Not much searching is needed to find the same method lurking in *The Common Catechism*, especially in Part Five. After the various points of disagreement are presented, points of possible agreement are presented. An absolute synthesis is not always possible, but the writers point out areas of future agreement. Confirmation is an easy point for illustration. For the Catholics it is a sacrament, something denied by the Protestants. However, under closer examination, the editors find that the Protestant rite "shows that it is very close to the Catholic rite of confirmation (which is even more true of the rite in the Book of Common Prayer)." But how about a sticky matter like infant baptism? We are told that "we are no longer constrained by any extreme interpretation of 'original sin' . . ." Next we are told that there "is no compulsory reason for Christian parents to have their children baptized as infants . . ." Then, "It is *most appropriate* for Christian parents to have their children baptized as infants." But, it "is only justifiable when there is the opportunity for a Christian education." No matter where you stand on the matter, you will be able to find your position somewhere in that maze, just as long as you do not move on to the end of the sentence or the next paragraph.

Then what is *the* purpose of *The Common Catechism*? The purpose of traditional catechisms was to introduce lay people to the basic outlines of a particular religion. The child brought up on the Missouri Synod catechism could engage in a somewhat intelligent and naturally polemical discussion with a contemporary brought up on the *Baltimore Catechism* of the Roman Catholic Church. *The Common Catechism* is not for beginners. It introduces the reader to the field of diversion without taking any sides and lets the novice choose on which team he wants to play. The theological battlefield becomes a gameboard and soldiers become players. Religion becomes a matter of unserious cheering, and winning or losing is something one forgets when he leaves the ball park. Unlike other catechisms, regardless of who produced it, *The Common Catechism* is not an invitation to *the* truth. Rather a reader who has had some idea of what the truth could have been is introduced to the fact that everyone has truth even if the truths are seemingly opposed to each other. Or at least, opposing ideas inch closer to each other and lines of separation are blurred.

This brings up the question of how we find out what the truth is or, better yet, what is the "truth substitute." In the Missouri Synod, Bible passages were supplied for the catechumen. This was also standard procedure in other churches. One might disagree about the interpretation or applicability of a proof-text, but the basis of truth was the Bible. *The Common Catechism* skirts the issue of Biblical bases for the variety of positions presented. It approaches denominations as "various branches of the Christian Church" and looks at this "Christian Church" to see what is being believed. It recognizes the current ecclesiastical situation as a "given." This does not mean that the editors do not show how various churches came to their positions from their particular understandings of Bible passages, but it does mean that they do not label one interpretation right or wrong, superior or inferior. The life of the church is substituted for the Bible as the formal principle of theology.

The question of Biblical authority naturally leads to the question of Biblical interpretation. The method used throughout is the one introduced and associated with the Bultmannian school. This is not the place to reexplain and denounce this method, but only to mention a few results. Resurrection becomes seeing Jesus in heaven. The virgin birth becomes an invention of the writer to glorify Jesus. The title "Son of God" applied to Jesus means that Father and Son are fundamentally one in will. (The *homoousion* becomes *homothelousion*—my term!) One suspects process theology as the grandmother of this novel form of ancient adoptionism. *The Common Catechism*, with a long list of contributors, provides a side benefit in letting one use source criticism as an acceptable exercise. Part One on God, with such chapter headings as "God in History," "The God Question in History," "Atheism," and "The God Question Today," suggests that the principal author was Pannenberg. Whether Pannenberg or one of his disciples is the prime source here, it means that the theology of hope is incorporated into *The Common Catechism* as the basic prolegomena. If the editor of the exegetical section could say that Jesus was one with the Father only because He did the Father's will, the



editor of the first part defines Jesus as "God's incarnate action in history." Of course both are saying the same thing: Jesus is not really or substantively God. A review by Malcolm Muggeridge said that *The Common Catechism* appeared just when the ecumenical movement was coming to the end of the road. If this be the case, the *The Common Catechism* was outdated even before the first copy came off the press. It might be best to consider it as a historical reconstruction. One admires the fact that so many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle could be put on the same table even if the pieces of the puzzle make up no recognizable picture. The kindest thing that could be said is that it is a marvelous piece of syncretistic thinking reflecting twentieth century "Christian" religion. It is also safe to say that no one will be converted by it and no one will grow in faith. What I find so disappointing is that the Roman Catholics were willing to give up so much. Why, for example, do they say that Mary is never called the Mother of God in the Bible, but only the Mother of Jesus (p. 621)? Is she not called "mother of my Lord" by Elizabeth in Luke 1? If it is any consolation for Lutherans, Luther has more citations in the index than anyone else besides Jesus. Reading through it brought me this one positive suggestion: it is about time that our catholic, orthodox, Biblical, and Lutheran faith find contemporary expression in a book of similar size and linguistic lucidity, but not of similar approach.

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