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Continuing

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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein *weiden*, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den *Woelfen wehren*, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre veruehren und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — *1 Cor. 14:8*

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Foreword

By W. ARNDT

As the old year departs and 1949 enters, we lift up our eyes to the hills whence cometh our help. It seems doubtful that the world situation will improve materially during the twelve months that lie ahead; that the war clouds which still cast their gloom over the globe will be dispersed; that true peace will again unite the nations in amity and concord; that the state of virtual slavery, the horrible privations and destitution which crush vast multitudes in Europe and Asia will be ended; and that we can again eat our meals without thinking with a start of the starving, helpless, displaced persons roaming about by the millions in areas where they are not wanted. Nor does there appear to exist a sound basis for the hope that a moral reformation will set in now that another series of large religious gatherings has been held; that purity and decency will become the watchword of our country's population; and that the crime waves will lose their frightening extent and power. But we know that the destinies of the nations as well as those of all individuals are in the hands of the Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps and who has given us the promise that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. In His name we cross the threshold of the new year, trusting that His power will avert whatever is inimical to our highest interests.

If anybody inquires what the flag is under which our journal intends to serve during the next twelve months, the answer is that there has been no change, that the banner is the same which our Synod has flown since its founding in

1847, that it simply is that of loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions. That this is the course to which we again commit ourselves is forsooth not news; it would be news if the announcement were made here that strict confessional loyalty is henceforth to be discarded by this journal. In the past the charge raised against us hardly ever was that of lack of faithfulness to what the Lutheran Confessions teach; usually we were accused of manifesting a fanatical excess of such faithfulness.

It is easy to imagine somebody rising and asserting that there is a whole score of reasons why this attitude of loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions should be dropped. Think of it, we can fancy him saying — this is A. D. 1949. The Confessions were written in the sixteenth century. What old documents they are! How can such declarations, hoary with age, be normative for us twentieth-century folk! But certainly no one of us need be impressed by such an argument. The poetry of Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton is old; that does not deprive it of excellence. The hollowness of this charge is so patent that it requires no long refutation.

More serious might appear the objection that the Confessions are cast into the thought patterns that were in vogue four hundred years ago, that the style employed is no longer used these days, and that our modern age, accustomed to terse, crisp speech, cannot find satisfaction and proper instruction in these antiquated presentations. This complaint is only partly justified. These old documents, it is true, bear the imprint of the age in which they were produced. But the teachings which they embody are set forth with crystal clearness, and the style frequently, as, for instance, in the Augsburg Confession and in Luther's Small Catechism, is remarkable for classical simplicity and forcefulness.

By and by we can visualize our imaginary critic moving to higher and more important ground. The Confessions do not deal with the issues of the day, is the charge. They were written to cope with problems that were acute four centuries ago, but which now are as dead as the Holy Roman Empire that was ruled over by Charles V. Many sociological difficulties confront us which were entirely unknown to Luther and Melancthon and the authors of the Formula of Concord; how can their declarations, be the content ever so noble and

edifying, serve us in our perplexities! This, it must be admitted, is a serious accusation. If it is valid, we had better consign the Confessions to the scrap heap and try to draw up new ones that are more adequate. But let the old documents be examined. What they deal with is, to begin with, the great question how we sinners may obtain the forgiveness of our God and Creator. The answer is, through faith in the work of Christ, the Son of God, who bore our sins. There is no more important question that can arise at any time. It is this fundamental issue which is, as it were, the leit-motif of all our confessional writings, and it is as alive in the twentieth century as in the sixteenth or in the first. Let the other subjects dwelt on in the confessional writings be scrutinized. What are they? Chiefly, in addition to the Gospel message just mentioned, the Law, sin and grace, the person of Christ, the means of grace, in which God's pardon is brought to us, the Church, conversion and sanctification, the predestination of God's children, Christ's second coming, and the Judgment. Are these vital issues? There are not any that are more important and significant. As for the sociological and economic problems on which the critic says the Confessions are silent, he will find, if he looks, that the proper principles have been enunciated. Special theories, it is true, are not included. However, that is not a defect, but rather one of the excellencies of the Confessions. They can serve us at a date so remote from the time of their origin because they deal not with detailed and ephemeral theories and suggestions, but with fundamental principles whose correctness and applicability do not wane with the passing of the centuries.

In a summarizing way one may state that our Confessions proclaim the three Reformation *solas* and that in them one finds the only answer to modern man's spiritual problems: *Sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*. Can our age, or any age, present a better foundation?

But we can see the critic preparing to state a still more serious objection. Some things which the Confessions teach are not true, he avers. Pressed to give particulars, he will reveal himself as a thoroughgoing rationalist who rejects whatever is not in keeping with his own reason, observation, and experience. The Confessions demand acceptance of the

teachings concerning the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, baptismal regeneration, the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, and similar matters, and all these things are incredible, says he. Yes, we admit the Confessions teach these doctrines. If the yardstick of human reason is employed, then the old confessional writings have to be opposed. But God be praised! there is a better, safer, more dependable means of judging whether these teachings are true or not, and that is the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. God Himself has told us what is true in the realm of the relations between Him and mankind, transgressions and pardon, death and life, hell and heaven. There is no higher tribunal to which we can go than the Holy Scriptures. Let the Confessions be judged by them. If their teachings fail to receive the endorsement of this Judge, they must at once be thrown to the winds. But we are not at all afraid that the verdict of this Judge will be negative. For about four centuries the Confessions have been tested by critics and scholars of every school and type, we ourselves have tested them, and no one has been able to point out one doctrinal error in them. It is true that not all exegetical processes in them can be approved, that not all historical or critical statements they make are tenable, but the doctrines set forth there are those of the Scriptures themselves. We defy the critic to show that in any point of doctrine the Confessions have forsaken the solid foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

The imaginary critic will probably exclaim that even if we endorse everything else in the symbolical books, we certainly cannot approve of their *damnamus secus docentes*. We are told that the confessional writings are intolerant, too positive, too insistent on the correctness of what they declare. Our reply is that the objection must be overruled and that the *damnamus* statement is justified. It is well known, of course, that this condemnatory judgment does not mean that those who teach differently are consigned to eternal torment, but merely that their position is rejected. *Damnare* here does not refer to anybody's eternal fate, but to his position as a teacher of Scripture doctrine. Nevertheless the judgment expressed may seem severe. Yes, it is severe; but is it *too* severe? May deviation from the divine norm of the truth be treated as a matter of indifference? Must error not be labeled as what

it is? Have we the right to see any part of the divine Word, even if it should be a short sentence or a single expression, trampled under foot? Must we not stand in awe of the majesty of the great God speaking to us in the Scriptures? We cannot take a different course, we simply have to reject the position of those who teach differently from the Scriptures. The words of the Son of God ring in our ears: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5: 18 f.

But, says our critic, are not the Lutheran Confessions division-making? Will insistence on them not promote rather than reduce sectarianism? We reply that whoever takes such a view does not understand the nature of our Confessions. Let us here think especially of the chief one of our symbolical writings, the Augsburg Confession. Among Lutherans the Augustana is the symbol to which all subscribe. In addition we can say that this confessional writing, in its first seventeen articles, brilliantly and yet in simple fashion sets forth the great Christ-centered teachings of the Holy Scriptures on which our holy Christian faith is based. Here we are not dealing with a divisive document, but one that is truly constructive and unifying.

The quiver of the critic is not yet empty; he fires one more dart as we face him. Not the Confessions, but the Bible should be our norm, he says. You are lifting human writings to a rank which must be occupied by no authority except the divine Scriptures. This sounds formidable, but when it is closely examined it shrinks into nothingness. Of course, the Bible is our norm, our guide, our judge, and the Bible alone. The *sola Scriptura* principle has our unequivocal endorsement. The Confessions, we emphasize, play an altogether different role from the Scriptures. They are witnesses. They show the world what we Lutherans believe the Bible teaches on the great issues of our existence and our relations to God and our fellow men. They may be called our response, the response of our Church, to the proclamation of the divinely

inspired penmen writing in the Scriptures. When we say that we have put on our banner the words "loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions," this does not mean that we look upon the Symbolical Books as the source of our doctrine, or as the oracle whose voice we obey. We do not obey the Lutheran Confessions, strictly speaking. They are not our master. They are our mouthpiece through which in a simple and effective way we announce our religious convictions to our fellow men. Why do we sign the Augsburg Confession? Not because we entertain the erroneous thought that Melanchthon, who wrote it, was inspired and that it is an infallible document. No, we sign it because we find it to be a declaration which expresses precisely the beliefs which we cherish, holding that it represents the teachings of the divine Word.

Confidently, joyously, then, we shall begin the cruise under the good flag of the Lutheran Confessions. By being faithful to them we are certain we are faithful to the Scriptures and to the message of salvation through the blood of Christ, our Lord.

