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Editorial ✠

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The 400th Anniversary of the *Concordia* and the 450th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession — the Task Ahead for World Lutheranism

For Lutherans the 400th anniversary of the *Book of Concord*, or *Concordia*, on 25 June 1980 will be of present and historical value; it will be linked up with the 450th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Charles V on 25 June 1530. In the 1970 to 1980 decade there are anniversaries that could be observed: the 125th anniversary of the organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1847), the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Synodical Conference (1872), the same anniversary of the death of Wilhelm Loehe (1872), the 300th anniversary of the publication of Philip Spener's *Pia Desideria* (1675), or the 400th anniversary of the promulgation of the Formula of Concord (1577). These are "Lutheran" events. But we also recall that the 400th anniversary of the *Confessio Bohemica* (1575) comes two years before the same anniversary of the Formula; three years before that the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve took place (1572).

But who wants to remember that tragedy? Perhaps it can tell us about the wickedness of politicians, both civil and ecclesiastical, and remind us of the blessings of religious liberty. The years between 1555 (the Peace of Augsburg with its *cuius regio, eius religio* solution) and 1580 established patterns of governmental control over the churches which in part account for the secularization of the churches. At least we can inquire about some of the roots of secularization and with that begin to ask some pertinent questions.

In the years preceding the Formula of Concord, Philip II reigned in Spain, Maximilian II (d. 1576) and Rudolph II were emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, and Elizabeth I was queen of England. Not the problems of monarchies, but the theories of resistance, the development of radicalism, and the agitations for tolerance during this period may have something to say to our age.

History, it is true, cannot be used to predict the future; it can only interpret the past. However, it can remind us of the heritage that is ours, call us to a reevaluation of that heritage, and ask us how we plan to use it. The past is not a graveyard of dead bones, but the living record of meaningful acts, significant ideas, and purposeful expressions. Ernst Cassirer, philosopher and historian, wrote: "Historical knowledge is the answer to definite questions, an answer that must be given by the past; but the questions themselves are put and dictated by the present — by our present intellectual interests and our present moral and social needs."¹

By one of those curious coincidences in history which can be very intriguing,

¹ *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Culture* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1953), p. 226.

Francis Drake began his journey around the world in the same year (1577) in which the Formula of Concord was written; he completed the circumnavigation of the globe in the same year (1580) in which the *Concordia* was published. Ferdinand Magalhães' (Magellan's) crew had performed the feat first in 1522, the year Luther's translation of the New Testament appeared. The processes which knit the world closer together, stemming in part from these events and others (the voyages of Captain James Cook were made between 1768 and 1779—there are possibilities here of celebrating a 200th anniversary), have accelerated greatly. What do these processes mean for the church?

Nor ought the arts and sciences be forgotten, because they, too, belong to the culture of the age. We need to remind ourselves that the total culture of any era has a profound bearing on the church's life and activities and on the emphases she gives to one or more of her teachings. The cultural patterns may determine her policies and polity. Only at their own peril may churchmen neglect a study of the church's past in its total context; that study ought best be coupled with a continuous study of the contemporary scene.

We are not pleading for a narrow approach to any of the anniversaries or calling for a Narcissus-like approach to the past. We must guard against falling in love with our own image as we think we see it reflected in the stream of history. To quote from the Mission Affirmations adopted by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1965:

We affirm as Lutheran Christians that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is chiefly a confessional movement within the total body of Christ rather than a denomination emphasizing institutional barriers of separation. The Lutheran Christian uses the Lutheran Confessions for the primary purposes for which they were framed: to confess Christ and His Gospel boldly and lovingly to all Christians. While the Confessions seek to repel all attacks against the Gospel, they are not intended to be a kind of Berlin wall to stop communication with other Christians.²

A great number of conferences, colloquies, and dialogs (to use an anachronistic term) were held in the years before 1580. These were between Lutherans and Lutherans, between Lutherans and Calvinists, and between Roman Catholics and Lutherans or Calvinists. Theologians, rulers, *periti*, and ignoramuses were involved. We need to investigate these colloquies and conferences further to determine reasons why some succeeded and many failed. Were the failures due to personality clashes, mistrust, inability to communicate, genuine convictions, stubbornness, pride? Just what caused most of them to fail? Can we learn anything for the ecumenical approach today? about the use and abuse of polemics? about the need for listening and trying to understand?

That raises the question: How can we begin to get ready now to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the *Concordia* and the 450th anniversary of the *Augustana* in the most significant way for the world beset with our contemporary complexities of problems? We need far more than an easy ritual of ecumenical gatherings.

Is the *Concordia* meaningful for the waning 20th century? Do we need a new

² The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Proceedings*, 1965, p. 80.

statement of faith? The *Concordia* was subtitled: "Christian, Reiterated, and Unanimous Confession of the Doctrine and Faith of the undersigned Electors, Princes, and Estates who Embrace the Augsburg Confession and of their Theologians, Together with an Appended Declaration, Firmly Founded on the Word of God as the Only Norm, of Several Articles about which Disputation and Strife Arose after the blessed Death of Martin Luther, Prepared for Publication by the Unanimous Agreement and Order of the aforementioned Electors, Princes, and Estates for the Instruction and Admonition of their Lands, Churches, Schools, and Descendants." That's a long sentence, but it clearly states the purpose of the *Concordia*. Will it serve for instruction and admonition today? Surely the order or command of the rulers of the 16th century is not binding today, no matter how thoroughly they were in agreement. Is it truly founded on the Word of God, free from unscriptural subtleties? Can it serve as a basis of agreement after 400 years? How can agreement be achieved among all who embrace the Augsburg Confession today? What validity has the *Book of Concord* for schools and churches in this generation? What is the purpose of the Confessions in a global context in which Christianity is a minority religion? The breakup of the Synodical Conference, the functioning of the Lutheran World Federation, the promise of the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, and the momentum of the ecumenical movement provide reasons for the questions.

To help formulate answers to these questions we need to go back to the 16th century. This means solid research, the compilation of bibliographies, the publication of critical editions of significant records, and the translation into English of important documents. It means the writing of monographs and the popularization of painstaking investigations. Only the best of scholarship can supply this research with trustworthy interpretations.

Institutes and workshops and conferences, too, must become a vital aspect of a program for appraising the significance of such an important anniversary (or anniversaries) of the church's history. Mere lecture series will not be enough nor will they satisfy many. Well-organized study programs, tailored to meet the needs of pastors, teachers, and alert laymen, will have to be devised. Joint study sessions cutting across synodical and even denominational lines are called for. We respectfully suggest that the presidents of The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod take immediate steps to bring about a dynamic and pragmatic program for the observances of the 450th anniversary of the *Augustana* and the 400th anniversary of the *Concordia*.

This is not an age for instant answers to the church's problems. A plunging into the past will not supply ready replies. It will cause men to wrestle with past relationships and probe their relevance for the contemporary world. Some clarity and perhaps more charity will result.

These findings must be transmitted so that hopefully all members of the church will gain a greater appreciation of their heritage and a better understanding of its sig-

nificance. Pedantry and wistful thinking alike will be out of order in making the observances of these anniversaries meaningful.

Is the church ready to implement the programmatic scheme presented here? Is there another approach that ought to be used? Whatever the answers are to those questions, it seems certain that the church ought to begin now, in 1970, to use the decade of the 1970s to level with former happenings in order to achieve present solutions, and, with the blessing of the Lord of the church, future vitality.

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