

# Concordia Theological Monthly



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## Do We Need Another Reformation?

In view of the tremendous progress of our age in all areas of human endeavor and the problems it has created, the question has been asked: "Do we need another Reformation?" After all, nearly four and a half centuries have passed since Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg.

But in spite of the great advances since the Reformation, particularly in the discoveries of science, man's basic needs are still the same. To the generation of today God says, as He did to that of Luther's day, what he said to Israel of old: "Prepare to meet thy God." (Amos 4:12)

The church's obligation is to provide the means whereby mortal, sinful man can meet his God and live. The Reformation re-established three great principles that must guide the church if this task is to be carried out: *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*. If these cardinal principles are understood and applied in their full intent and meaning, the answer to the question: "Do we need another Reformation?" must be a resounding no.

So far as Rome is concerned, these principles are as relevant today as they were at the time of the Reformation. For Rome it is not *sola Scriptura*, but Scripture, tradition, and the infallible teaching office of the pope; not the Pauline *sola gratia*, but infused grace; not *sola fide*, but faith and works. But present-day Protestants have every reason to examine themselves whether they are still faithful to these principles. For many it should not be a matter of another Reformation but a penitent returning to the old.

*Sola Scriptura!* Let us hear the heroic words of Luther which he spoke before the Emperor and the Diet at Worms, when in view of the fate of John Huss at Constance he expected nothing less than death for himself. He declared: "Unless I am overcome with testimonies from Scripture or with evident reasons—for I believe neither the Pope nor the councils, since they have often erred

and contradicted each other—I am overcome by the Scripture texts which I have adduced, and my conscience is bound by God's Word, I cannot and will not recant anything; for to act contrary to one's conscience is neither safe nor sincere. God help me! Amen." It matters little whether he added the words "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise," for it sufficed that he stood.

*Sola gratia!* Saved by grace alone—what agonies of heart and mind Luther suffered until the Holy Spirit through the Gospel taught him that! Only when he found and studied the Holy Scriptures and there learned to appreciate the comforting meaning of the words "The just shall live by faith" did peace enter his heart. Therefore he insisted: "Whatever may happen, though heaven and earth should fall, nothing in this article can be yielded or rescinded."

*Sola fide!* Again Luther emphasized the word "alone." His opponents accused him of falsifying Scripture, because he insisted on the "alone," but Luther replied that it was always there, but on account of the blindness of the opponents it had to be written large.

Here then we have the three great principles of the Reformation, as vital today in our age as they were 400 years ago. They gave life to a dying church then, and they will keep the church alive today, for they mean nothing less than that Jesus comes to the sinner in Scripture and is received by him in faith for the forgiveness of sins. But where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. So it was in Luther's day, so it is today.

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