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Foreword

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No. 1

Foreword

Again a new year dawns. God be praised for the assurance we Christians have that in spite of wretchedness, fear, famine, war, and bloodshed reigning in the world it will be a year of grace for us. The Gospel, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and, in these heavenly gifts, Christ the Redeemer Himself will be in our midst; constantly the river will be flowing the streams wherof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High.

But the feeling of spiritual security must not produce in us what has been called the attitude of quietism, a do-nothing, a *laissez faire* disposition. "The time is short," 1 Cor. 7:29. The world is growing old, on all sides one sees signs of decay; spiritually, morally, socially, politically it is moving in the direction of disaster. What would St. John, who about 100 A. D. wrote, "Children, it is the last time" (1 John 2:18), say if he lived now and observed the disintegration in the field of religion and ethics which is going on in the so-called Christian world of our days? He would bid us read the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and emphasize the words spoken to hesitating, lingering Lot, "*Haste thee, escape thither!*" It means that what has to be done has to be done quickly; "the night is far spent, the day is at hand."

In thinking of the tasks which evidently stare us in the face and concerning which dilatory tactics should not be countenanced, we believe all seriously minded fellow Lutherans will join us in assigning a prominent place to the work of setting our Lutheran house in order and to the holy cause of Christian missions. The Lutheran house is still sadly divided. Though we do not know of any Lutheran body here in America which does not avow allegiance to at least the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism,

Foreword

unity, peace, fellowship are still wanting. It has often been asserted that in the Lutheran Church, its many divisions notwithstanding, there is more doctrinal unity than in any other large Protestant denomination. Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that disunity, theological warfare, and opposition of one body to the other still characterize Lutheranism as it is seen by the outsider.

In the discussions dealing with Lutheran unity foolish thoughts are now and then uttered. There are some who advocate the principle of union at any price. They do not wish to see any more deliberations, conferences, and debates. What they desire is action, a declaration of union, apparently regardless of what is involved. Their attitude reminds one of that taken by certain pacifists who insist that we have to have peace at any price at all, even if this course entails the loss of political independence and every kind of freedom. That the sponsors of union at any price are contradicting plain directives of the Scriptures must be clear to all who are not hopelessly prejudiced. At times, so Paul says, people come to or into or arise in our churches who cause divisions and offenses, and the only proper course to take is to avoid them (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:9).—A factor whose power and authority no one of us can deny is love of the truth. It has a good deal to say on this question. It states in accents whose validity is above question that you cannot be for a doctrine and against it at the same time. In politics we all recognize that a man cannot simultaneously be on both sides of the fence, that he cannot vote both the Democratic and the Republican ticket. In religion some people seem to think they can practice what appears to be a general adherence to everything, though, of course, upon examination it turns out that they actually adhere to nothing, that what vaunted itself as generous, universal hospitality is really a very comprehensive indifference. How can a person be a firm believer in the teaching of justification by grace through faith and at the same time become the brother and ally of those who seek to destroy this teaching! This kind of church fellowship condemns itself.

There is, too, the principle of self-protection or self-preservation, stressed by Paul in the words: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). Do not deceive yourself, he says, as it were, false teaching is a dangerous thing. It does not take a big quantity of leaven to leaven the whole lump. So it does not require a very striking error to vitiate your whole teaching. A comparatively minor aberration may do it. Paul is in that connection speaking of the position of the Judaizers. These people did not come with a heinous denial of the Messiahship of Jesus or of the reality of His resurrection. These fundamental matters

they were willing to grant. What in distinction from Paul they were insisting on would have appeared to some heathen philosophers, we fancy, as a minor point, the tenet that certain good works were still required for one's justification. Even if wrong, how insignificant did this view seem to be to the onlooker in comparison with all the grand doctrines on the person of Jesus which the Judaizers held in common with Paul! But the Apostle teaches us differently and in that connection issues the general warning of the evil potency of a little leaven of error.

Especially must we mention here the holy awe which all Christians should be filled with in their attitude toward the Word. Where God has spoken, the matter has to be considered decided by them; to play with this Word, to make compromises as to its authority, to allow anyone to set it aside, to build a brotherhood on or through sanction of disregard of its message—what a sacrilege it must be to every disciple of Him who in His clashes with enemies, whether scribes or high priests or the devil himself, pointed to the sacred Scriptures! The union-at-any-price people, if they are still Christian, have not clearly apprehended what their procedure involves, that it amounts to a definite declaration of indifference toward Scripture truth, or they have been led to think that in this evil world such compromises as they engage in must be permissible because apparently in no other way can the churches be united. The earnest Lutheran will declare, Let there be disunion rather than an agreement resting on such a foundation! How little Christ, our divine Master, approves of these hyperirrenical schemes, we can see from His disillusioning pronouncement: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay, but rather division" (Luke 12:51).

But while it is easy to demonstrate that the union-at-any-price policy is contrary to God's will and ordinance, it is equally easy to show that the course which is opposed to any and every kind of union and which glories in being separate is not in keeping with Christ's teachings. From the Scriptures it is evident that the normal thing for Christians is to be at peace and in fellowship with each other. Of the early Christians in Jerusalem, placed before us as an example to be emulated, we read that they continued not only in the Apostles' doctrine, but in fellowship. There was no clique in their midst which separated from the brethren and essayed to travel to heaven along a lonely road of its own. Of no early congregation are we given such intimate glimpses in the writings of Paul as of the congregation in Corinth. Soon after its founding, it began to be characterized by extensive factionalism. There were four parties which Paul enumerates—those people that made Paul himself their great leader, those that pro-

fessed to follow Apollos, those who looked upon Peter as their spiritual guide, and those that refused to listen to any human teacher, saying that they belonged to Christ. There is no doubt that all of them manifested an abundance of zeal and earnestness and that they maintained to be actuated in their separatistic tendencies by devotion to principle. But the Apostle by no means commends them for such divisive, centrifugal ardor. He gives them to understand that the erection of barriers between Christians is as little justified as you can say that Christ is divided. Evidently he was not impressed with the zeal which drove these people to form distinct parties. In his grand Epistle to the Ephesians he stresses that the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace should be preserved among Christians. They are one; now let that oneness be kept, is the Apostle's plea. In the Epistle to the Romans he discusses the relations between the "strong" and the "weak" Christians. Somebody else might have suggested that for the sake of peace and order it would be best, where such groups are found, to separate them and to let them establish distinct churches. Not so Paul. He urges them to remain together and, instead of meeting separately, to praise God jointly, "with one mind and one mouth" (Rom. 15:6). In fact, the very texts in Paul's epistles which we, quite correctly, quote as directing us to separate from heretics imply that the Church should not be divided and that from those who simply insist on making divisions (*haireseis*) we have to withdraw because we certainly cannot join them in their schemes to tear the Church apart.

In Paul's concern to see the people whom he had led to Christ remain in harmony and fellowship with each other, he in 1 Cor. 12:14 ff. expresses thoughts which cannot be stressed too much. He tells his converts that they are all members of one body, having their individual gifts, endowments, and functions, precisely as the various parts of the human body all have their special tasks and appropriate activities. Naturally, there are differences; the parts of the body are not all alike; some are weak and less comely, and yet they all belong to the one organism. In the Church, too, we must not expect absolute uniformity; but let there be no schisms on that account, says the Apostle. And with respect to gifts, let those that are profitable be coveted, and above them all, more excellent than all, stands the gift which all Christians have, in the cultivation of which, however, they are often lacking, true brotherly love. How the spirit of the Apostle labored in the attempt to make his converts realize the sinfulness of nursing separatistic inclinations!

In this connection but few readers will fail to think of what our Lord Jesus Christ Himself has said on the preservation of unity

and fellowship, John 17:21 Is it doing justice to His words if we refer this petition in his High-Priestly Prayer, "that all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me," exclusively to the spiritual, invisible unity which binds all who accept Jesus as their Savior together in one grand brotherhood? Jesus is thinking of more. That inward unity is to manifest itself so that the world will see it, be impressed, and believe in Him who through establishment of such a fellowship has proved that He is God's own Son. Luther comments thus, "That is the fruit which is to result through and out of such unity, namely, that the Word of Christ progress further and be accepted in the world as the Word of God, in which there dwells almighty, divine, unconquerable power, and the eternal treasure of all grace and salvation." (St. Louis Ed., VIII: 833.)

Hence we say that if Lutherans in America wish to do their duty in the (apparently) few days still remaining to the world, they must not only avoid the error of the people who seek to establish union regardless of what the cost is, but they must likewise steer clear of the separatism which, for carnal reasons (pride, inertia, love of ease, fear, traditionalism, etc.), seeks to keep intact the barriers that divide one group of Lutherans from the other. The effort to reach unity through patient and frank discussions, begun several decades ago, must go on. Where mutual opposition rests on misunderstandings, these have to be cleared away. The errors that are still held must be pointed to, and everybody must be willing to learn and, if need be, to be corrected. Let no one of us appear at conferences with the claim or the secretly nursed opinion that he is infallible. "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Such an attitude of humility does not involve surrender of the truth. In speaking of the aberration of John Gerhard in the teaching concerning Sunday, Dr. Walther, certainly a staunch champion of orthodoxy, said at the colloquy with the Iowa Synod theologians, "I believe the highly esteemed Gerhard, in comparison with whom I am not worthy of loosing the latchet of his shoes, would have permitted himself to be persuaded if he had had a friend (pointing out his error to him)." (Beyer, *Stenographisch aufgezeichnetes Kolloquium*, etc., p. 91.) This exemplifies that humility and firmness may well go hand in hand.

What precise form such intersynodical conferences and discussions should assume cannot well be considered in this brief Foreword. But we have no doubt that if the pastors of the various synods assemble in the right spirit, the spirit of love of the truth

and of humility, the question as to the methods to be followed (whether the confessional writings are to be studied, essays are to be presented, propositions are to be looked at, perhaps in panel discussions, etc.) will not play much of a role. Since the *Brief Statement* and the *Declaration* (together with the provisions of the report of Committee No. 16 and Synod's actions thereupon) were in 1938 declared by the Missouri Synod to furnish a doctrinal basis for future church fellowship between this Synod and the American Lutheran Church, and the latter body at its convention in the same year adopted a similar statement, it is evident that these documents should be studied by the clergy of both synods wherever this has not yet been done. That apart from, or on the basis of, these documents the issues which divide the Lutheran Church at present should be given special attention requires no elaboration. Will the Lutheran house thus be set in order and the divisions be removed? God alone knows. But we are sure that He has not, and never will, forsake His Church and that the old promise stands, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

From the Lutheran household the mind inevitably travels to the larger realm, the regions round about, where darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. It is true, we should like to be in fellowship with the Christians of other denominations, too, but we suggest that if we are wise, we shall be satisfied with working at one unification task, the one dwelt on above; when that has been disposed of—if it ever will be—let the approach to other church bodies be considered. But one thing brooks no delay—the bringing of the Gospel to those who are not in possession of it, be it on our continent or abroad in so-called heathen lands. Here must lie the contribution of the Church to the solution of postwar problems on which papers and magazines offer articles and comments in bewildering abundance. As a rule, we have no doubt, what is written on this subject is well meant and springs from the desire to heal the ghastly wounds on the body of mankind. The counsels that are given deal chiefly with the political, social, financial, and economic difficulties that will confront the world when finally the last gun has been fired and church bells proclaim the signing of an armistice agreement. On some of the matters involved the Word of God throws light for us, for instance, on the importance of justice and fairness and on the heinousness of cruelty. Let the Christian preacher proclaim what he finds in the Scriptures on subjects of this nature, so that his parishioners may make proper decisions in their political and social activities. But we must not presume as preachers and theologians to have expert knowledge on things on which God

has not given us directives, nor have we as ambassadors of Christ any business preaching anything except what He has given us to proclaim. The "political parson," who discourses with a show of wisdom on weighty questions of statesmanship where he lacks knowledge, training, and experience, has done the Christian pulpit an incalculable amount of harm, not to mention the wrong he is committing by neglecting to feed the souls entrusted to him with the Bread of Life. Let the Church rather than to participate in political discussions bethink itself of its great task—that of bringing the precious Gospel of Jesus, the divine Sin-bearer, to those who are still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death! It cannot give self-government to the inhabitants of India—the question whether this should be done is studied by statesmen, and honest and intelligent men differ on that point—but it can bring them something better, the news and assurance that their transgressions have been paid for in the court of God and that heaven has been opened wide even for the poorest *pariah* in their midst.

On all sides church papers express the thought that after the war there must be a strong forward movement of Christian missions. Who can withhold his assent? Having the teachings of salvation with the direction "For all people" in our hands, we cannot, if we wish to reflect the mind of our heavenly Lord, refuse to participate in this great endeavor. Naturally the war interferes, and has interfered, severely with the preaching of the Gospel in heathen countries. Even to bring the number of missionaries back to its prewar strength will require special efforts. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that so-called Christian nations, through their internecine strife, have given the heathen a deplorable spectacle and brought the religion of Jesus into disrepute. To what extent the Christian citizens in the various countries at war are responsible for the bloody inundation that swept over the earth, we shall not now investigate. We merely wish to assert that heathen people cannot understand why nations that profess to follow the "Prince of Peace" should destroy each other and that whatever respect they may have entertained for the Christian religion is in danger of vanishing. Hanging their heads in shame, in humble repentance, Christians must resolve to redouble their ardor in portraying Christ to those that have not yet learned to know Him. We are told that after the conflict the doors will be wide open, especially for missionaries coming from America, because our country is supposed to be waging this war without imperialistic motives. May be! Of course, that does not mean that the antagonism of the self-righteous human heart in pagan lands will be less strong after the war than it is now. However, whether

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8 **The Meaning of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* for Our Day**

there will be a welcome for Christian emissaries when they come to heathen people or not, the work of evangelization will have to go forward at an accelerated pace. In the past we have been remiss. "The time is short."

Let us think for one minute of what a difference it would make if throughout the world, instead of the thunder of guns and the declarations of hatred and hostility, there would be heard the grand tidings that Jesus, the promised Christ, has paid for the sins of mankind and that all things must work together for good to them that love God, the God who reconciled the world to Himself through the death of His Son. Good news in the darkness, indeed! Not a promise of wealth, to be sure, of earthly power, greatness, and glory, but of inward peace and happiness, manifesting itself in radiant service to one's fellow men! Spreading this news, we shall be laying foundations of peace, better than any others that can be devised in this sinful world, because in this way there will be brought about that change of heart which is required if the lust for power is to give way to feelings of friendship and good will. That is the grandest contribution imaginable to the solution of postwar problems. Christians, ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world!

May 1944 see the end of the dread conflict, so that with vigor Zion may be built and its walls extended! "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor. 15:58. W. ARNDT

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The Meaning of Augustine's "*De Civitate Dei*" for Our Day

(A paper read before the South-Central Pastoral Conference
of the Minnesota District on May 4, 1943)

In the presidential address which he prepared for the meeting of the American Historical Association in 1941, but which he could not deliver because of his death, James Westfall Thompson said:

Historic unity, the unity of history proper, is to be sought only in the history of universals, that is, in ideas. History is not a compilation of facts. The purpose of the serious historian is to trace the advancement of knowledge; not of all knowledge, but so much of it as is causative of human conduct. For the totality of man's conduct is ultimately determined by the totality of man's knowledge, and the prime movers of human affairs, I think it may be said, are Law and Government, Religion, Literature, and Art. The degree of culture of any country, of any epoch or period, is con-