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Address communications to the Editor, Erich H. Heintzen, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Business correspondence should be addressed to Arleigh Lutz, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Ecumenical Strivings in the Church of the Twentieth Century

The essay substantially reproduced below was delivered by Dr. Fred Kramer at the Thirty-seventh Convention of the Central Illinois District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, assembled in Springfield, August 20-23, 1963.

I.

CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANISM IN THE ECUMENICAL ERA

THE AGE or era in which we are living is often called the atomic or nuclear age. This name looks to the scientific developments which characterize and threaten to dominate our age. Viewing this same age from the vantage point of religion, some men have called it the post-Christian era, believing that Christianity has had its day, and that in the future it will play a less and less important role in the life of the world and its people. It is not our purpose at this time to discuss this particular view, but rather to speak of that which above all other things characterizes the life and activity of the Christian churches in our time. This is without doubt the ecumenical movement. It is not our purpose merely to trace the history and the present status of the ecumenical movement, although this history must be considered in our discussion. Rather, we intend to attempt to help our church to find its place and stance in the ecumenical era.

The ecumenical movement aims in some way to reunite a badly divided church. The church has always been prone to division. The New Testament itself indicates this time and again. We would here only remind of the situation in the congregation at Corinth, which had to be admonished by St. Paul "that ye all speak the same thing, and *that there be no divisions among you*; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,"¹ and of the admonition to the Christians in Rome: "Now I beseech you, brethren, *mark them which cause divisions* and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."²

The church after the days of the apostles had great difficulties with the makers of divisions and offenses. It sought to safeguard itself against these by developing the apostolic succession of bishops, who in their turn were to guard the unity and the orthodoxy of the church. Nevertheless, both heresy, in the sense of faith-destroying error, and schism, in the sense of division in the church, troubled the church again and again. A long quarrel between the Greek or Eastern churches and the Roman or Western churches, which involved both doctrine and prestige of the respective bishops led, in the year 1054, to a division of the church into the Eastern and

Western, which has persisted to this day. During the time of the Reformation, the Lutheran Church and the Reformed churches came into being as separate both from Eastern orthodoxy and from Roman Catholicism. Along with the Lutheran and the Reformed churches there came into being a number of sects which are often lumped together as the "left wing" of the Reformation. This included particularly the Mennonites or Anabaptists, who were rather seriously divided among themselves.

It was not long before there was a division also in the Reformed group. Protests against some of the most extreme tenets of Calvinism led to the formation of the Arminian Church, whose theology came to dominate a number of Reformed groups.

Lutheranism also threatened to break apart into a number of warring factions after the death of Luther, but was happily united after the year 1580 by the adoption of the Formula of Concord, in which the controversies that had rent Lutheranism were settled, at least for the time being.

But, though churches through the adoption of carefully worded Confessions, which set forth the faith of the church, sought to ward off schism and to heal it where it already existed, the number of divisions in the church continued to grow. It was particularly during the first half of the 19th century that the number of divisions and sects multiplied.³

But the first half of the 19th century was also the age of the revival of the missionary spirit in the churches. Missionary societies sprang up in the various Christian churches in Western Europe, and hundreds of missionaries were sent to carry the Gospel to India, to China, to Japan, to Africa, and to other parts of the world. Because the Gospel was carried by missionaries of various denominations, it goes without saying that in due time missionaries of various persuasions would confront each other on heathen soil. It was in this connection that the evils of division in the church became painfully apparent. Roman Catholic missionaries would confront Protestant missionaries, and hard words and mutual condemnations were the order of the day. One kind of Protestant confronted another kind of Protestant, even one kind of Lutheran another kind of Lutheran, "each too often engaged in unceasing warfare, not against the sin and suffering all around, but each against the supposed defects in the beliefs and practices of the others."⁴

Many foreign missionaries could testify to the harm which denominationalism does to their work. Those of us who are fortunate enough to have contact with our own missionaries on the foreign field know how these men at times suffer under the situation. Our own missionaries in India meet missionaries from other Lutheran groups at the mountain retreat in Kodaikanal in India. Because the churches at home are not in pulpit and altar fellowship, the missionaries on the foreign field are expected to deny to Lutheran missionaries from other groups the privilege of pulpit and altar fellowship. Yet, they feel that on the basis of careful discussion

with these other missionaries they are wholly one in the faith with them. On other mission fields, particularly in the Caribbean area, our missionaries tell us that it is most necessary that Lutherans of various Lutheran groups should cooperate in training a native ministry, since neither finances nor manpower permit each group to maintain its own seminary, and since such a divided front scandalizes the people whom they seek to win for Christ and His saving Gospel.

We have tried too briefly and too inadequately to give a picture of the harm of denominationalism on the mission field. In view of the sad situation it is not surprising that the ecumenical movement was born on the mission fields, and that it was in a series of great missionary conferences, interdenominational in character, that the ecumenical movement received its impetus in the churches in the United States. We cannot for lack of time trace this particular development. Suffice it to say that the movement has forged its own instruments. For the bulk of Protestantism this is, above all things, the World Council of Churches which meets once every six years.

The World Council of Churches

Out of the great missionary council meetings which began in Jerusalem in 1928 and continued with one meeting approximately every ten years since that time, there came the dream of a World Council of Churches. This dream, which began to take shape in the year 1937, was not realized until the end of World War II when the World Council of Churches was organized in Amsterdam. Since then there have been meetings in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954 and at New Delhi in India in 1961. To date more than 170 church bodies in more than fifty countries have joined the World Council of Churches. Among them are such diverse groups as the Episcopalians, the Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, the Salvation Army, and some Lutheran bodies.

We may well ask what is the doctrinal platform of the World Council of Churches. Manifestly, it cannot be any of the historical confessions of the several churches that make up the World Council. For a formula on which all could form some sort of association they agreed to accept as members in the Council "all who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." This formula does not mean that the World Council of Churches attempts to gloss over the theological and other differences between the member churches, or that it considers doctrines other than the deity of Christ and salvation through Him as unimportant. W. A. Visser't Hooft, the first Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, said to the Council at its convention in Amsterdam in 1948: "We are a council of churches, not the council of the one undivided church. Our name indicates our weakness and our shame before God, for there can be and there is finally only one church of Christ on earth. Our plurality is a deep anomaly. But our name also indicates that we are aware of the situation, that we do not accept it passively, that we would move forward toward the manifestation of the One Holy

Church. Our council represents, therefore, an emergency solution—a stage on the road—a body living between the time of complete isolation of the churches from each other and the time—on earth or in heaven—when it will be visibly true that there is one Shepherd and one flock.”⁵

On the basis of the platform that membership is open to all who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior, the World Council of Churches celebrates joint communion at its official meetings every six years. However, there are members of the Council whose consciences do not permit them to commune with men of other communions. For this reason four separate communion services are arranged, namely, Reformed, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran. Other worship services are joint services, with preference given to liturgical services.

Fear has been expressed, particularly in strict confessional circles, including our own synod, that the World Council of Churches aims to become a super church, so that all existing denominations and confessions will be replaced by the World Council of Churches. That this is the aim of the World Council of Churches was stoutly denied by Visser't Hooft at Evanston. According to the published report, he said: “The World Council of Churches is essentially an instrument at the service of the churches to assist them in their common task to manifest the true nature of the Church. It is an instrument and must therefore never be considered as an aim in itself. The important thing is not the World Council as an organization. What is important is that the churches should be the Church. It is therefore a sign of confused thinking to speak of the World Council itself as the World Church, and it is completely erroneous to suggest that the World Council is or has any ambition to become a super church, that is, a center of administrative power. There is not a single church in the membership of the council which desires this; there is none which would tolerate this.”⁶

Visser't Hooft, furthermore, reveals that the aim of the World Council of Churches for the future is “first, to remind the churches again and again that cooperation or friendly relations are not enough, for *unity means at least complete, unrestricted fellowship*; second, to create the conditions in which the churches come to know each other, and learn from each other so that the walls of partition become transparent and finally disappear. . . .”⁷

Besides the work of bringing the churches together in fellowship, the World Council of Churches works in a number of practical areas. After World War II the Division of Interchurch Aid and Service to Refugees has helped to re-settle more than 200,000 refugees. This was a most necessary and blessed work. Secondly, the Division of Ecumenical Action has been studying in particular youth work. Thirdly, at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland, Christians of all races have been exploring the meaning of the Christian Gospel for the work and witness of the Church in the world. In the division of studies the World Council of Churches

calls upon the world's best minds to help analyze and to suggest Christian approaches to the problems confronting the Christian church, especially in the area of missions and evangelism. Finally, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs keeps the churches informed about world problems in so far as they concern Christian faith and life.

This very briefly characterizes the World Council of Churches, its work until the present, and its aims for the future. We may have things to criticize in connection with the work of the World Council of Churches and the manner in which it is done. We shall have great difficulty justly criticizing the aim of the World Council of Churches to help heal the harmful divisions within the church of Christ on earth.

The Lutheran World Federation

While the World Council of Churches is looked upon as the instrument of the ecumenical movement for all Protestantism, Lutherans have an organization of their own, whose aim and purpose is to bring Lutherans together. The Lutheran World Federation states its own doctrinal basis as follows: "The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible rule of all church doctrine and practice and sees in the confessions of the Lutheran church, especially the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God." The purposes and aims of the Lutheran World Federation are described in its constitution in the following terms:

1. The Lutheran World Federation shall be a free association of Lutheran churches. It shall have no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it.

2. The purposes of the Lutheran World Federation are:
 - a) To bear united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation;
 - b) to cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran churches of the world;
 - c) to promote fellowship and cooperation in study among Lutherans;
 - d) to foster Lutheran participation in ecumenical movements;
 - e) to develop a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in missions and education; and
 - f) to support Lutheran groups in need of spiritual or material aid.^s

Surely, the doctrinal basis of the Lutheran World Federation is all that a Lutheran could and should desire, and the aims of the Federation are such that a Christian must approve them. We cannot, however, fail to observe that in practice there is much in the Lutheran World Federation that fills the hearts of loyal Lutherans with sorrow, if not consternation. Despite the very fine doctrinal

basis, there is much in some of the churches which belong to the Lutheran World Federation which appears in flat contradiction to the doctrinal basis. Time permits us to call attention only to the study document for the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation which was held in July of this year at Helsinki, Finland, entitled, "On Justification." It must be said that not all competent men who read this document understood it in the same way. This alone should tell us that the document is lacking in clearness. Dr. Hermann Sasse of Adelaide, Australia, analyzed this document in a five-page paper. He concludes, and this essayist concurs wholeheartedly, that the authors of this document hold a broken position toward the Scripture, having capitulated to the modern higher criticism, which attacks particularly the understanding of the Old Testament which we find in the words of Christ and the writings of His apostles, and that also the presentation of the Doctrine of Justification in the document falls far short of the clarity and precision with which this doctrine is set forth in our Lutheran Confessions, and must be rejected as inadequate.

This is being said, not merely to disparage the document, but in interests of truth and of the Lutheran Church.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Movement

We are witnessing in our time a phase of the ecumenical movement which, only a few years ago, would have been thought impossible, though signs of it were beginning to show for some years. The Roman Catholic Church has actively entered the ecumenical movement. It was evident for some time to those who had any acquaintance with present-day Roman Catholic periodicals and other publications that there was great interest in the ecumenical movement, and that trained Roman Catholic theologians were following the movement with meticulous care. I would call attention here to the book by Father Bernard Leeming, S. J., *The Churches and the Church, A Study of Ecumenism*.

In approximately the first half of this book of slightly more than 300 pages Father Leeming ably presents the origin, history, and aims of the ecumenical movement, and in the second half he discusses with equal ability and great candor the Catholic attitude toward ecumenism and the principles upon which this attitude is based. Father Leeming sums up the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement, as he understands it, in the following two propositions: 1) "The Roman Catholic Church does not seek unity for herself, but she is obliged by her commission from Christ to try, with Christian zeal and prudence, to draw others into the unity which Christ has given and preserved."⁹ 2) "The Roman Catholic Church has a duty, to her own members, to dissident fellow Christians and to the world to assert her claim of uniqueness, unity and visibility, and not to allow it to be obscured."¹⁰

Father Leeming says: "It is misleading to say that Rome's only attitude toward separated brethren is 'to demand submission.' She invites them of themselves by God's grace to recognize Christ in His universal church and spontaneously to bring to Him all their gifts and all the goods which they possess. The only 'submission' is submission to charity and to the obedience of faith."¹¹

From this and similar Roman Catholic literature on the ecumenical movement, a Protestant might conclude that individual Catholics at least were adopting a friendlier tone toward Protestants than had been customary in previous times, but that essentially nothing has changed or is likely to change. Yet the careful reader of theological literature cannot help noting that some changes have taken place. If this fact was not recognized earlier, it could not help being recognized when suddenly Pope John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council, invited to it not only the Roman Catholic prelates, but also observers from the Eastern Orthodox Church, from the Anglican church, from the Lutheran church, and from the Reformed churches. Not only were these observers invited, but they were given choice seats in St. Peter's Cathedral, and were shown every consideration and kindness while the Council was in session. To some observers, who were not wholly aware of what had been going on for decades, the action of Pope John came as a great surprise. But actually subtle changes were taking place in Roman Catholicism and these can be traced both in papal announcements, and in responsible theologians and writers within the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps the most important papal document in this connection is the papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, issued by Pope Pius XII June 29, 1943. This whole encyclical deals with the doctrine of the church, and the church itself is viewed under the Biblical and Pauline picture as the mystical body of Christ. Parts of the encyclical read as though Pope Pius XII stood firmly by the Old Catholic definition of the church, as the Reformers faced it, and as Robert Cardinal Bellarmine formulated it in his day: "The church is a union of men who are united by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by participation in the same sacraments under the direction of their lawful pastors, especially of the one representative of Christ on earth, the Pope of Rome."¹²

Later he says of those who are not at present members of the Roman Catholic Church: "May they then enter into the Catholic unity, and united with us in the organic oneness of the body of Jesus Christ, may they hasten to the one Head in the society of glorious love. With persevering prayer to the Spirit of love and truth we wait for them with open arms to return, not to a stranger's house, but to their own, their Father's house."¹³

To the best of our knowledge it is from the time of this encyclical on that Protestants, including Lutherans, have been called "separated brethren" by many Roman Catholic writers, particularly those of an ecumenical turn of mind.

But the greatest indication that a different atmosphere has developed within Roman Catholicism toward non-Roman Catholic Christians is the Second Vatican Council which Pope John XXIII announced at St. Paul's Basilica in 1959 and which met during the latter part of 1962 and into the early months of 1963, and then recessed with the expectation that it would resume at a later date.

The purposes and aims of the Second Vatican Council as understood by Catholics themselves are set forth in an article by Daniel Callahan, one of the editors of the more liberal Catholic magazine, *Commonweal*, in a booklet entitled, *Looking Toward the Council*, and published with the approval of the hierarchy.

In contrast to the circumstances which caused the calling of other councils, Callahan finds that the present Vatican Council "has been called under very healthy circumstances: it was called for positive rather than negative purposes; it was called from a position of strength rather than a position of weakness; it was called to effect positive ends rather than to correct abuses or put enemies to rout."

He states that "the most important gains seem to be as follows: the gradual development of a more viable notion of human freedom, both religious and political; the emergence of a revitalized—and theologically sounder—liturgical life; the emergence of a competent Biblical scholarship and a return to the Bible; a re-awakened interest in Christian unity; and a new understanding of the existential dimensions of Christian life. In each of these areas there has been considerable progress, considerable boldness and an unfolding of possibilities little conceived of by earlier generations."

He fears, however, that "each of these important movements is very close to reaching the critical stage. For the most part, the great bulk of the progress has come from the work of individual scholars and minority groups within the church. Though each has had the blessing and encouragement of the *Magisterium*, none has quite (with the exception, perhaps, of the liturgical movement) so proved itself that its work is beyond all danger of suffering a reversal—one need only recall the recent 'Monitum' on Biblical studies. Each of the movements has had opposition, each has had to struggle against critics within the church who were hesitant, suspicious or hostile. So far these critics have managed to do little more than offer harassment; but the more advanced the movements become the more vociferous the critics are likely to become. Unless, that is, the council can bless and establish beyond attack the work that has taken place recently."

Callahan feels that "this is particularly crucial in the area of the church's recently awakened ecumenical interest. So far, the interest has been of a very general sort and good so far as it has gone. But it has, as yet, not gone far enough. The next stage of the Catholic ecumenical movement will be a far more difficult one than the first. The first stage concentrated on awakening interest in the problem of Christian unity and in urging charity, self-analysis and a sympathetic attempt to understand Reformation thought and its

aftermath. The second stage, logically, should call for a close re-examination of the present teachings of the church in the light of the need for Christian unity. It should call for a willingness to modify, where possible, those teachings and practices of the church which are a hindrance to reunion. Along with this second step should go increased contact between Catholic and non-Catholic scholars, clergy and laity—and constant official high-level discussions between members of the hierarchy and leaders of separated churches. The importance of the council for the rapprochement of Christian churches will lie in giving the present activities a formal stamp of approval and in making them an integral and important part of present church life. That step taken, the more advanced steps can proceed from a firmly established base.”¹⁴

We have quoted at length from a Catholic source—and let it be understood that it is a *liberal* Catholic source—to show how at least a segment of Roman Catholicism understands the Second Vatican Council and its purposes and aims. Let it also be said that while there is considerable opposition within Roman Catholicism itself to the reforms, and I believe that we must call them such, that have been going on in the Roman Catholic Church, it also appears evident that Pope John XXIII placed himself solidly on the side of the liberal Catholics and of reform. Certainly it is evident from the quotation from Callahan that liberal Catholics themselves are not totally certain that their program of reform and the steps which they hope will lead to reunion with those whom they call “separated brethren” will continue to find favor with the hierarchy. The death of Pope John the week after Pentecost, 1963, must have filled liberal Catholics with fear for the permanence and continued development of their program of reform and reunion. However, the election of Cardinal Montini as Pope Paul VI and his declaration in his very first address that the task of the ecumenical council is viewed by him as “the principal labor on which we intend to expend all the energies that the Lord has given us,”¹⁵ must have reassured them that there is not to be a sudden halt to the program of bringing the church’s theology and practice up to date, but that they could hope that the continued council would continue the labors toward reform and reunion.

We have tried to sketch, altogether too briefly, the developments that have taken place in Roman Catholicism since 1871, the transformation of Protestants, in the eyes of Roman Catholics, from heretics who must be anathematized, into separated brethren, who must be accounted members of the body of Christ, and wooed, in order that they may return to their true home, the one holy catholic and apostolic church as represented in the Roman Catholic Church, and a Vatican Council at which Protestant theologians are made welcome. We have not in particular sought to evaluate or to criticize these developments. We needed to realize clearly what the developments are before we can evaluate and criticize.

II.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND
THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

In Francis Pieper's *Dogmatics*, which was first published in the year 1920, the doctrine of the Church occupies a total of 38 pages. If we add the closely related doctrine of the ministry, we may add an additional 30 pages. By comparison, he devotes nearly 300 pages of the same volume to the means of grace, and of these 300 pages slightly more than 100 to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. If this distribution is any indication at all of conditions in the Church at the time Pieper's *Dogmatics* was written, one must conclude that the doctrine of the Church was not a burning issue at the time.

Conditions have greatly changed since that time. Our library catalog at Concordia Theological Seminary lists approximately 80 volumes devoted wholly or at least predominantly to the doctrine of the Church. A few of these, like Walther, *Kirche und Amt*, are older. By far the most of these 80 books are of very recent date, that is since 1950. Not a few of them bear dates ranging from 1960 to 1963.

Everything relating to the doctrine of the Church appears to be minutely examined in these volumes. The New Testament concept of the Church is treated again and again.

This apparent interest in the doctrine of the Church in our time is a result of the ecumenical movement. Due to the ecumenical movement, in which the churches look at the sadly divided state of Christendom and concern themselves with the question on how these divisions may be healed, the doctrine of the Church occupies Christian theologians above all other doctrines.

In the following we shall attempt at least to delineate the problem. In the New Testament the doctrine of the Church appears to be very simple. After St. Peter had made his notable confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Lord not merely said to him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," but He also added: "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. 16:17-19. Roman Catholic theology finds in this passage grounds for teaching that Peter was the first pope, and that the Church is built on St. Peter and must therefore be obedient to the pope.

So far as Lutherans are concerned, let it suffice to say here, that the Lord promised that He would build the Church upon the rock. Lutherans have not understood that St. Peter himself is the rock upon which the Church shall be built, but that it is rather Peter's confession of the deity of Christ. Nor have Lutherans un-

derstood that when the Lord Jesus gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that this constituted Peter the first pope, as it is understood in Roman Catholicism, but Lutherans have pointed out that the Lord gave the same office of the keys to all the apostles when He said to them: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, "receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose-soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."¹⁶ This understanding agrees with everything that we read in the New Testament concerning the founding and governing of the Church. It appears evident from the New Testament that the Church was composed of those who accepted the Lord Jesus in faith as the Son of God and their Savior. For when St. Peter in his sermon on Pentecost had summed up the meaning of all that God had done in and through Christ, he addressed to the assembled multitude this exhortation: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."¹⁷ Then we are told: "They that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about 3,000 souls."¹⁸ These, together with others who accepted the Gospel, were from that day on the Church, and are henceforth so designated in the book of Acts.¹⁹ The New Testament Church had come into being through the proclamation of the Gospel. The members of the Church were those who had accepted the Gospel, the believers. These two Scriptural facts, that it is the preaching of the Gospel which brings the Church into existence, and that the members of the Church are those who accept the Gospel in faith, have been taken by the Lutheran church into her definition of the Church, as is evident from the Lutheran Confessions. In the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, we read: "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered." In the Smalcald Articles, Article 12, the Confession says: "Thank God, today a child of seven years knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd." It goes without saying that the Shepherd is here understood to be not the pope, but Christ Himself. Wholly in harmony with this definition Luther says in Article 3 of the Large Catechism, discussing the words of the Apostles' Creed—"I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints . . ."—"This is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it. . . .

"Everything in the Christian church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and Signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the grace of the Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help one another.

"But outside of this Christian church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness. Therefore, all who seek and wish to merit holiness, not through the Gospel and forgiveness of sin, but by their works, have expelled and severed themselves from this Church."

Calvinism has complicated the doctrine of the Church in that Calvinist teachers prominently drew the doctrine of the election into the doctrine of the Church. Generally, however, the Reformed churches have with us stressed the fact that it is faith that makes a person a member of the holy Christian church.

The greatest difficulty which the ecumenical movement encounters with respect to the doctrine of the Church is encountered in Roman Catholicism, and in a lesser measure in the Anglican or Episcopalian church. In both of these the Episcopate, or office of the bishop, not as a pastor of a congregation, but as a ruler of a diocese, plays a most important part. Long before the Council of Trent, which met during the 16th century, it was known that the concept of the Church in Roman Catholicism was heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic view of the primacy of the pope, that is, of the view that the pope at Rome is above all other bishops, and is the very vicar of Christ on earth. The definition of the Church in the Augsburg Confession, "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered," was severely criticized by Roman Catholic theologians after the Augsburg Confession was read. Melanchthon responded in the Apology: "But the adversaries perhaps require a new Roman definition, that the Church be defined thus, namely, that it is the supreme outward monarchy of the whole world, in which the Roman pontiff necessarily has unquestioned power, which no one is permitted to dispute or censure."²⁰ How closely Melanchthon was able to approximate the definition with which Roman Catholic theologians were operating may be judged from the common definition of the Church, which is current in Roman Catholicism today, and credited to Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, the contemporary of the Lutheran dogmatician John Gerhard, although it really goes back much farther in the history of the Church, and can be traced all the way to St. Augustine. "The outward legal side is emphasized in St. Robert Bellarmine's well known definition: 'the Church is a union of men who are united by the profession of the same

Christian faith, and by participation in the same sacraments under the direction of their lawful pastors, especially of the one representative of Christ on earth, the pope of Rome.'"²¹

It must be plain to anyone who reads the encyclical of Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, that this pontiff was not operating with this so-called juridical concept of the Church alone, but that there is a conscious attempt in the encyclical to emphasize the spiritual side of the Church, the Church as the body of the faithful, the mystical body of Christ. Over this we can genuinely rejoice. We would, however, be very foolish if we believed that all things were now well or on the road to being well with the concept and definition of the Church in Roman Catholicism. Also a liberal Roman Catholic like Father Hans Kueng of Tübingen, who at times sounds far more evangelical than one is accustomed to in Roman Catholic theologians generally, makes it clear in his very stimulating and readable book entitled, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, that the old definition has not been abandoned. Father Kueng says on this subject: "By the Church we understand 'the people of God in the New Testament, founded by Jesus Christ, *hierarchically organized*, serving to advance the reign of God and the salvation of men; and which exists as the mystical body of Christ.'"²² When this definition stresses that the Church is hierarchically organized, it wants to tell us that it is organized with bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and at the very head the pope himself as the vicar of Christ. This is the definition of the Church with which also ecumenically minded Roman Catholics, including Father Kueng, the late Pope John XXIII, and even, if he turns out to be as ecumenically minded as his predecessor was, the present Pope Paul VI, must operate. This is Roman Catholic theology held through the centuries, and not likely to be changed one iota, in spite of the fact that Protestants and other Christians that are not in communion with Rome are no longer branded as heretics, but wooed as separated brethren.

The Marks of the Church

Wholly in line with the respective definitions of the Church in Lutheranism and in Roman Catholicism are the views which these communions hold concerning the so-called marks of the Church. According to the Lutheran Confessions the marks of the Church are the pure preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accord with Christ's command. Other essential marks of the Church Lutheranism does not recognize.

According to Roman Catholicism, the chief marks of the Church are the oneness of the Church, understood of the unity of the Church under the hierarchy, with the Roman pope at the head, the holiness of the Church, including the presence of saints in the Roman Catholic sense as members of the Church, the Catholicity of the Church, understood of the presence of the Roman Catholic church in all the world, and finally, the apostolicity of the Church in the sense that the Church has bishops who have come down in

unbroken apostolic succession from the apostles, every bishop having been consecrated by a bishop who can trace his own consecration finally back to the hands of the apostles themselves.

The Unity of the Church

Contrary to the teaching regarding the unity of the Church in Roman Catholicism, Holy Scripture teaches an inner unity of the Church, which Christians can neither establish nor safeguard, but which is the inalienable gift of God to His Church. Our Lord speaks of the Church as One when He says, "Upon this rock I will build my church."²³ The Scripture also speaks of the Church as One in Ephesians where St. Paul says concerning Christ that God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."²⁴

But Holy Scripture, which speaks of the Church as *being* One also knows of the need for Christians to *foster unity* in the Church and to guard against disunity. One of the passages which is much quoted by ecumenists, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, is from our Lord's highpriestly prayer, "Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they may all 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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast loved me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."²⁵

These words have suffered much at the hands of interpreters, and there have been sharp disagreements concerning their meaning also among some Lutherans. The debate has revolved around the question whether this is merely an inner unity in the Spirit, or whether it also involves an outward unity. Some have concluded on the basis of this passage that the churches must forget their differences and all become one great visible church. Others have limited the words of the Lord so severely that they have taught that all this speaks of is the Unity of the Church in the *Una Sancta* or the invisible Holy Christian church, and that they have nothing to do with anything outward. We believe that both interpretations are in error. The Lord Jesus certainly does not say here that people should forget their differences and rush into church union. Nor does He say that the unity of the Christian church is merely an inner unity without outward manifestation. The very words of the Lord indicate that this latter understanding is false because He prays that the Church may be One in order "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." And later on He prays, "that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." In other words, the unity of the Church is to be observed by the world

and the world is to learn something from it, namely, that God has sent Jesus into the world, and that He has loved Jesus and His Church.

Now the world is not omniscient. It cannot see the invisible. If the unity for which our Lord prays is merely an inward, invisible unity without any outward signs, it can teach the world nothing. Certainly our Lord wants the Church to be united not only in heart but also outwardly. This is the teaching of the New Testament throughout.

Another great passage concerning the unity of the Church which we must not overlook at this point is Paul's plea in Ephesians, "that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."²⁶

From this passage we learn certainly that there is a side to the unity of the Church which must be cultivated by Christians themselves and which they cannot cultivate unless they have first cultivated the proper Christian attitudes of mind and heart. But where these proper attitudes have been cultivated and Christians are minded toward unity they have in their faith itself the most powerful dynamic toward the unity of the Church. This motive and dynamic for endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is expressed by St. Paul in the following words: "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." In the Christian faith there is every pull toward unity and no reason whatsoever for division and offense. The divisions and offenses within Christendom are sown there by Satan. The good seed of the Gospel calls us to oneness and unity of the spirit.

It is very instructive to see how Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism view the unity of the Church in harmony with the concepts of the Church in each of these communions. On this subject the Augsburg Confession says: "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: 'one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,' and so forth."²⁷

It is significant that the Lutheran Confessions state that to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. These two things are the marks of the Church. Where these are, the Church is. Where the Church can agree on the Gospel and on the Sacraments, there the Church has true unity.

We cannot refrain from remarking here that also within Lutheranism there is the greatest danger that we lose sight of this statement of our confessions. At the time of the Reformation, Roman Catholics demanded that the same ceremonies should be observed in all churches. Our confession says distinctly that this is not necessary. Everything depends on Word and Sacrament. In our time we have heard within Lutheranism that the practice of the churches must be the same, and if the practice in one church is not in harmony with that which the other considers correct practice, this is cause for the breaking of fellowship. We would here only humbly remind those who are of this opinion that also in the Apostolic Church the practice was not the same throughout the church. In the church in Jerusalem many people considered it necessary to circumcise their male children and they so practiced. In the Gentile world this was not done. Yet fellowship was not disrupted. In Jerusalem men would have been horrified had they found out that they had eaten meat which had been sacrificed to idols. In the Gentile world it happened right along, and St. Paul told the Christians that they were to ask no questions when they went to visit anywhere. The meat was in itself clean. Only if someone should call to their attention that the meat had been sacrificed to idols, then they should not eat it in order to avoid giving offense.²⁸ No, as desirable as unified practice within the Church may be, it is not always possible, and neither Scripture nor our confessions make unanimity with respect to practice a mark of the Church or an essential for the unity of the Church.

After this degression, brought on by conditions in our own churches today, we return to the discussion of the unity of the Church. The Roman Catholic theologian, Adolf Tanquerey, whose dogmatical treatise has been widely used in the instruction of priests in Roman Catholic seminaries, defines the unity of the Church as follows: (we translate from the Latin) "That property by means of which the Church remains undivided in itself under the same rule, the same profession of faith and communion, and separated from all other organizations." The unity of rule he defines as follows: "The unity of rule by the strength of which all the faithful are lawfully and outwardly subjected to the bishops who in turn obey the Roman pontiff. This is the very firm foundation of the other unities; for by schism it is divided." The unity of faith he defines as follows: "The unity of faith gathers all Christians who believe the truths revealed by God and by the magisterium of the Church in outward profession; however, it is destroyed by heresy." The unity of communion he defines thus: "The unity of communion or of worship proceeds from this that the faithful love one another by inward charity, and are outwardly united by participation in the same worship and sacrifice and the participation of the same Sacraments. Excommunication nullifies this unity."²⁹

A Lutheran cannot help feeling that all this puts something else, namely, the hierarchy and obedience to the hierarchy, in place

of the Gospel. Lest we believe that this is merely the teaching of the Old Guard in the Roman Catholic church, and that under Pope John XXIII's teaching of bringing the church up to date, this teaching will be changed, we quote from modern Catholic sources. We quote Pope John himself when he says in his address to the diocesan presidents of Italian Catholic Action: "The ecumenical council will be a demonstration, uniquely far-reaching in its significance, of truly worldwide Catholicity. . . . By God's grace, then, we shall hold this council: we shall prepare for it by working hard at whatever on the Catholic side most needs to be healed and strengthened according to the teaching of our Lord. When we have carried out this strenuous task, eliminated everything which could at the human level hinder our rapid progress, then we shall point to the Church in all her splendor, *sine macula et ruga*, and say to all those who are separated from us, Orthodox, Protestants, and the rest: Look, brothers, this is the Church of Christ. We have striven to be true to her, to ask the Lord for grace that she may remain forever what He willed. Come; here the way lies open for meeting and for homecoming; come; take, or resume, that place which is yours, which for many of you was your father's place. Oh, what joy! what a flowering even in civil and social life may be looked for by the whole world if we once have religious peace in the re-establishment of the family of Christendom!"³⁰

Here, also, we may be certain that the definition of the unity of the Church as we heard it from the respected Roman Catholic dogmatician of a by-gone day, Adolf Tanquerey, is in the back of the pope's mind. The unity of the Church is the unity of the Roman Catholic church under the hierarchy of bishops who are obedient to the pope. This is what Lutherans, from Luther down to our own time, have at all times criticized about Roman Catholicism. The Gospel has been falsified. The Biblical concept of saving grace has been changed. . . . When a Roman Catholic, according to the Catholic definition of grace, says that we are saved by grace, he means that we are saved by some quality which God has poured into our own hearts. Are we wrong in insisting that this is one way of teaching salvation by works?

For the sake of unity as Rome understands it she is willing to reform the liturgy, introduce at least in a large measure the vernacular into the divine service also of the mass, grant the congregation opportunity to participate in the mass; she may be willing to reconsider the celibacy of the clergy under circumstances; she may even be willing to consider communion under both forms, particularly on special occasions. Can the Roman Catholic church also reform herself at this deepest depth, in her understanding of the grace of God in Christ Jesus and of the Gospel itself, from which flows the concept of the Church and the Unity of the Church?

If there can be no reform here, all other reforms are merely palliatives, which can never heal the division which Lutherans

felt compelled to enter because of their understanding of the Gospel of our salvation.

III.

THE STANCE OF OUR CHURCH WITH RESPECT TO THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Christianity is both a faith and a way of life. Our church and its members live in the ecumenical age, and must find their place and stance in it. What happens in the ecumenical movement concerns us all. We may or may not approve of what happens. It still happens, and it concerns us.

What have we been doing in the past, and what are we doing today with respect to the ecumenical movement? First of all, it should be said that we have not officially entered the ecumenical movement by becoming a member either of the Lutheran World Federation or of the World Council of Churches. Our synod has consistently declined the invitations to membership in these bodies. We have, however, sent observers to some of the meetings of both these federations of churches.

By sending observers to the meetings, both of the World Council of Churches and of the Lutheran World Federation, our synod has indicated that it is vitally interested in these two federations of churches and their work. It has shown that it desires to know these groups, their aims and objectives, and their work at first hand, not merely by hearsay, perhaps by the reports of prejudiced people, both for and against.

But why, if our church is interested in these ecumenical organizations and their work, are we not members? Things hang together intimately with the attitude of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the great majority of its membership toward what has been called religious unionism. The term *unionism* has not always been understood and defined the same way. It arose, it seems, during the early decades of the 19th century, when Prussian kings were trying to unite the Lutheran and Reformed communions by royal decree, according to which Lutheran and Reformed communicants were to commune at the same altar. From this first use of the term *unionism*, the term has been widened to include every kind of worshipping and working together of churches that are not in pulpit and altar fellowship, *even of Lutheran churches* that have no pulpit and altar fellowship with each other even though they may subscribe to the same Lutheran confessions.

This stand, which seems so strange and incomprehensible to many Christians in other communions, is based on the understanding in our church of certain Scripture passages which command Christians to avoid false prophets and false teachers. Our Synodical Catechism sets forth this position under the question: When do we use the doctrine of the church properly? The Catechism answers: "We use the doctrine of the church properly a) when we take heed to be and remain members of the invisible church by

sincere faith in the Redeemer; b) when we adhere to the church which teaches the Word of God in all its purity; c) when we do all in our power to maintain, promote, and extend this church by prayer, personal service, and financial support; d) when we avoid all false churches and all other organizations that profess a religion that is false." Under point d) the following Scripture passages are quoted: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are ravening wolves;"³¹ "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world;"³² "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them;"³³ and finally, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."³⁴

In considering the use of these Scripture passages for our stand on unionism, we ought to be aware of the fact that the Scripture passages all speak of individuals who are or are to be teachers of the faithful. It does not speak of churches. In fact, the denominations to whom we apply these passages today did not exist at the time the passages were written, nor was there a counterpart of the denominations. In fact, had Christians at all times heeded the command of Scripture to beware of false teachers, the denominations as we know them could never have come into existence.

I mention all this in order that we may not be of the opinion that when the holy writers penned these passages, they were speaking to a situation precisely like the one we face today. Our fathers here made an application from the passages to a situation that they faced. They apply passages which were written against individual teachers to churches. I would remind that the part of the answer to the question with which we are dealing, namely, point d) reads "when we avoid all false churches, and all other organizations that profess a religion that is false."

In evaluating the use which our fathers made of Scripture on this question we must also call attention to the fact that one of the passages³⁵ warns Christians, not against fellowship with erring fellow Christians, but against being unequally yoked together with *unbelievers*. The context, as the passage seems to show plainly, is of the attendance of the Corinthians at idol feasts, which were very common in Corinth. That is why St. Paul asks "what agree-

ment hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Therefore the admonition, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," refers to the Christians coming out from among the heathen and their idolatrous worship. It appears unfair to fellow Christians in erring churches to apply this passage to them.

In this connection we ought to give some attention to a thesis on the doctrine of the Church from Dr. C. F. W. Walther's classic monograph, *Kirche und Amt*. Thesis 8 of this book has been translated in the booklet, *Walther and the Church*, as follows:

"While God gathers for Himself a holy church of the elect in places where the Word of God is not preached in entire purity and the holy Sacraments are not administered altogether in accordance with their institution by Jesus Christ—provided the Word of God and the Sacraments are not utterly denied but essentially remain in those places—still, everyone is obliged for the sake of his salvation to flee from all false teachers and to avoid all heterodox churches or sects and, on the other hand, to profess allegiance and adhere to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such."³⁶

Walther then carries out three points: "A. Also in erring, heretical congregations there are children of God; also in them the true church becomes manifest by means of the remnants of the pure Word of God and the Sacraments that still remain in them; B. Everyone is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee all false prophets and to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches or sects."

Dr. Walther in a very fine Scriptural manner makes it the duty of every Christian, first of all, to flee all false prophets, and then adds, it is everyone's duty also to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches, or sects. Walther in his day had warned particularly the German Lutheran immigrants to America against hastily joining any and every kind of church that they found in this country. He was very soundly Lutheran in granting that also in other churches there were true Christians, but he was just as soundly Lutheran in insisting that Lutheran immigrants ought to join sound Lutheran congregations. When, then, he says that they ought to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches or sects he plainly means that *they should not join these*. That this is his meaning becomes evident in point C. "Every Christian is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to profess allegiance and adhere to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such."

Surely this is a very sane and Scriptural position, wholly above criticism. However, some have concluded from this position that we ought not only to refrain from joining churches which are in part given to error, but that one must avoid them utterly and entirely. Fellowship there has been understood of having any kind of dealings with them whatsoever. Dr. Walther plainly understood it of membership.

The extreme position which we have mentioned has led to this, that some among us condemn every kind of conversation with Christians of another denomination; they condemn sending observers to the Lutheran World Federation and to the World Council of Churches; they believe that under no circumstances dare a Lutheran address a group from another church; they try in every way they know to seal off Lutheranism hermetically from all other Christians. This is called by some "the historic position" of our church. Let me say here that this is not "the historic position" of our church but a caricature of the same. It is a fact that Luther went to Marburg and spoke there with Zwingli about the disputed doctrine of the Lord's Supper. And though they did not get together, Luther agreed that he would consider them Christians though he saw another spirit in them and knew that he could not have altar fellowship with them. After the day of the Reformation, time and again Lutheran theologians sat down with Roman Catholics and with Reformed at some of the great colloquies which aimed at restoring the unity of the Church, the loss of which all of them bemoaned deeply, the Lutherans as much as any of the rest. The last such colloquy of which I have any knowledge was held at Thorn in Poland in the year 1645.

Much was wrong with the manner in which the colloquy had been planned and in which it was conducted by the Roman Catholic party. It is no wonder that little if any good came of it. But the important thing is that it was held. The Lutheran theologians, including Abraham Calov, were willing to sit down with representatives of other confessions and to discuss disputed doctrines.

This was also the spirit of Dr. Walther during the early decades of our church here in America. He personally called for free conferences among all the warring Lutherans to discuss the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. It is a fact that finally these free conferences came to grief. It is, however, also a fact that inestimable good was accomplished by them.

These things are said here in order that we may know that it is not the historic Lutheran position that Lutherans avoid all false churches to the extent of having nothing to do with them in any way, shape or form. Time and again they have entered into discussion with others in order to do away with the divisions and the offenses that were troubling the church. The passages which were uppermost in their minds here were not the ones that said we should avoid false prophets but the prayer of the Lord that the Church may be one, even as He and the Father are one (John 17) and the admonition of St. Paul: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In this way they escaped both dangers, that of an un-Biblical unionism, and that of an un-Biblical and un-Christian separatism. Our church today, in the midst of the ecumenical age, will do well to take to heart both admonitions of the Holy Scripture, the admonition to avoid false teachers, and the admonition to work for the unity of the Church wherever this

can be done without a denial of the faith. In trying to find our place and stance in the midst of the ecumenical age and movement we may well ask ourselves, what are we to do in order that we may both please God and serve His Church. In harmony with the doctrine of the Church as it has been set forth, I would say, first of all, let us never forget that there are Christians also in other churches. There are Christians in Roman Catholicism; there are Christians in the Reformed churches wherever modernism has not succeeded in utterly destroying the Gospel; there are Christians in other Lutheran churches which are not in pulpit and altar fellowship with us; there are Christians in those churches which we are accustomed to call the sects.

Most certainly we owe it to them that we love them. They are children of our heavenly Father by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are our brethren. We may be separated from them by denominational bounds. Error that is tolerated and taught in their midst may make it utterly impossible for us to enter into fellowship with them in this sense, that we practice pulpit and altar fellowship with them. But one fellowship we dare not deny them—the fellowship of love. They are our brethren and we must love them.

Because we love them we must pray for them. When in the great prayers of our church in the divine service we pray for the Church of God on earth, let us remember particularly those Christians who are found in communions other than our own who may not have the Gospel in the same purity in which it is found among us by God's grace.

In this connection may I plead that we pray particularly for the Bible scholars in the Roman Catholic church who have been working hard and faithfully both for a proper understanding of the Holy Scripture for their own persons, and who have also sought to teach such an understanding in their own church. The news magazine *Time* in the issue of May 3, 1963, in the religion section, carried an article entitled, "The Bible," with a subhead, "The Catholic Scholars."

Concerning the status of Biblical scholarship within Roman Catholicism the article says: "Catholic Bible experts began catching up with the rest of the scholarly world after 1943 when Pius XII issued his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. Written largely by German Jesuit Augustin Bea, now the cardinal in charge of Rome's Secretariat for promoting Christian unity, the encyclical encouraged Catholics to study the historical background of Scripture, and to use modern critical techniques developed by Protestant and Jewish scholars. Bible scholars hailed the encyclical as their *Magna Charta*; conservative theologians thought it an open invitation to a modernist revival." This brief quotation should tell us two things: first, that there is a revival of Biblical scholarship within Roman Catholicism; secondly, this Roman Catholic Biblical scholarship is in great danger of falling into the clutches of the so-called higher literary and histori-

cal criticism. Let us pray for the Biblical scholars in Roman Catholicism that God's Holy Spirit may guide them that they may behold wonders in the Word of God, that the truth may become clear to them, and that this revived Biblical scholarship within Roman Catholicism may become a blessing to this church as it enters the ecumenical era. And even as we pray for the Christians in the Roman Catholic church, so let us also pray for our brethren in the World Council of Churches.

We think often that the World Council of Churches is a gathering of unclean spirits where false teachers and modernists have the upper hand. It is true, churches which have been known for modernism, and which have been under the leadership of grievous false teachers in the past, are members of the World Council of Churches. This cannot but fill us with grave concern. It is, however, also true that the leading voices which have come out of the World Council of Churches have been conservative rather than liberal. They have stressed the fact that Jesus Christ is our God and Savior, and they have sought to unite the churches on this platform. We may criticize this platform as being not sufficient. No one dare to say that it is incorrect, much less that it is modernistic or otherwise heretical. When we pray for the Church let us pray for our Christian brethren in the World Council of Churches that God may give them faith and courage to confess His holy name and to walk worthy of their Christian calling. And as we pray for the Church let us pray also for our fellow Lutherans with whom we are not at this time in pulpit and altar fellowship, whether they be here in the United States, or in Europe, or behind the Iron Curtain, or in one or the other of the young Lutheran churches on the mission field. Our hearts should go out to these brethren and we should pray God's blessings down upon them in order that they may be faithful to the Savior who has called them and whose name they confess.

And as we pray these blessings upon our own separated brethren, let us trust God that through His Word He will draw them closer to Himself and lead them more and more into the truth so that He Himself will make us all one in Him.

Besides this duty of praying for each other, which is one that cannot be questioned by any right-thinking person, there is a duty which may seem downright dangerous but which is a duty nevertheless, the duty to criticize the Church. Father Hans Kueng, in the book, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, refers to this duty in the following words: "As a church of men, sinful men, the church, though a divine foundation, needs criticizing; as the Church of God she is, more than any other institution, worth criticizing. To show by criticism what has become humanly deformed in a church is a necessary preliminary to any reform. How can failures and abuses be corrected if they cannot be spoken of and discussed? How can we ever do without those who put into words what needs to be said if the Church is to make spiritual progress, what many others are thinking and because of which they are suffering?"³¹

What Father Kueng here has so well expressed, and what he meant for his own church in particular, and what he is also practicing honestly, so it seems to us, with respect to his own church, we Lutherans ought to be practicing with respect to our church.

We said before that this duty might seem even dangerous. Who likes to criticize his church? There are, of course, some people who do it in a way that shocks and disgusts their brethren. There is a type of criticism, practiced too often toward other communions, that has in it little if anything of the Spirit of Christ. There is also criticism on the part of some Lutherans of their own church, which indicates anything but the Spirit of God and seems to smack rather of the spirit of contentiousness and complete selfishness. We are not asking for such criticism of our church. Our church has too much of it now.

However, criticism is also the act or art of criticizing, or judging by some standard. In this sense we need to criticize our church constantly. We need to judge it by a standard, the standard, first of all, of God's holy Word, and then of our Lutheran Confessions which have been drawn up as a correct exposition of the Word of God. We have probably done too little of this kind of criticism. Also, in our midst in particular, the Lutheran Confessions have been neglected far too much, and also the Holy Scripture has not been studied and applied as diligently as it should have been. Of this kind of criticism of our church we ought to have far more than we have had. If we all, laymen, pastors, professors, subject our church, its teachings, its practice, to searching criticism according to the standards of the Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, we may be able to do much to help her find her place and stance in the ecumenical era. Let us take this duty of criticizing our church very seriously. Only let us make sure that we never forget that the Church, being the people of God, needs to be criticized in love and constructively. Of this kind of criticism we shall not easily get too much.

But praying for the Church and constructively criticizing the Church are only two of the steps that we need to take during the ecumenical era. The ecumenical era is known by this name, because the churches are actively engaged in examining their differences and in working toward the elimination of these so that the unity of the Church may not be something which only God can see but which becomes evident also to the world, in order that the world may believe that the Father has sent the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. Praying for each other, praying for the Church, constructively criticizing the Church must then lead to communication between the churches concerning their differences. A certain amount of this communication has always been going on. Churches have talked to each other, particularly in their periodicals. An examination of the periodicals of our own church will bear this out. However, it is also true that an examination of the periodicals of our church will indicate that at times this talking to other

churches, this criticizing of the things that are wrong in them, has been carried on in a way little calculated to produce the desired results.

Perhaps we have not always realized sufficiently the real difficulty that human beings experience in the field of communication. When this communication is carried on by the printed word, there is real danger that the divisions will become not less but even greater because of the misunderstandings and the hurt feelings that develop. Very often when we meet a person with whom we have had a difference of opinion face to face and can talk it over, we managed to get certain misunderstandings and misconceptions out of the way, and the chance to get together is much improved.

This is true particularly in the communication between churches. There ought to be personal, face to face confrontation. We should speak here of a phase of the ecumenical movement which has been carried on for some time in Europe among Lutherans, Reformed and Catholics on a community basis, a movement which has also spread to America. In a certain community particularly the clergymen of various denominations, but in some instances also laymen, come together for a discussion of the doctrines and differences of the churches. They come together, not in order to debate and to defeat one another, but to examine the beliefs and teachings of the churches in the light of God's Word. Where this is done in an honest and open spirit, no charge of unionism ought to be raised against a brother who takes part in such a discussion. How can we ever hope to heal the divisions in the churches unless we talk to each other openly and at length?

Our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has been engaged in some of these endeavors. The so-called "Bad Boll Conferences" after World War II were largely of this nature, although they were limited to various kinds of Lutherans. Our recent discussions with some Presbyterian groups are also of this nature. Far more of this could very well be done and needs to be done if the divisions in the churches are to grow less and, perhaps by God's grace, eventually to disappear.

In entering thus into dialog, we need to bear in mind that the church has above all things two duties, the first of which is to preach the Gospel. This is our Savior's marching order: "Go ye and teach all nations. Preach the Gospel to every creature." The second is to guard the purity of the Gospel.

When we engage in dialog we are not privileged to sell the truth, or even any part of the truth, down the river for the sake of peace and unity. However, we must enter into the discussion not in the spirit of contentiousness, which the Pharisees constantly brought to the discussions in which they engaged the Lord, but in the spirit of the Lord Himself, who could talk with the Pharisee Nicodemus, with the Samaritan woman at the well, with Roman centurions, in fact, with all kinds and conditions of men, and who

very often succeeded in gaining them because grace was poured into His lips and gracious words proceeded from His mouth.

May Christ, the Head of the Church, which is His Body, graciously grant that whatever is undertaken by our own church in the ecumenical age for the reunion of the churches may be carried on in harmony with His own instructions, and may He graciously bless every effort that is according to His will.

NOTES

1. I Corinthians 1:10.
2. Romans 1:17, 18.
3. Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961). Lists about 250 religious bodies in the United States which consider themselves Christian. Eighteen of these approximately 250 groups are Lutheran. Not all of these represent warring bodies, and some of them have merged since 1961, but there is much evidence here that the churches in general, including Lutheranism, present a sadly divided house.
4. H. N. Bate, *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August 3 to 21, 1927*, (London, 1927), p. 492.
5. *Official Report* (New York: Harper and Brothers), pp. 28 f.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
8. *Proceedings of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly, Lund, Sweden, 1948* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House), pp. 100-104.
9. Father Bernard Leeming, S. J., *The Churches and the Church, A Study of Ecumenism* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960), p. 228.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
12. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder Book Company, 1954).
13. Pegis, *The Wisdom of Catholicism* (New York: Modern Library, 1949).
14. Daniel Callahan, *Looking Toward the Council* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962).
15. *Commonweal*, July 5, 1963, p. 387.
16. John 20:21-23.
17. Acts 2:38.
18. Acts 2:41.
19. See Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1, and many other passages.
20. Apology, Articles 7 and 8.
21. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1954), p. 269.
22. Hans Kueng, *The Council, Reform and Reunion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961). In part this definition quotes from a modern German Roman Catholic *Dogmatics* by M. Schmauss, Munich, 1958, Vol. 3, pp. 1 and 48.
23. Matthew 16:18.
24. Ephesians 1:22-23.
25. John 17:20-22.
26. Ephesians 4:1-6.

27. Augsburg Confession, Article VII.
28. I Corinthians 10:25-33.
29. Tanqueray, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae* (Paris: Desclee et socii, 1937), paragraph 771.
30. Kueng, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 and 7.
31. Matthew 7:15.
32. I John 4:1.
33. Romans 16:17.
34. II Corinthians 6:14-18.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, Theo. Engelder (eds.), *Walther and the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938).
37. Kueng, *op. cit.*, p. 44.