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Editorial Comment

Does the Lutheran Church need to remember Marburg?

In the January issue of our journal Hermann Sasse suggests this question in his article "The Lutheran Contribution to the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper."

In this issue Paul M. Bretscher provides our readers with a translation and a preliminary analysis of the Arnoldshain theses on the Lord's Supper.

In all parts of the world Lutherans are engaged in discussions with other churches on this topic. And this is good. Lutherans should discharge their obligations to other Christians and contribute in every way possible to the unity of the Christian Church.

But what about the significance of Marburg and the role of the Lutheran Symbols in these conversations?

Lutherans do not equate their symbols with the inspired Scripture as the source and norm of doctrine. New formulations and statements of doctrine in themselves are not ruled out as a repudiation of the confessions, in fact they may be desirable and even necessary.

The confessions came into being in answer to a need in a given historical situation. Their emphases and antithetic concerns reflect their *Sitz im Leben*. So it may be true that some aspect of the Lord's Supper may not be particularly stressed or may be more or less implicit only in the formulations of the confessions. No one will object if new statements stress or elaborate such a phase of the doctrine.

But in their conversations on this doctrine with others Lutherans will insist on two points.

The new formulations must be no less in accord with Scripture than are the symbols.

The language employed dare not obscure the issues involved. It must be made unequivocally clear, for example, that the term "real presence" denotes not merely the actual presence of the Lord

to dispense spiritual gifts appropriated by faith but also the unique sacramental presence described in the confessions as taking place when the body and the blood of the Lord is present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine.

The present issue of the CTM also contains the "Confession of Faith of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church." For the thrilling account of the emergence of this large body of Christians from heathendom the reader is directed to the article by Joseph Ellwanger in the January issue. These Christians applied for and were received into membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

As Ellwanger points out and as is evident from the confession itself, the Batak Church did not deem it necessary to embody the Lutheran Symbols in its statement of faith with the exception of Luther's Small Catechism. It proceeded in the conviction that its doctrinal position could be adequately and more specifically set forth in new formulations and with emphases on its particular needs. It evidently was necessary, for example, that the relationship of Christianity to the hereditary and powerful "Adat" be made clear.

No doubt the Batak Church is also aware of the fact that it is confronted not only by issues arising from former heathen views and practices. It also lives among Christian denominations with divergent doctrines.

As a confessionally Lutheran group it will not want to avoid defining its position, for example, with respect to the views held by the Rhenish missionaries to whom it owes so much. Here clear statements on those doctrines that still divide Lutheranism and Reformed theology are very much in place.

To what extent the confession of the Batak Church is adequate in this respect is not our immediate concern. But we do note that the doctrine of the Lord's Supper also is given a new formulation.

We suggest that conferences and study groups give serious attention to these modern discussions of the Lord's Supper. We hope that in the last two issues the CTM has furnished the incentive and also some helpful material for such study and discussion.