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Foreword

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Arndt: Foreword

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CONTENTS

JANUARY

Foreword. W. Arndt	1
The Sola Scriptura and Its Modern Antithesis. John Theodore Mueller	5
Catholic Tributes to Luther. William Dallmann	24
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	35
Miscellanea	45
Theological Observer	48
Book Review	64

FEBRUARY

The Marburg Colloquy of 1529: A Textual Study. George John Beto	73
Syntactical Peculiarities in Revelation. Paul M. Bretscher	95
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	106
Miscellanea	113
Theological Observer	129
Book Review	139

MARCH

The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	145
I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body. W. F. Beck	153
Sermon Study on Heb. 12:1-6. Theo. Laetsch	169
A Definite Need in the Field of New Testament Textual Criticism. W. Arndt	180
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	187
Theological Observer	199
Book Review	212

APRIL

Objective Justification. E. W. A. Koehler	217
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	236
Forgiveness in the LXX. Richard T. Du Brau	249
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	256
Miscellanea	265
Theological Observer	270
Book Review	284

MAY

Propositions on Unevangelical Practice	289
The Hades Gospel. Th. Engelder	293
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	301
Sermon Study on Eph. 1:3-14. Theo. Laetsch	306
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	319
Miscellanea	331
Theological Observer	337
Book Review	355

JUNE

A Re-examination of the Lutheran Doctrine of the Real Presence. P. E. Kretzmann	361
The Argument in Support of the Hades Gospel. Th. Engelder	374
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	396
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	404
Miscellanea	411
Theological Observer	414
Book Review	427

JULY

Christian Fellowship. C. August Hardt	433
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	466
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	473
Miscellanea	483
Theological Observer	487
Book Review	501

AUGUST

The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	505
Christian Fellowship. (Concluded.) C. August Hardt	513
Keeping the Doctrine Pure. J. H. C. Fritz	533
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	542
Miscellanea	552
Theological Observer	558
Book Review	572

SEPTEMBER

How to Deal with Cases of Attempted Suicide. E. A. Duemling	577
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	583
The Evil of the Hades Gospel. Th. Engelder	591

Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	616
Miscellanea	626
Theological Observer	640

OCTOBER

Trends and Tendencies of the Times. A. Guebert	649
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	666
Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf: Statesman and Scholar. L. W. Spitz	672
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	685
Miscellanea	694
Theological Observer	703
Book Review	717

NOVEMBER

Trends and Tendencies of the Times. Arnold Guebert	721
Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf an Orthodox Defender of Pietists. L. W. Spitz	744
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	757
Sermon Study on 2 Cor. 5:1-10. Th. Laetsch	765
Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference	775
Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons	781
Miscellanea	785
Theological Observer	787

DECEMBER

Soeren Aaby Kierkegaard. J. T. Mueller	801
Some Remarks on the Question of the Salvation of the Heathen. Th. Engelder	823
The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer. G. H. Smukal	842
Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons	848
Miscellanea	860
Theological Observer	865
Book Review	876



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No. 1

Foreword

Again a new year has dawned, and it is clear that 1944 was not the year destined to bring the final cataclysm, the end of the present universe, but that God's mercy once more deferred the advent of Judgment Day, giving sinners another opportunity to repent and saints some more time to show their gratitude to the Savior by spreading His kingdom. It is a topsy-turvy, confused, suffering, disintegrating world on which January, 1945, descends. How can one view it without becoming sarcastic: a world vaunting itself as having attained unheard-of heights of wisdom and yet striving with might and main to make its own house collapse. It is like a super-giant, a global Goliath, who sits in solemn state with cap and gown, diplomas of high intellectual and other achievements all about him, but who with a huge blade cuts away one limb after the other from his body and now and then deftly stabs himself — the blood is gushing forth, and a moribund look is spreading over his features. Oh, these clever statesmen! Madness arises somewhere among the nations, and the only answer and remedy the wise leaders and doctors have for it is some more madness. "*Similia similibus curantur* — don't you see?"

Through God's mercy the war, we trust, will be ended in the not too distant future. What kind of world will it be that will then emerge and take shape? If discussions and achievement were in the same ratio, it ought to be a nearly perfect world, because there is nothing that is talked and written about so persistently as postwar problems and conditions. Naturally our readers and we are interested in the role which the Church is to play in the *post-bellum* reconstruction work. In some quarters the view is urged that at the peace table the Church should be represented to see to it that in the treaties the principles of the Sermon on the Mount are recognized and followed. One church leader who we have no

doubt would very much like to be present or represented in those negotiations is the *pontifex maximus* of Rome. How it would flatter his vanity and nurture his pretensions (rather unsuccessfully maintained during the present sitting-on-the-fence period) to be invited to participate in the important debates and parleys which will usher in the peace stipulations! Among Protestants the presence of representatives of the Church at the peace table has been both advocated and opposed. We agree with those who sternly frown on any attempt of the Church to be a participant as a Church in the peace negotiations. While we devoutly pray that the men responsible for the drawing up of the peace treaties may be Christians, who do their work in the fear of God and in the light of the Holy Scriptures, we hold that the Church as such has neither the right to engage in such activities nor the competence for them. The Church is the body of believers in Jesus Christ, it has an infallible Guide—the Word of God. Wherever this Guide speaks, it can speak with authority. Where this Guide is silent, it has to be silent, too, unless it is willing to stultify itself. Does the Bible say whether Germany is to be dismembered, whether Japan is to be shorn of all foreign possessions, whether the Balkan states are to be left intact?! Why, then, clamor for representation of the Church at the peace parleys? That there may be some ministers of the Gospel who possess striking political insight and acumen, we are ready to admit. But that is due to their own personal endowments and not to their being spokesmen of the Church. If only at this juncture all who have been called to be ministers of Christ would keep Is. 1:18-20 uppermost in their mind: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it!"

Some Protestant leaders think they have found a fairly sure panacea for all the ills besetting the world—the nationalistic animosities, the economic troubles, the class conflicts, the strife between capital and labor, the race prejudices, the crime waves, and the other troubles from which the whole family of nations, collectively and individually, is suffering. It is a simple remedy and consists merely in the unification of the churches. How often do we not hear the slogan "In union there is strength"! Bible texts are quoted which inculcate the principle of peace and harmony among Christians. Christianity, we are told, overcame the many social evils in the old Roman empire, such as slavery, execution by crucifixion, the gladiatorial contests, the unworthy position of women, the neglect of the sick and the poor, and it can do the

same thing for our world, provided Christians stand united and unselfishly work for the same goals. It is an intriguing propaganda which is carried on by these prophets of peace. Who is so glacier-like in his sympathies as not to be moved by its appeals? Several things will have to be granted at once: the divided state of Christendom is not according to God's will; the spectacle of war between Christians and Christian bodies is not a factor that will dispose an outsider favorably to Christianity; much of the strength and time that go into controversy could be used to better advantage.

In view of these and other considerations, we say that if the knights of peace and amity can unite the churches in the right way, on a Scriptural basis, the basis God Himself has indicated, we shall all applaud. It is not mere cant, but an expression of our heart's sentiment when we declare that all of us engaged in editing and publishing the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* are intensely interested in seeing true harmony established between the Christian denominations. But what is attempted in this direction, for instance, in the Federal Council of Churches, is the formation of a united front through indifference toward individual and distinctive doctrines, a *laissez faire* policy in matters of teachings, every church being permitted to cling to what in the eyes of the others are heresies and errors, provided it accepts a few general principles and is not insisting on adoption by all of its own particular creed. It means that efforts are made to bring the churches together, not by removal of their doctrinal differences, but in spite of doctrinal differences, the separating barriers being simply ignored. What of the truth? It is compelled to walk arm in arm with error. Of course, everybody is told he may cling to his convictions, but he must not protest if what he holds dear, precious, and holy is trampled under foot by a fellow member in the union. What of the Scripture passages which inculcate separation from heretics? They are either not considered as normative and binding for us in the twentieth century, or they are regarded as not pertaining to the question of fellowship between individuals and churches clinging to the name "Christian."

With such tactics, which amount to a denial of the truth and unfaithfulness to God's holy Word, we can have nothing to do. It is our conviction that in the Scriptures God speaks to us, that every teaching, every word of it is divine, and that in its statements we are not dealing with conjectures or opinions, but with sacred truths which must be dearer to us than life itself, and which we cannot permit to be treated with indifference. Indeed, union based on true unity would be a most desirable boon; but the union sought after by the union-at-any-price propagandists would be positively dis-

astrous. Instead of being a panacea, it would be a poison, killing all spiritual life.

This brings us to the topic of the attempts made in our country to establish Lutheran unity and union. Much of what is said and written on this topic we consider not only ill advised, but positively wrong, because it disregards the truth that God's Word must be our Guide in all matters of religion and conscience, and that the chief factors to be regarded are not considerations of convenience or expediency, but the principles laid down in the Holy Scriptures. We must beware of approaching the question of Lutheran union in the manner of the unscrupulous politician who on a given issue balances the advantages against the disadvantages and makes his decision without any thought of the right or wrong involved. But though we protest against the attitude which refuses to give serious examination to the doctrinal issues arising here or to God's directives, the cause of Lutheran unity is very dear to us. Let it be promoted, but let it be promoted in the right way.

Since in 1945 Lutheran unity will be a prominent subject of discussion in Lutheran circles, a word or two of a general nature will not be considered out of place. To begin with, let us emphasize that the excess of enthusiasm and the erroneous argumentation met with here and there where Lutheran union is sponsored, must not induce us to go to the extreme of viewing with suspicion and alarm all attempts to bring about Lutheran unification. *Abusus non tollit usum*. If a thing is right, its being sponsored among others by some cranks does not make it wrong. The plenary inspiration of the Scriptures does not become objectionable because among its champions we find millenarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Holy Rollers.

A chief requirement, if the negotiations are to succeed, is that of humble love for our fellow Lutherans. In the spirit of helpfulness, which, however, does not forget or overlook our own frailties and shortcomings, the task must be approached. It is true that there is a love which outranks the love of our fellow men—the love we owe our great God, our Father in heaven. "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Certainly nothing must be done which would give second place to the love we owe our Creator. But are the two loves which constitute the sum of the Commandments in conflict with each other? Far from it. The one is the steppingstone to the other. Where the major is found, the minor will not be absent. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4:20.

It is a truism that in drawing up conditions of fellowship the "too little" and the "too much" have to be avoided. On account of the spirit of the times it is evident that we have to guard especially against the "too little." We are living in days of doctrinal and moral laxity; the philosophy of pragmatism has captivated the minds: "Take the course that works!" But it cannot be denied that in opposing the popular latitudinarianism the danger of our insisting on "too much" gets to be very real, too. Extremes beget extremes.

There is before the Lutheran Church in America in general and before the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod in particular a document which, it is hoped, will form the doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the two bodies mentioned — the *Doctrinal Affirmation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, and the American Lutheran Church*. Both bodies have requested their members to give this document careful study in order to determine whether it is Scripturally adequate. God granting His grace, the circle may become enlarged, and other Lutherans may become interested in the document, too. As it is studied and examined, we beg the brethren to bear in mind the general principles set down above. It is not a panacea we are seeking; that will be provided for God's children when Christ on Judgment Day takes them home into the mansions of His Father's house. But adoption of the *Affirmation*, if it is found acceptable, may prove of some help in the efforts we together with all other conservative Lutherans are putting forth to bring the message of Christ's redemption to a perishing world.

W. ARNDT

The Sola Scriptura and Its Modern Antithesis

I

It is indeed correct to say that the outstanding achievement of Luther's Reformation was the recovery, clarification, and vindication of the *sola gratia (sola fide)*. That truly was a pre-eminent accomplishment, an almost miraculous attainment, as it appears to everyone who considers how thoroughly Rome had succeeded in burying this *articulus omnium fundamentalissimus* under the rubbish of its extreme work-righteousness program.¹⁾ Luther in a most lucid manner, in learned treatises (*De Servo Arbitrio*), in sermons, intelligible to the simplest layman, and in songs made known far and wide the Gospel message of God's free and full grace

1) Cf. *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte (Die Lehre Luthers)*. Von Reinhold Seeberg. Vierter Band, erste Abteilung, pp. 124 ff. Also *Lehrbuch der Symbolik*. Von Wilh. Walther, pp. 363 ff.