

keep reminding them. If "Watergate" can be pushed to the impeachment of Mr. Nixon, it should be. The crimes and conspiracies he has *admitted* would have already landed you or me in jail for long terms, if we had admitted them; if he is not impeached, it will be because we are afraid to risk actually using our constitution and its provisions of freedom. Such an exercise in constitutionality would of course evoke great perils, but believers know that these can be faced. If we remember "Watergate," we remember how fragile is the structure of the American free system, and how daring we must be to keep it. That we must remember.

R.W.J.

ZWICKAU REDIVIVUS

A gathering which billed itself as "The Second International Lutheran Conference on the Holy Spirit" met recently in the Minneapolis Auditorium. The fact that it bore the name "Lutheran" would have made Luther turn over in his grave. The assembled multitudes were treated to visions and prophecies in no way based on scripture. They were regaled with exegesis that was irresponsible, fanciful and heretical. They were entertained with "spiritual" pyrotechnics of various sorts, being assured all the while that this was happening under the auspices of the Spirit who is called Holy.

That it would have made Luther turn over in his grave would not, I suppose, have bothered many in attendance. If asked, most would probably have replied, "Who is Luther?" Or at least they (including most of their clergy) would have been entirely oblivious to the battles Luther fought against just the sort of nonsense they were indulging in. Even if reminded they would, no doubt, have been unimpressed. After all, if one can treat scripture so arbitrarily, why worry about a little bit of history? The experience of the moment is sovereign.

Meanwhile, the Church has apparently decided to remain silent. Maybe this is wise, maybe it isn't. I don't know. A frontal attack on what is apparently such a popular movement may be strategically futile and only pour oil on the flames. But one thing is certain. A Church that doesn't know what the issue is and has so lost touch with its theological foundations that it can no longer muster cogent criticism, no longer preach and teach a gospel which can at least forestall such nonsense, is in trouble.

250 The issue is the age-old one of the gospel

versus religion. The issue is not speaking in tongues and all that. As St. Paul knew, that is neither here nor there. It is rather a question of the exaggerated claims that are made (the boasting), the degree to which one comes to depend on, live on and feed on one's own "experience," and to trust that experience as the be-all and end-all of one's existence. Luther, we should recall, resisted the prophets from Zwickau and their like because he saw in them just another form of what he saw in Rome: the raising of finite human experience and opinion (whatever the supposed source!) to the status of the ultimate. This is the enthronement of religion in the place of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One does not have to read much of the literature (or the "Letters to the Editor" in our Church papers) to see that this is just what is taking place. People go on and on about how wonderful their lives have become, how marvelous everything is, how all their little comings and goings are now sanctified by the name of Jesus; everyone claims that the "results" are all that matters, etc., etc. It is nothing other than a massive incursion of religious cultism which covers everything with a pious frosting and leaves it just as it was.

Where is the judgment that reduces all human effort and experience to ashes so that every mouth be stopped? Where is the grace that comes to the "poor in spirit?" Where is the gospel? Our age is supposed to have gotten beyond the "crisis theology" of the early days of this Century and gone on to "better" things. Is this it? Is this what happens when the door is opened a little crack to let just a bit of religion in? This incoherent mumbo-jumbo (and I don't mean only speaking in tongues!), this grovelling in one's own drippy piety? Perhaps we would do well to go back and reread Barth's Romans and take it to heart. Words like these bear pondering once again:

Each concrete and tangible disposition of human affairs so that they conform to the will of God marks the presence of the prophet turned pharisee: he who engages in dispositions of this sort stands under the authority of him who is No-God, and round him gather the threatening clouds of the wrath of God. He has falsified accounts by failing to disclose how serious his position is. Though he piles up higher and higher his divine claims his divine assurance and his divine delights, he does but build a Tower of Babel. Behind the screen of his daily disposing waits the eternal day of wrath and of the last judg-

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ment of God. Standing on his eminence, he *has* already *been* cast down; the friend of God, he is His declared and most bitter enemy; the righteous man, he *has* already been judged. He must not be surprised if what he is be suddenly manifested and made known. (pp. 60-61)

The cult of experience and “religion” bears bitter fruit. If we care about the gospel we had better take note.

Gerhard O. Forde

STRANGE BEDPERSONS

Amid the bewildering array of liberation movements that beset us at this moment in history, it is possible to point out some exceedingly interesting convergences and divergences. They are interesting because they illuminate strange and unexpected partners.

For instance, it is interesting that the women's and gay liberation movements on one hand, and the black liberation movement on the other, do not share a common assumption about the retrieval of authentic cultural identity. It seems that the more radical elements of the women's and gay movements have a common stake in denying the major part of the cultural heritage pertaining to sexual identity. They would have us believe that difference in sexual roles is completely derived from an oppressive culture. For them, human beings are basically “plastic” when it comes to sexual identity. It is only the nasty culture that has imposed those roles on the human *tabula rasa*. Being biologically male or female should have only incidental importance for one's personality and role. We should not have “masculine” or “feminine” characteristics, only “human.” Since it is difficult to find cultural precedence for such neutering, the cultural heritage is jettisoned. Humankind must leave the past behind and “make” itself according to new criteria free of sexual polarity.

Black liberation, on the other hand, is interested in the retrieval of an authentic black cultural past. Believing that there is a cultural heritage “back there” or “over there” appropriate to their present biological and psychological nature, many blacks tend to want to draw the two together. There is an effort at genuine mooring in the cultural continuities of the past.

This divergence is highlighted when we include another partner in the discussion—the

technocrat. The technocratic vision of the human future also—like that of gay and women's lib—is grounded in the notion that humans are infinitely malleable. Oblivious to the age-old ways that humans have dwelled together on the earth, the technocrat sees the increasing technologization of human life as increasing liberation. Instantaneous communication will make us wiser and more tolerant. Faster transportation will create more understanding among peoples. The social and geographical mobility that accompanies technological advance is seen as an obvious gain. Abundance will make us happy. Medicine will keep us well.

As the great technological machine is thrust upward and forward, it too leaves behind as wreckage the cultural continuities of the past. The traditional modes of belonging to the world—a feeling for *place*, a relation to kith and kin, life in a nurturing family, a respect for the intrinsic value of beings and things, a loyalty to social groups and organizations, an insistence on peace and quiet—are left behind in an unguided rush toward a technological future.

It is as though—as Hannah Arendt has noted about our yen for space exploration—we want to escape the human condition itself, to be suspended above all the given structures of reality. In technopolis, artificial constructs float above the bedrock of evolutionary and cultural history. The extreme elements of gay and women's liberation are participating in the same perilous flight. In their unisex paradise, who will know what one is? There won't be any *is*, only what we decide *to be*. We will arbitrarily create ourselves in the airy spaces above the world. In that utopia of pure human freedom—without destiny—the militants of technology and sexual freedom will lie down together in a dubious peace.

Although even now the militant rejection of cultural continuities has tended to erode the quality of our lives and unravel the social fabric, it will no doubt boomerang. The question is whether we will come to our senses before a great deal of pain is experienced. The wave of nostalgia in recent movies, music and dress are symptoms of the pain we already feel.

From a Christian and human perspective, these efforts to escape the human condition must be rejected. An increasingly artificial world of technology will enervate us while an increasingly arbitrary world of sexual identity will lead to familial and social chaos.

It is unbelievable that millions of years of biological and cultural evolution have not left permanent marks on us as human beings, male and female. Biological constitution itself presses