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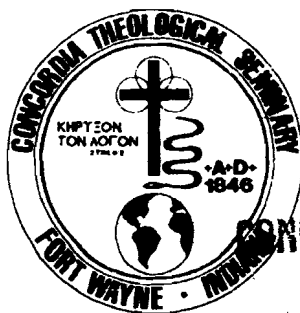
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Theological Observer

THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT AS ECUMENICAL PHENOMENON

Though the ecumenism expressed through institutional forms has been increasingly ineffective in the personal piety of Christians, it has through the Charismatic Movement been most effective in bringing together the most diversified forms of Christianity. Thus, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, all with a tradition of old church worship forms, are sharing the same tents with the oldline Pentecostal churches with their seemingly non-structured worship.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has recognized the attractions and the various dangers connected with the Charismatic Movement. The synod through its conventions, its Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and its seminaries has definite policies directed against the movement and attempting to prevent charismatically oriented pastors from entering its ministry. Church leadership has not been inarticulate on this issue. Along with the officially adopted statements of the synod and its agencies, essays have alerted both the clergy and laity to the dangers of the movement. Missouri Synod Lutherans with their strict understanding of church fellowship immediately see a clear violation of their tradition in charismatic gatherings, whether they are of the intimate cell variety, congregating in a private living room, or whether they are of the mammoth baseball stadium variety. Denominational boundaries melt away in the quest of that "special" outpouring or gift of the Holy Spirit associated with the movement. The charismatic ecumenical abandon reflects an understanding of the Spirit's working entirely different from the Lutheran one. Lutherans understand the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Son of God, Jesus, Christ. This intertrinitarian mystery finds reflection in the doctrine of Christian revelation. The Spirit sent by Christ testifies to Him, especially His atonement, i.e., the Gospel. The Spirit's testimony incorporated in the Gospel comes to expression through what Lutherans term the Word and Sacrament. The Gospel is not only the message originating from Christ, but is also about Christ. The Word and Sacrament do not become instruments or implements to manipulate the Spirit in people's lives or to get hold of the Spirit for personal purposes. The message centering in Christ is the Spirit's working. Thus, in Lutheran theology, the locus on the Word and the Sacraments is, in fact, the locus on the Spirit's working. There is a certain un-Lutheran attitude in treating the Spirit independently of Christ so far as His essence is concerned and independently of the Word and Sacrament so far as His work is concerned.

Lutherans see the charismatic understanding of a direct working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians as a dogmatic violation of their concepts of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Word and Sacrament. On these issues Lutheran theology and the Charismatic Movement are incompatible. Those bound to the Lutheran Confessions have shared a common abhorrence of the movement while at the same time they have employed several exegetical approaches. The final result of the movement is a doctrinally unrestricted ecumenism where doctrinal boundaries are no longer enforced, simply because they are no longer recognized as important.

The charismatic violation of the Word and Sacrament principle is the chief reason for the evaporation of the traditional denominational boundaries within

the movement. Within the movement the Spirit is no longer, as the charismatics would say, "bound," "captivated," or "encrusted" by the Word, but begins to transcend it, bringing the believers to a higher plateau. The Word is no longer the cradle where the believer finds Christ, as Luther would say, but the Word at best points to Christ or sends the searcher in His direction. This is even true of the Lutheran species of the Charismatic Movement. The Lutheran charismatic form claims to differ from the general Protestant type by giving more attention to the sacraments in search of Christ or the Spirit. Unlike traditional Lutheran theology, however, the Lutheran charismatic is not content to go no further in this world than the Word and Sacrament in finding Christ and the Spirit. The charismatic experience of the Spirit is something beyond the Word and the Sacrament. Such was the basic scheme of medieval mysticism, which had an appreciation for the sacraments not as ends in themselves, but as a means to the mystical blending of the soul with God or Christ. Even here the Lutheran charismatic is offering nothing really new.

The Word which no longer holds within itself Christ and the Spirit, but merely points the believer to them, now begins to lose its authoritative impact for life and doctrine in the personal Christian life. As the Word projects the believer outside of itself to that intimate union with God, it is understood more and more merely as past history with little excitement and real meaning for the charismatic. Personal experience of God with the accompanying and verifying gifts of the Spirit is the real focus point for faith. The Scriptures are valuable in bringing about this personal experience, but become less important to faith than the actual experience itself. The real answers to questions of faith and life are now more frequently found in faith as experience than in the Scriptures. Faith as experience is substituted for Scripture as authority. Problems among Christians from differing denominational traditions are resolved by a common experience and not by the study of Scripture. Differences in belief, where recognized as irreconcilable because of differing interpretations, are dissolved in the common experience of the charismatic group. Refusing mutual Christian fellowship across denominational boundaries is viewed as a legalistic codebook mentality. The Spirit no longer bound to the Word and Sacraments *ipso facto* transcends contradictory understandings of the Scriptures and brings about a deeper unity.

Charismatics can be Lutherans, Baptists, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics without conflict of loyalty. For the tradition represents an outward or organizational unity, while the movement projects the participants into the more important, deeper mystical unity transcending old established denominational or confessional borders. The invisible church begins to become clearly visible (to borrow the older language) in the Charismatic Movement. The same pattern surfaced in the Evangelical Church in the nineteenth century, where the slogan of the merger-mentality stressed unity in essentials, differences in the non-essentials, and charity in all things. The Charismatic Movement sees the essential item in the common experience of the Spirit. In comparison with this experience all other "truths" become mutually tolerable interpretations and opinions.

The twentieth-century ecumenical movement failed to ignite any real enthusiasm through institutional negotiation by forming regional and international councils and ecclesiastical superstructures. The Charismatic Movement has succeeded in generating this enthusiasm, though hardly in the form desired by the first ecumenical leaders. Christians who found it more convenient to give up regular church attendance than to attend a different denomination or a newly formed church have found their way into the multi-

sized charismatic gatherings. Only in such charismatic groups has ecumenism shown sustained success on the local level.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod had rightly recognized in the ecumenical enthusiasm of the Charismatic Movement a clear break with Lutheran ecclesiology, which sees fellowship as possible only among those who share, not a common emotional experience allegedly identified as originating with the Holy Spirit, but a common commitment to what God has revealed through the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. Where Christians feel impelled to transcend the older confessional boundaries, they have already put less value on some revealed truth than formerly. Lutherans must beware of this attitude. The ecumenical mentality of the charismatic movement is only a reflection of a deeper problem — an aberrant understanding that detaches the Spirit from the Word and Sacrament and proclaims His freedom from the Scriptures. Euphemistically, this idea can be called the *sovereignty of the Holy Spirit*. Luther would call it *Schwaermerei!* Roman Catholicism with its strain of mysticism and Reformed Protestantism with its understanding of faith as personal experience can permit at least a temporary *detente* with the Charismatic Movement. To Lutheran theology, with its indissoluble bond between Word and Sacrament, the movement is nothing but destructive. More to the point, the charismatic view makes it impossible to say: "I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The Gospel is robbed of Christ as its chief content and souls remain in darkness.

David P. Scaer

LUTHER AND EMERGENCY COMMUNIONS

Luther in a letter to the Bohemian Christians (1523)¹ suggested that a church — and here Luther is referring to the territorial church in Bohemia — which is deprived of pastors through the refusal of the regular bishops to ordain pastors could establish through lay ordination their own pastors, who in turn would institute bishops and they in turn an archbishop for a wider supervision. There is no thought in Luther that lay ordination would become usual. Though Luther suggests this course, it would be difficult to demonstrate that this actually happened during the Reformation era.² Some have reasoned that, since emergency ordination is possible in certain remote cases, then it stands to reason that emergency celebrations of the Lord's Supper, i.e., by non-clergymen, are also possible.

Dialogues, especially between Roman Catholics and Lutherans, can be and have been especially useful since both churches have a serious doctrinal heritage. These dialogues have forced both communions to examine their own heritage and the heritage of the other church. Professor Dr. Peter Manns, a Roman Catholic parish priest and full-time professor at the University of Mainz specializing in Luther studies, has addressed his research to the question of whether or not the Wittenberg reformer would have ever allowed for emergency communions. As Luther would have permitted emergency lay baptisms, preaching, absolutions, and ordinations, it might be somewhat surprising to discover that Luther did not allow the laity under any circumstances to celebrate communion — even if that lay person was theologically trained and called by a congregation. This thesis is developed by Peter Manns in an essay, "Amt und Eucharistie in der Theologie Martin Luthers," appearing with other essays in a volume entitled *Amt und Eucharistie*.³

Manns writes his essay after examining Luther's responses to three historical situations. In the first case, Lutherans living in Augsburg were forbidden three Zwinglian clergymen to celebrate the Lord's Supper according to Lutheran form. The year was 1531.⁴ A certain Caspar Huberius, in the name of his friend Hans Honold, addressed to Luther a request for permission for laymen in this unfortunate situation to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In his request to Luther, Huberius mentions that in times of distress and sickness, Christians have a great need for the Lord's Supper. Huberius argues his case from a medieval argument that absolution can be dispensed by a layman in cases of emergency. A similar situation occurred in 1535 in Freiberg, a Roman Catholic city, where Lutherans were asking permission to celebrate the Lord's Supper without their own ordained pastor.⁵ Again one year later another request came to Luther which argued that the head of the household as the religious leader had the obligation to celebrate the Sacrament in the absence of an ordained pastor. Luther's reply to all these requests was no, even though he couched his refusal in the kindest pastoral tone possible.⁷

To the Lutherans in the Zwinglian situation in Augsburg, Luther strictly forbade them to participate in the Zwinglian rites, warning them of the plague that came upon the Anabaptist fanatics. At the same time he strictly forbade "house communions" or "conventicle communions," as they were otherwise known, with the same vigor as he did the "Winkelmesse," the private masses of the Roman Church.⁸ Luther bases his advice on the situation of the Jews in the Babylonian Captivity, who were without their own church or worship services. Such deprivation of the sacrament is called by Luther an *Anfechtung*, i.e., tribulation for faith, but a tribulation which must be accepted with the reading and the teaching of God's Word, deep longings, and prayer. Luther could even speak of substituting a "spiritual communion" (*communione fidei . . . spirituali*) and pointed to Daniel who prayed with longing for the temple services in the direction of Jerusalem.⁹

According to Manns, Luther's opposition to non-clerical communion was based on his understanding of the Sacrament as a public remembrance and commemoration of the church which did not belong in the private setting of the home. The head of the household was commanded in the Scripture to lead his family in devotion and give Christian instruction and perhaps even to marry his children, but the command to dispense the Sacrament belonged to the church, not to Christians as individuals. Luther derived this conclusion from his exegesis of I Corinthians 11.¹⁰

Closely related to the problem of individual persons coming together in conventicles to celebrate communion was the case of Magister Johannes Sutel, who had studied theology under Luther and was celebrating communion at St. Nicholas congregation in Gottingen at the request of the city council but without ordination.¹¹ (Congregational call procedures were simply not known in the Reformation period.) Luther demanded that Sutel cease celebrating the Sacrament until he had been publicly ordained; "tunc publice coram altari; reliquis ministris cum oratione et impositione manuum testimonium accipies et auctoritatem coenae tractandae" ("then you receive publicly before the altar the certification and the authority to celebrate the Sacrament from the other ministers with prayer and the imposition of the hands").¹²

Luther's writings and his instructions allowing only for clerical celebration of the Lord's Supper may not be canonical for Lutheran practice today; but certainly they cannot be overlooked, since the Lutheran Confessions do place Luther's writings in a special category. It is not uncommon in the Lutheran churches in the United States for unordained men to celebrate communion.

though they have some type of authorization from a congregation or church supervisor. In the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, parochial school teachers are not infrequently asked during the pastor's absence to supervise at the Lord's Supper. It may even happen in the LCMS that a theological student, a professional worker of some sort, or a layman may be asked to celebrate communion for a congregation. Certain small groups are known to come together to celebrate the Sacrament outside of the regularly provided church services. This phenomenon may not be uncommon in college settings. Luther's opinions can never be the final arbiter of truth, but can churches which pride themselves in being legitimate heirs of the Reformation totally ignore them? Certainly Luther's strong opposition to the practice of communion celebration by those not ordained by the church to the clergy should at least open the question for serious study. One thing is clear: Luther had no appreciation for an emergency celebration of the Lord's Supper. We should at least examine the Biblical lines of his arguments.

Footnotes

¹ "Concerning the Ministry," trans. Conrad Bergendorf, *Luther's Works*, 40 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 37.

² Dr. Tom Hardt, a Luther scholar and protestor of the situation in the Church of Sweden, has in recent times received lay ordination.

³ Ed. Peter Blaser (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifacius Druckerei, 1973; "Konfessionskundliche Schriften des Johann-Adam-Mohler-Instituts," 10), pp. 68-173.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73. Luther's opposition to lay administered and celebrated communions seems to be consistent throughout his career. While Mann's case is developed from Luther's 1530's writings, the period recognized as the Reformer's theological maturity by scholars who operate with such divisions, Luther is giving the same advice in 1523 to the Bohemians. In "Concerning the Ministry", *op. cit.*, p. 9, Luther writes, "Clearly if misfortune and need are so great that they can secure ministers in no other way (than by subterfuge), I would confidently advise that you have no ministers at all. For it would be safer and more wholesome for the father of the household to read the gospel and, since the universal custom and use allows it to the laity, to baptize those who are born in his home, and so to govern himself and his according to the doctrine of Christ, even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends upon it. The gospel and baptism are sufficient, since faith alone justifies and love alone lives." Luther proceeds to discuss that God does and can reward Christians who through no fault of their own are forced to abstain from the sacraments. He makes it very clear that laymen, regardless of the circumstances, cannot celebrate the Sacrament.

¹⁰ Manns, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Here is a translation of the pertinent section from Luther. "Don't let yourselves be persuaded by the group that every householder

may administer the Sacrament in his house. I may very well give instruction at home, but that does not mean that I am an official preacher (*öffentlicher Prediger*), if I am not officially called. St. Paul says the same thing about the Sacrament in I Corinthians 11: 'We should come together and not have everyone celebrating his own Lord's Supper.' Let it not be ever reasoned in this way: The Sacrament is made by the word, therefore I will do it at home. Indeed, this is not the procedure and order of God; but God wants the Sacrament administered through the official office."

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 85

¹² *Ibid.*

David P. Scaer

TOWARDS A WORLD CONFSSIONAL FEDERATION

For some time confessional Lutherans throughout the world have been setting their sights on a wider confessional fellowship embracing Lutherans on a global scale. The necessity of this kind of a group was first seen when the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was formed after World War II. At first there had been some legitimate hope that the LWF might provide the skeleton first for serious confessional confrontation among Lutherans and then for confessional fellowship. The LWF simply has not provided this kind of opportunity. Rather it has developed into an ecumenical organization typical of the late twentieth century. It mirrors little more than contemporary theological trends and has overextended itself in political affairs. Ecumenism feeds upon and begets more ecumenism. At one time the LWF along with other worldwide denominational federations of this type could be taken seriously. That time has passed. The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod which was formerly enamoured with ecumenical organizations of various types is gradually outgrowing this delayed middle-aged adolescent puppy love and is quietly but definitely detaching itself from these liaisons.

As a ghost that refuses to depart, the haunting specter of the defunct Synodical Conference is a reminder that confessional fellowship was not only possibility but definite reality. The reasons for the Conference's demise are complex. When the Synodical Conference breathed its last in the early 1960s, it as an association of freely acting church-bodies with a common confessional base was strangely out of step with general ecclesiastical developments. The trend then among churches was toward common church administration and organization with multiplicity and diversity in the church's confessional base. Monolithic belief was sacrificed for monolithic organization. In reality there was no confessional base in most cases at all. What was lacking in confessional unity was compensated by organizational and administrative union. Today the idea of organizational union is hardly spreading with the fury of a forest fire. Denominations are now more concerned in retaining whatever little identity they might have salvaged from the ecumenical homogenization. The time might be right for the reconstruction of a type of Synodical Conference, i.e., freely cooperating churches with a common confessional base.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod with its association of sister churches on five continents can easily provide the network operation necessary for a worldwide Synodical Conference. The older Synodical Conference was strictly a North American creature. Its title was the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. One hundred years ago or even fifty years ago we thought in continental terms. Now the realities are global not only in the political sphere but in the churchly as well. The annual meetings of the sister churches of the Missouri Synod are already providing the first steps toward a wider and more formal association of churches.

While this can provide a base or starting point for a wider confessional association of churches, other churches must be drawn in. The Lutheran World Federation cannot provide the firm confessional and Biblical resources to younger churches of the Third World. Many of these churches have an evangelical fervor in soul-winning which is simply unmatched even by the older more conservative churches. These churches in many cases have become affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation, but here their theological needs have not been met. Any new organization would have to determine what kind of relationship should exist with these churches. Would it be possible for a worldwide confessional fellowship to extend aid and counsel to these churches even if a fuller expression of fellowship would not at first be possible? The day may already be here when American and European Lutheran churches could begin new missions through their sister churches in the Third World.

As the confessional federation would extend its hand into newer fields for Lutheranism, it would reaffirm its past associations which have fallen into disrepair or even disappeared. The greatest concentration of confessional Lutherans outside of the United States are in Australia and Germany. Within recent memory these Lutherans have overcome their differences to establish larger churches. As these have been internal realignments, the Missouri Synod has maintained the courteous posture of a distant but still interested observer. These churches would have to be included in any realistic plans for the future.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in bringing about a world-wide confessional association of Lutherans would be in the United States itself. The relics of the older Synodical Conference as an association of free Lutheran churches cooperating from a common base are quickly disappearing. The Synodical Conference mission program among blacks has been absorbed by the Missouri Synod into her regional districts. The Slovak Synod maintains its autonomy but within the framework of the Missouri Synod. The Finnish Synod, though not a member of the Synodical Conference but nevertheless a sister church, has lost its identity through amalgamation into the Missouri Synod. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod ("Little Norwegian Synod") maintains its autonomy, maintaining fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod but showing interest in Missouri.

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) still bears the copyright reference to the Synodical Conference on the title page, a vestige of a former age. With pressure for some type of new hymnal, the 1941 hymnal may soon be found in Wisconsin, Norwegian, and some Missouri congregations. Vitally needed for a real revival of any Synodical Conference is the participation and blessing of the Wisconsin Synod. On the surface there appears to be no real solid progress in overcoming the current division. But this hardly means that the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod are ignoring one another.

As a result of the Missouri Synod's participation in ecumenical associations at various levels and with various degrees of enthusiasm, its pastors are keenly attuned to theological developments in other churches. With a firm commitment to the confessions and Biblical doctrines, they cannot avoid seeing that the

Wisconsin Synod has a substance in theology not unlike their own. After the controversy of recent years, Missouri's pastors are aware of the problems connected with higher criticism. They have become better theologians through the fire of experience. They place a high value on historic doctrines because they have had to defend them personally. It might be said without exaggeration that the entire Missouri Synod became a theological battlefield and even now some skirmishes are still being fought. No Lutheran church has had to develop the militancy which the Missouri Synod has had to develop. The clergy have come to a deeper appreciation of Lutheran doctrine through bitter experience.

The Wisconsin Synod has maintained a reserved posture toward the Missouri Synod, but the histories of the two synods have been so interwound with each other that neither can really ignore the other for long. In the April 1979 *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Professor Wilbert R. Gawrisch said in regard to Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues that "the greatest tragedy is that that one-time pillar of Lutheran orthodoxy, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has permitted itself to become a participant in this dialogical disaster" (p. 162). At the same time the Wisconsin Synod has noted what it considers positive confessional directions in the Missouri Synod, e.g., the publication of *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord*. The matter of interchurch relations whether it be interdenominational dialogues or the more serious, more formal, and absolutely fragile association with The American Lutheran Church is the real issue separating the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. The Missouri Synod has not been without fellowship principles. They were the very reason for the synod's establishment and are part of her constitution. The current need is for the synod to recognize her founding principles once again and to expedite their implementation without excessive disruption in normal church life. Here is where the Wisconsin Synod has the opportunity to exercise understanding and patience. The Wisconsin Synod evolved out of a unionistic situation involving both Lutheran and Reformed heritages. Resolving this difficulty was not an overnight occurrence. Still within certain dimensions the Missouri Synod extended the hand of fellowship then. Perhaps one hundred years later the tables are turned. The Missouri Synod is moving back to solid confessional ground. The movement is not uniform in speed or performance, but the movement is clear and pronounced.

The time may be very near for the Wisconsin Synod to recognize her obligation in this matter. The Missouri Synod has sailed through bitter seas in the last generation. She has attracted the world's attention and frequently scorn. Her leaders have maintained a confessional direction without scuttling the ship. World Lutheran leaders have been her detractors and not her supporters as she tried to move in a more confessional direction.

A successful world confessional federation requires the participation of both the Wisconsin and the Missouri Synods. This is the time to support one other in confessional and missionary endeavor. A restoration of the past may not be impossible.

David P. Scaer