

82. Lehre und Wehre, 1886, p. 76, quoted in W. Dallmann, W.H.T. Dau, Th. Engelder (ed.), Walther and the Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), p. 15.
83. St. Louis ed., vol. III, col. 21.

II. THE CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AS THE TRUE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Was the Reformation Ecumenical?

The Ecumenical Movement of our time is a mighty stream whose elemental force is felt in the remotest provinces of Christendom. Ignoring it, sticking our heads in the sand, will not make it go away. The surviving Confessional Lutheran churches of the world need to face the issues raised by the Ecumenical Movement, and when these issues will have been faced, fully and in the light of God's Word, then--this is my firm hope--we shall have a new Confession entailing new alignments and new divisions.

At the very outset we must note that the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" of the "one body" in Eph. 4:4-5 is meant as a present reality, not as an ideal still to be achieved, much less one to be achieved by human church politics! Scripture speaks not of any "Ecumenical Movement" but of the ecumenical status of the Church! The Church is already one. This oneness is given in the one Lord and the one faith, and is not an imaginary abstraction, of a piece with "some Platonic republic".¹

This means of course that there is no conflict or "tension" whatever between truth and unity. The "One Lord, One faith, One baptism" create and determine true unity, so that any "unity" based on compromise is simply a bogus unity, a fraud. The "one faith" is truly ecumenical, no matter how few may consistently confess it, while every departure from the "one faith" is anti-ecumenical, no matter how numerous and illustrious the dignitaries who propound it!

But did the Reformation really represent the "one faith" of the "one Lord" and of His "one baptism"?

The challenge most immediately relevant to our Reformation Jubilee observance is probably the idea that the Reformation was a one-sided reaction, which mistook a part of the truth for the whole truth, and therefore ended in division and sectarianism. Or, as Archbishop Temple put it in his inaugural sermon at the 1937 Faith and Order Conference in Edinburgh: "it may well be that in the heat of conflict, such as tormented the sixteenth century, men so zealously upheld what seemed to them neglected truths that they became blind to supplementary truths which were dear to their opponents."² The remedy of course is to correct the Reformation's one-sidedness by means of a more balanced, ecumenical approach, which would give due weight to the "supplementary truths".

The vulgar, journalistic version of this approach is the conviction that each "denomination" has its distinctive "insight", and that if only all these various aspects could be combined, we would have the one Truth and Gospel of God in all its full-orbed splendour and integrity! This superstitious belief in the attainment of ever fuller truth through the progressive reconciliation of opposites comes of course not from Scripture but from the German philosopher Hegel. St. Paul never suggests that the

"whole counsel of God" which he had "not shunned to declare" (Acts 20:27) in any way depended on the "supplementary truths" of his opponents; quite the contrary (Gal. 1:8,9)! Just as an algebraic expression or sum may add up to nought, no matter how complex the terms that make it up, so contradictory theological doctrines yield not a "greater" truth but none at all. How can the denial of salvation by grace alone, or of the Real Presence, possibly "supplement" these doctrines? Let Chesterton deliver the coup de grace:

I mean those who get over all these abysses and reconcile all these wars by talking about "aspects of truth" . . . I will only say here that this seems to me an evasion which has not even had the sense to disguise itself ingeniously in words. If we talk of a certain thing being an aspect of truth, it is evident that we claim to know what is truth; just as, if we talk of the hind leg of a dog, we claim to know what is a dog. Unfortunately, the philosopher who talks about aspects of truth generally also asks, "What is truth?" Frequently even he denies the existence of truth or says it is inconceivable by the human intelligence. How then can he recognise its aspects? I should not like to be an artist who brought an architectural sketch to a builder, saying, "This is the south aspect of Sea-View Cottage. Sea-View Cottage, of course, does not exist." . . . Nor should I like any better to be the bungling and absurd metaphysician who professed to be able to see everywhere the aspects of a truth that is not there.³

But does not the very slogan "grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone" prove the Reformation's imbalance? Insistence on the threefold "alone" seems "extremist," and "extremism" offends our modern "appalling frenzy of the indifferent" (which for

Chesterton constituted the very definition of bigotry)!⁴ This supposed "extremism" embarrasses even so-called Lutherans today: both the Department of Theology and the Commission on Theology of the "Lutheran" World Federation mutter apologetically about justification being after all only one of many Biblical "pictures"!⁵

From a soberly Scriptural point of view there is nothing particularly "extreme" about the threefold "alone." Quite on the contrary. "By grace alone" and "through faith alone" add up to nothing more or less than "Christ alone," as the ground and means of our salvation. And "Scripture alone," as source and norm of theology, again means "Christ alone" as the one authentic Teacher of His Church. But if the threefold "alone" merely spells out and underscores "Christ alone," then who will dare to call this "extreme"? Or with what is "Christ alone" to be counterbalanced? With Antichrist? Or with Belial? No! What Father Congar calls Luther's "unilateral and exacerbated Galatianism" (!)⁶ is not anything unbalanced or peripheral, but the heart and core of the Gospel, the very centre of that one faith in the one Lord into which and into Whom all Christians have been baptised. In other words, the Reformation with its threefold "alone" was truly ecumenical, catholic, universal, because it was truly evangelical and biblical!

At the time this was freely admitted even by some within the papal camp. Bishop Stadion of Augsburg, for instance, exclaimed after he had heard the Augsburg Confession; "What has been read to us is the truth, the pure truth, and we cannot deny it."⁷ And Duke William of Bavaria, Luther's bitter foe, too, was deeply impressed and asked Dr. John Eck whether he could refute the Confession. When Eck replied that he could do so from the Church Fathers, but not from Scripture itself, Duke William made the

famous statement: "So I hear that the Lutherans sit in the Scripture, and we of the papal party sit beside!"⁸

What was really anti-ecumenical was the small and unrepresentative, largely Italian, sectarian assemblage which gave itself the imposing title of the "Sacrosanct Oecumenical and General Synod of Trent," and harshly condemned the Reformation. Such respect for this Council as can survive a study of Chemnitz's celebrated Examen, must, it seems to me, perish in the reading of the learned monk Paul Sarpi's detailed history of the Council of Trent. Sarpi shows clearly that this Council was at every stage effectively controlled by the incredible ambitions and intrigues of the Popes, who saw to it that "the Holy Ghost arrived daily in the mail-bag from Rome". The Jesuit Pallavicini tried, on behalf of the enraged Roman curia, to dispel the fatal impression made by Sarpi's book, but succeeded only in confirming it. Pallavicini was unable to convict Sarpi of a single major error. His triumphant list of 360 mistakes concerns such minor details as names and dates. These having been corrected, Sarpi's classic became all the more valuable!⁹

Like Chemnitz¹⁰ Sarpi calls attention to the deliberate ambiguity of the Tridentine formulations--dramatically illustrated by the completely contradictory interpretations of the decrees on sin and grace, published in 1548 by Soto, the main Dominican representative at Trent, and Vega, the leading Franciscan.¹¹

Although modern Roman Catholics are of course technically bound by the decisions of Trent, recent years have seen some amazing developments in the Roman Church. Consider for instance some of the startling things said by some prelates at the recent Vatican Council. Joseph Tawil, Patriarchal Vicar

in Egypt, said:

The People of God has unity when, in quest of salvation by faith, it receives the promise; on the contrary, it is divided when, trusting in the flesh, it loses the promise. . . Afterwards the Church--the new People of God--ran after the temptation to "Judaize", to "Hellenize" (fifth century), to "Latinize" (eleventh century), and finally to "Romanize" (sixteenth century). Then she found she had the righteousness of the flesh and no longer that of faith. /Phil. 3:7-9/12

Luther himself could hardly have put it better!

Eugene D'Souza, Archbishop of Bhopal (India), said:

Just as Christ took to himself everything human, sin alone excepted, so Catholicism which is true to its name should take to itself everything which is Christian, leaving out negations. In actual fact, for the principal first fruits of renewal we are heavily indebted to others--for the biblical movement to the Protestants, and for the liturgical movement to the Orthodox. Relying on their help, let us abandon those traditions which belong only to a particular school of theology or national character or religious order and which we have repeatedly confused with Tradition with a capital T.¹³

Perhaps the noblest statement in this connection was made by Leon-Arthur Elchinger, Coadjutor Bishop of Strasbourg (France):

It is a certain historical truth that at the beginning of our divisions, those who took the initiative had no desire to act primarily and unconditionally against unity, but began by seeing that certain truths were fundamental in divine

revelation; for instance, the apostolic rights of the Churches, in the schisms of the eleventh century, or again, in the sixteenth-century Reformation, the dogma of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus our Savior, which had been defined at the First Council of the Apostles in Jerusalem. On the other side of the ledger, what scholar well versed in the history of those two periods would dare to doubt or deny that some Christians, perhaps many of them, and even Pastors of our Catholic Church, made light of these truths at that time (though they are certain truths) and sinned in various ways against those who bore witness to these truths?¹⁴

When I read such statements, I cannot but admire their honesty and integrity. And I ask myself: Why are such honourably self-critical accents not heard more often from Lutheran dignitaries at great Lutheran synods? Why, so often, the unseemly rush to whitewash every shady status-quo, and to blacken every inconvenient critic? For all our vaunted "Protestantism" we can be a smug and self-congratulatory lot! Our large, comfortable ecclesiastical establishments sorely need the Apology's warning against the spirit of the later scholastics, who "like petty public officials . . . quietly approved the errors of their superiors, without understanding them."¹⁵ And Dr. Sasse reveals a large part of the secret behind the tragedy of the German territorial churches, when he says:

But such are the theologians: for every kick administered to them by any officer's boot, they at once have a theological basis. . . Always the Church receives the elimination of her freedom with gratitude and enthusiasm.

One of the editors of the collection of Vatican Council speeches I have been quoting was Father Hans

Kueng. This Biblical scholar from Switzerland, though he participated in the recent Council in the capacity of theological expert, is so controversial, that his books have been forbidden to be sold in Rome! This is not surprising in view of his book about justification. Here Kueng, whom Karl Barth in a prefatory letter calls "an Israelite without guile", reaches virtually the same conclusions as Luther precisely at those decisive points at which Rome has always condemned Luther. Kueng maintains, for example, that justification is a juridical (forensic) act, that saving grace is the favour of God, rather than anything infused, and that the works which St. Paul excluded from justification were not only those of the Ceremonial Law, but also those of the Moral Law!¹⁷

Now, it would be very wrong not to acknowledge and thank God for voices like Father Kueng's. It would be equally wrong however to allow such voices to rob us of all historical and theological perspective. Yet it is not only excited students but seasoned "Protestant" churchmen, even "Lutherans", who speak and write as if the Second Vatican Council had ushered in, if not the millenium, then at least, belatedly, the Reformation, and that the sooner we can all re-unite under the Pope, the better!

What must be seen clearly is that the biblical-evangelical strain which so impresses Lutherans, is only one element in Rome's theological revolution. The real direction of Vatican II was not towards this, but as the phrase "apertura a sinistra" implies, towards the latitudinarian type of "Theology" represented by the World Council of Churches. And this is not really a theology, but a whole museum of theologies. Now, if you want a museum, you will have to take one or two "Lutheran" displays into the bargain. But they are as harmless as museum tigers!

That this was the real direction of the Vatican Council is clear not only from the subsequent chaos, but from expressions at the Council itself. Thus a Mexican bishop described Freemasonry as "an organization whose origins, as we know from history, are completely Christian, which still remains partially Christian, and is now renewing its Christian character," and then suggested "a reappraisal of the penalties decreed by the Church".¹⁸

Rome's dogmatic confusion is particularly acute in Europe. In Holland, for example, leading Roman theologians have not only attacked Transubstantiation, but, as the new Dutch Catechism shows, have begun a "reinterpretation" of fundamentals like the Virgin Birth. The shift of emphasis from the facts of the Gospels to their "meanings" is ominous. Indeed, it has been quipped that "in Holland everything changes--except bread and wine"!

Where it will all end, no one can foresee. It behooves us to celebrate neither Rome's imagined acceptance of the Reformation, nor her present doctrinal chaos, which can only mean a frightful acceleration of Christendom's general plunge into dissolution. It behooves us rather, mindful of I Cor. 10:12, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," to ponder the sobering words of Britain's former leading Roman Catholic theologian, Father Charles Davis, who recently left the Roman Church because "it is not concerned with truth or people."¹⁹ It would be a great and perhaps costly mistake to assume that this is true only of the Vatican-dominated power structure. Dr. Sasse has written:

If the Missouri Synod were to join the World Federation. . . nothing would change in the World Federation, but everything would change in Missouri. This great Church would cease

to be a Confessional Church. Who would be served thereby? The great global church politicians perhaps, but no one else, neither the congregations, nor the pastors. Whether a Church might perhaps break up, many thousands of consciences be injured, hearts be broken and souls lost, about that the Oecumene does not ask.²⁰

Trent was not the only anti-ecumenical force in the sixteenth century. Zwingli's and Calvin's denial of the Real Presence of the One Lord's true body and blood in the Sacrament, was equally unbiblical and therefore unecumenical. Therefore Dr. F. Pieper used to admonish his students: "Do not get into the habit of saying 'Reformers'. There are not Reformers, but only one Reformer, that is Martin Luther."²¹

The authentic line of true, doctrinal apostolic succession in the sixteenth century runs through the Augsburg Confession. And if that Confession was biblical, evangelical, and ecumenical four-hundred years ago, then it is still biblical, evangelical, and ecumenical today. On the other hand, if opposition to that Confession was unbiblical, unevangelical, and unecumenical then, such opposition under whatever flag, must still be unbiblical, unevangelical and unecumenical today!

The Teaching of Article VII

of the Augsburg Confession

The genuine ecumenicity of the Augsburg Confession is evident particularly in its teaching about the nature of Christian unity:

For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in

conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.²²

Here with one stroke are swept aside all the false crutches which men have used to prop up their various caricatures of Christian unity!

Probably the earliest such crutch was the idea that the bishop is the centre of unity and guarantees it.²³ So long as the bishop is orthodox, the rule works well enough. But the scheme collapses when bishops themselves become heretics and must be excommunicated. Modern Anglican insistence on the "Historic Episcopate" as one of the four cornerstones of its ecumenical programme (the so-called Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral²⁴) is in fact very unecumenical. Insistence on this human tradition (according to Scripture there is no difference between "presbyters" and "bishops", despite the King James translators' tendentious avoidance of "bishops" in Acts 20:28!) is not only theologically wrong, but also practically absurd. What does the "Historic Episcopate" mean, if members of it, like Pike and Robinson can with impunity reject the Trinity, and even the very existence of a personal God, not to speak of the rest of the Christian Faith? Why should personal bishops be necessary when a personal God is not? It is one thing to swallow camels and strain out gnats, but quite another to recommend this hypocrisy as the very model of ecumenicity!

Yet this fallacy permeates the whole institutionalized "Ecumenical Movement," which is wont to speak of "Faith and Order," as if it were self-evident that human, traditional "order" is on the

e same level as the divinely revealed faith. This whole conception is essentially legalistic and therefore unecumenical.

The Western Church had noticed the inadequacy of the "Historic Episcopate" as such long before there were any Lambeth Conferences. The medieval solution of the problem was the Papacy as the visible centre of unity. Despite the warning of St. Ambrose that "they have not the patrimony of Peter who have not the faith of Peter,"²⁵ the Papacy became a law unto itself, and filled subsequent Christian history with tragedy. Today, after the Second Vatican Council has revealed Rome's internal disunity, even many intelligent Roman Catholics are beginning to suspect that the "rock" of the Papacy was in fact papier maché all along!

Nevertheless all "realistic" "Ecumenical" work today is carried on on the premise that the future union of churches will have to take the Papacy into the bargain somehow, though this necessity is of course regarded with various degrees of enthusiasm.

Not unrelated to the notion of the "Historic Episcopate" is another Anglican speciality, the belief in the efficacy of liturgical uniformity. Consider these fantastic statements by Canon Smyth of Westminster, issued together with a lecture by the Lord Bishop of Derby (The Rt. Rev. A. E. J. Rawlinson) and a foreword by the late Lord Archbishop of York (The Most Rev. Cyril Garbett), under the title The Genius of the Church of England:

The great contribution of Archbishop Laud to the Anglican tradition was the dual principle of maintaining a decent uniformity in the external worship of God according to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, as the basis and condition of a wide liberty of theological

speculation. You can afford variety in the pulpit so long as you have uniformity at the altar. So long as your clergy are united by "using the Form in the said Book prescribed, and none other," their divisions of opinion are a source of strength and not of weakness in the life of the Church. . . . the Church of Rome encourages an almost luxuriant variety of devotion, but insists on theological uniformity: the Church of England embraces many shades of theological opinion, but desiderates liturgical uniformity.²⁶

A more blatant formulation of formalism it is difficult to imagine. Christianity is turned topsyturvy: "human traditions or rites and ceremonies instituted by men" (Augsburg Confession VII,3 Latin text) become necessary and essential, while the real truth and doctrine of God Himself is placed on the free list!

Unfortunately Augustana VII, unequivocally seconded by Article X of the Formula of Concord, has not prevented even Lutherans from falling prey to liturgical legalism at times. To speak purely historically of "the Lutheran Liturgy," for instance, is one thing. But to suggest that this particular form of the Western Church's Liturgy, even allowing for minor variations, is the standard and normative Service for the Lutheran Church of all times and places, is quite another. Let us imagine a particular case. Suppose that Russia were liberated from the Communist yoke. Naturally, the Church of the ecumenical Augsburg Confession would want to begin work in these vast fields ripe unto harvest. Now, it would be totally un-Lutheran to impose upon the new Russian Church "the Lutheran Liturgy" of our Western rite which is entirely foreign to the Russian experience. The biblical, ecumenical, yes, Lutheran thing to do would be to do what Luther did: to cleanse the old Slavonic Liturgy from all abuses

and superstitions, but to keep with suitable adaptations to the times whatever is not inconsistent with the Gospel. This purified Byzantine Liturgy, though entirely different in rites, ceremonies, vestments, church architecture, and even in the arrangement of the Church Year, would be just as "Lutheran," under Augustana VII, as Friedrich Lochner's Hauptgottesdienst! Of course all this assumes that the Gospel and the Sacraments are pure. Without the pure doctrine, liturgical schemes are mere mummery anyway.

For better or for worse, however, liturgics is not a major preoccupation of modern Lutherans. More to the point are the activist-organizational patterns of modern society:

Following the dominant patterns of American life, there was an increasing tendency to think of the Church as a kind of business corporation chartered to do the Lord's work. The subordination of questions of truth--though only of those regarded as "unessential"--to efficiency of operation carries a recognisable suggestion of pragmatism.²⁷

This activist business-approach places a premium on rules, regulations, by-laws, and resolutions, which, however necessary they are in their place, can easily degenerate into an oppressive legalism, unless strictly controlled by the evangelical ecumenicity of Augustana VII. Nothing merely human, certainly nothing merely administrative or organizational (Luke 9:49.50), nothing beyond the Gospel and Sacraments of God Himself, may be treated as constitutive or divisive of Church Fellowship!

I have dwelt at such length on the false bases of Christian unity swept aside by Augustana VII in order to distinguish these clearly from the one genuine basis which the Confession emphatically

upholds. Oddly enough this real point of Article VII is today often "interpreted" away. It is done quite simply: The Confession, it is argued, clearly says that agreement on the Gospel and the Sacraments is "sufficient"; then why bother about other, minor doctrinal points? Is it not then contrary to the Augsburg Confession to fuss about such things as inerrancy, Genesis, and evolution, as if they were divisive of church fellowship?

No doubt the proponents of this line of misunderstanding would be displeased to be told that they have in fact adopted the "Fundamentalists'" worst error, that of trying to narrow the binding content of Scripture down to a few "fundamentals", and placing "lesser" doctrines on the free list!

But the Augsburg Confession does not know of any Gospel isolated from Biblical doctrine as a whole. The contrast in Article VII, 2-3 is not between Gospel and "other doctrines," but between the full Gospel, in all its doctrinal detail and integrity, and "human rites and ceremonies, instituted by men." This is crystal clear not only from the wording of the Augustana itself, but also from the longer discussion in the corresponding Article of the Apology. One reference of the latter to the Gospel is particularly suggestive in our modern context:

How many of them/the Popes/ care anything for the Gospel or think it worth reading? Many openly ridicule all religions, or if they accept anything, accept only what agrees with human reason and regard the rest as mythology, like the tragedies of the poets.²⁸

The Formula of Concord goes into considerable doctrinal detail to spell out in relation to the controversies of the times what all is involved in the Gospel, as understood by Augustana VII. It is in

reference to this doctrinal plenitude, which today is scorned as a "theological system," that the Formula demands agreement "in doctrine and in all its articles,"²⁹ asserting that "the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended," and that "these we do not by any means intend to tolerate in our lands, churches, and schools inasmuch as such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it."³⁰ And the Lutheran Church accepts the Formula of Concord not as an expansion of the doctrinal content of the Augsburg Confession, but merely as a specification and safeguard against current misinterpretations of what had been the true and necessary sense and meaning of that Confession all along.³¹

If people reject our Confessions, let them honestly say so. But let them not deceive themselves and others by frivolously twisting the Confessions' obvious intent and meaning.

Neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions know of any "Gospel" which could be separated from the concrete particulars of its dogmatic and organic foundations, to float in the vacuum of Kantian transcendence! The Trinity, Christology, the Creation, fall, and sinfulness of man, and, yes, the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scripture as the organic foundation of the whole structure, all these necessarily belong to the essence and integrity of the Gospel. A "refined" Gospel, free of the "impurities" of concrete doctrinal points is as impossible as "refined" life, apart from some particular organism. Attempts to isolate and abstract "life" on its own from the particularities of, say, a given cat, are bound to lose both the life and the cat! Neither can the Gospel of the Incarnate Saviour be had apart from all the particularities--including the Scriptures!--of His Incarnation.

"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me" (St. Matt. 11:6)!

Those who think that the Genesis matter, for instance, is only a harmless exegetical detail, and does not belong to the integrity of the Gospel confessed in Augustana VII, ought to ponder the part this issue played in the doctrinal dissolution of other Protestant churches, as told by one who regards this dissolution as a healthy "broadening":

Where the theory was consistently universalised, all absolutes--including religious and ethical absolutes--were smashed at a stroke. Of course the most radical implications of evolution were not immediately drawn, nor were they everywhere accepted, but the disquieting and unsettling effects of the new doctrine were soon felt even in the most conservative circles. Evolution's challenge to the creation narrative of Genesis was direct and immediate. The stimulus it gave to naturalistic developmental views of the Bible was soon apparent. Its implications for the traditional doctrines of the fall and sin and redemption were unmistakable. Was the Person of Christ to be excepted from naturalistic processes of development? What should be the foundations for Christian ethics? Most ultimate of all was the threat of evolution to reduce the concepts of reality and truth themselves to sheer relativity. . . . The ultimate stage of metaphysical disintegration was being reached.³² (my underlining)

It is clear that Augustana VII, true to its biblical and ecumenical nature, is not concerned with mere formalities but only with substance. The mere technicality of "confessional subscription" is quit beside the point. The Confession insists not that the pure Gospel somehow serve as a "doctrinal

basis," which can be twisted this way and that, like a waxen nose, but that it be actually taught, and that the Sacraments be actually administered biblically. Note the durative force of the verbs in VII,1 according to the Latin text: "the Gospel is being purely taught," and "the Sacraments are being administered rightly." Orthodoxy is not a matter of occasional pronouncements, much less of correct formalities, but of a solid, faithful day-to-day- continuing in Christ's Word (St. John 8: 31ff). Hence Church Fellowship depends not so much on the quantity of the Confessions accepted, as on the quality of the acceptance! If a man genuinely and unreservedly subscribes to the Augsburg Confessions, he is in fellowship with the orthodox Church. (Of course he cannot then disagree with the Formula of Concord!) On the other hand, the most solemn formula of subscription to all the Confessions including the Formula, is meaningless, if the doctrinal substance of the Confessions is not taken seriously. Men who pay lip-service to the Confessions, but violate their teaching by, say, "reinterpretation" along "Neo-Orthodox" lines, must be denied fellowship by the orthodox Church, and this precisely on the ecumenical grounds of Augustana VII!

But does all this really add up to any sort of ecumenicity worthy of the name? Seen carnally, or as Luther would say, "with cows' eyes," in the false light of the World Council of Churches' eclectic, syncretistic standards, no, definitely not. But seen spiritually, in the true Light of the One Lord, the One faith, and the One baptism, it is the only possible ecumenicity. Genuine biblical ecumenicity stands under the sign of the strait gate and the narrow way (St. Matt. 7:14). Widening the gate and broadening the way are activities of a rebellious, counterfeit "ecumenicity."

"Cows' eyes" and spiritual sight are not complementary, so as to produce between them one harmonious three-dimensional picture. They are as contradictory and incompatible as unbelief and faith. "Cows eyes" compared Jesus Christ with His illustrious, and above all, official opposition, and concluded that He was but an eccentric Rabbi. The gleaming Temple, the ancient and impressive ritual in it, the unbroken line of priestly succession going all the way back to Aaron, the learning and piety of the conservative Scripture-scholars, all these seem more obviously true and divine than the desert-extremist's earnest young Cousin, with His handful of theological illiterates, and without any "official" trappings whatever! Modern "cows' eyes" are just as blind. They may stare fascinatedly at the moral grandeur and the human pathos forever embodied in the historical figure of the Crucified, yet they see in Him no more than an unusual Step-Son of a Galilean carpenter! And as "cows' eyes" look at Jesus Christ, so they look also at His Body, the Church. The trappings of officiality are always regarded as the marks of truth. The splendour of St. Peter's in Rome, the imposing if rarely attractive historical chain linking Paul VI with Peter and Paul, the "Historic Episcopate" with its aura of legitimacy, the inter-Confessional and international inclusiveness of the World Council of Churches, the negative consensus of the world-wide craft of "theological scholarship" (which when it comes to the positive content of the Faith, is agreed about nothing), the statistical millions, and the deferential treatment by the mass-communications media, all these are far safer bets than the plain men and the small church-bodies which "wangle divisively" over "obscure theological points", and in general endanger Establishment apple-carts (always containing a fair share of forbidden fruit!) by applying the leverage of Scripture-truth directly without the benefit of intervening safety-springs

and shock-absorbers in the form of the self-serving rulings, interpretations, and pronouncements of vested ecclesiastical interests!

Spiritual sight, guided by the Word of God, judges entirely differently. Judging "righteous judgment," and "not according to the appearance" (St. John 7: 24), faith dismisses as irrelevant, incompetent and immaterial all arguments from numbers, power, prestige, learning, church-political consequences, etc. It is interested only in the question of truth. Though faith treasures the historical continuity of pure doctrine, it is not misled by purely external historical connections. (Fossils of fish are not fish!) Since it knows that Christ was born not in Jerusalem but in little Bethlehem, faith is not shocked to find the Reformation issuing from Wittenberg rather than from Rome. It despises neither the imperial grandeur of the Council of Nicaea, nor the pitiful misery of the Saxon colonists in Perry County, Missouri--impartially regarding both as faithful witnesses to catholic, evangelical truth. Nor does it suppose the voice of the pure Gospel to be forever or ex officio tied to Jerusalem, Rome, Nicaea, Milan, Hippo, Wittenberg, or St. Louis, but is ever ready to follow the Tabernacle through the desert, or, to use Luther's metaphor, the "downpour" of the pure Gospel, wherever it may lead. Faith has seen invidious party-labels attached to ecumenical truth, e.g. "Athanasianism," "Augustinianism," "Lutheranism"; and though it may regret that in the latter case the nickname has "stuck," despite Luther's wishes,³³ apparently through Nicolaus Hunnius' surrender of the term "catholic" to the Romanists and von Seckendorf's acceptance of the term "Lutheranism" from his Jesuit opponent Maimbourg,³⁴ faith is neither confused nor deterred by a mere name. Chesterton wrote about Shaw: "I am much too interested in what he really means to bother myself about everything that he merely

says".³⁵ Faith can do no less. It looks beneath mere form and appearance to substance and reality.

Clinging to the pure Marks of Christ's Church, the pure Gospel and the Sacraments, faith finds there the One Lord's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. That external communion which seriously confesses this pure Gospel in its public teaching and practice, is the legitimate representative on earth of the One Lord, of His One Mystical Body, the invisible Church, and of her One ecumenical Faith! Be they few or many, wise or foolish, rich or poor, known or unknown, official or unofficial, men are ecumenical when they represent Christ's one truth, and unecumenical when they do not!

This true ecumenicity the Church of the Augsburg Confession means to represent. By virtue of the pure Gospel and the Sacraments taught and administered in her, she boldly claims that her cause is not her own, "but the cause of Christ and the Church".³⁶ Her Augsburg Confession is not a sectarian speciality but "a genuinely Christian symbol which all true Christians ought to accept next to the Word of God, just as in ancient times Christian symbols and confessions were formulated in the Church of God . . .".³⁷ Her Confessions never speak of a "Lutheran Church," but only of the "reformed" or "Evangelical"³⁹ or "Evangelical Christian"⁴⁰ churches. She is conscious of being not one sect among others, but, by virtue of the pure Marks of Christ's Church, the legitimate outward expression and representative of Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. As such she is the rightful heiress of the whole Christian patrimony, and gratefully treasures as her own even the historic practice of the catholic Church⁴¹ and the memory of men like Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, "Anthony, Bernard, Dominic, Francis, and other holy Fathers.

Because of this ecumenical status, the Church of the Augsburg Confession must distinguish in other Christian bodies--which differ from her pure, Scriptural faith--two aspects, according to which she sustains to them a twofold relation:

(1) On the one hand she knows herself to be one in faith with all Christian believers everywhere, many of whom "go their way in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the issues, and take no pleasure in blasphemies against the Holy Supper as it is celebrated in our churches."⁴³ It is hoped, however, that "when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools."⁴⁴ Since the Holy Spirit works faith only through the truth, it follows that all Christians, to the extent that they are Christians at all, are completely united in faith and doctrine. Errors and superstitions are not part of Spirit-wrought faith. Members of false churches are Christians not through or because of the doctrinal errors involved, but despite them. The orthodox Church is ecumenical, because she officially and publicly teaches that pure faith and doctrine to which the Spirit of God bears witness, through Word and Sacrament, in the hearts of all Christian believers everywhere. This ecumenical solidarity requires of us a breadth of outlook and charity which must constantly counteract any sectarian hardening of narrow, self-centered traditions.

(2) On the other hand, the orthodox Church, just because of her ecumenical, representative character, must refuse all Church Fellowship or fraternal recognition to those who persistently represent, advocate, or defend deviations from apostolic, biblical, ecumenical teaching, and who thereby misrepresent the One Lord, and His One Faith and Church!

One of the most incisive paragraphs on this subject I have ever read occurs in the former Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia's official critique, written by Dr. H. P. Hamann, of the Missouri Synod "Theology of Fellowship":

Surely one must see that the true counterpart in our day to the false teachers of the New Testament age are the heterodox church-bodies themselves. There are individual false teachers, too, a-plenty, but the truly false teachers today are the heterodox bodies. For in them heterodoxy, false teaching, heresy is given a habitation and a name; it is given respectability; it is given perpetuity--and all this under the protection of the blessed name "Church"! The false teachings given a refuge in heterodox bodies are every whit as bad as the false teachings known in the New Testament. . . . And in all heterodox bodies it is just their characteristic false teaching which makes them what they are, and which is their raison d'etre. The Methodist Church, insofar as it is Methodist, is the support of heresy; its incidental witness to the Gospel is not something which would mean its continued separate existence. And the same is true of all heterodox bodies. In as far as they are what their reason for existence is, they are the modern counterparts of the New Testament false teachers and false prophets. And the New Testament condemnation of false teachers should be applied to them directly and without any softening of the rebuke.⁴⁵

Since, however, we can never deal with entire church-bodies except through representative officials, committees, or assemblies, it follows that any principles applicable to heterodox churches must either apply to their official representative as such, or else they cannot be applied at all!

The Biblical principle is stated in Rom. 16:17: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them." This controversial text is particularly relevant because the heterodox bodies as such are the divisions which constitute the notorious offence of divided Christendom! (The most objective and most valuable grammatical study of Rom. 16:17 in our circles seems to me to be that of the classics scholar, Prof. R. G. Hoerber, Ph.D.⁴⁶)

We have already seen that the extensive application of Rom. 16:17 (and parallels) covers at least heterodox church-bodies and their official representatives as such. So long as this important objective minimum of application is firmly maintained, it does no harm if judgments differ on occasion in the shady area of casuistry, involving all sorts of individual, personal relations, unusual circumstances, etc.

But what of the intensive application of Rom. 16:17 and parallels? What sorts of acts and relations are forbidden by the command to "avoid"? Clearly not all forms of contact, "for then must ye needs go out of the world" (I Cor. 5:10). Spiritual fellowship, communication "in sacris" is meant.

The context of Rom. 16:17, "avoid them", speaks of the kiss of peace (v. 16), which was part of fellowship. Nothing could be more artificial than the arbitrary exemption of prayer from the command to "avoid"--except perhaps the claim that prayer is not worship but witness! (And that prayer is not a means of grace is irrelevant: the kiss of peace wasn't either!) Scripture does not contain separate series of texts, dealing with altar and pulpit fellowship and with prayer fellowship respectively. The practice in both cases must be based on the same texts. But if one single series of texts

governs both areas of application, how can the same texts be held to allow the one and forbid the other?

It is rank formalism to think of church fellowship merely as a formal declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship, short of which all sorts of joint spiritual work and worship with falsifiers of the Gospel are possible. Our Australian Document of Union in its amended, final form,⁴⁷ echoing the 1963 Mankato International Theologians' Conference's incisive definition of fellowship as brotherhood, effectively repudiates the formalistic notion of fellowship:

according to the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions, church fellowship, that is, mutual recognition as brethren, altar and pulpit fellowship and resultant co-operation in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, presupposes unanimity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the right administration of the Sacraments. . . .

We declare that wherever continued co-operation in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments and worship exists, there we have a witness to the world of unity in the faith and a profession of church fellowship.

Church fellowship is brotherhood--and brotherhood is indivisible. However shady some areas of application may be when it comes to individual cases--the evangelical and missionary maxim "salus populi suprema lex" must rule here--the principle is crystal clear that fellowship is one unitary whole, either practised completely or denied completely. This was taken for granted in the ancient Church, as Elert has shown:

There is either complete Church fellowship or none at all. . . . the schism between Bishop

Meletius of Lykopolis and Peter of Alexandria became complete in this, that "these and those prayed separately and likewise everyone rendered the other sacred services (hierourgias) by himself."^{47a}

Fellowship is the point at which doctrine is either confessed or denied. Here it becomes evident whether men or churches really confess what they know to be divine truth, or whether they are merely toying with "views" and "interpretations", and are therefore ready to treat the opposite teachings as having equal rights. A "confession" which can practise fellowship with the representatives of the contrary doctrine, is play-confession. The great Reformer said to Dr. Major:

He who holds his doctrine, faith, and confession to be true, right, and certain, cannot stand in one stable with others, who teach false doctrine, or are given to it.⁴⁸

As part and parcel of the Church's confession of the Gospel, fellowship dare never be treated as simply another aspect of sanctified living, something in the realm of the Second Table, perhaps of the Eighth Commandment. Where this is done, the objective Gospel is subtly transformed into subjectivity, and doctrine and confession are relativised, on the plea that perfection is impossible in a sinful world. Luther warns against this confusion of doctrine and life, in his comments on Gal. 5:9: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump":

Just as in philosophy a small error at the beginning (in first principles) in the end becomes a very great and excessive error, so also it happens in theology: a small error can destroy and falsify the whole Christian doctrine. Therefore doctrine and life must be rigidly distin-

guished. Doctrine is not ours, but God's, Who has called us only as slaves and servants over against it: hence we may not and cannot surrender or remit the very least tittle or letter of it. . .

Doctrine is heaven, life is the earth: in life there are sin, error, disunity, sheer effort and labour; there love must ignore and overlook, tolerate, there the forgiveness of sins must reign and rule. . . But with doctrine it is another matter altogether: for it is holy, pure, heavenly, divine. Whoever wants to change or falsify it, toward him neither love nor mercy are to be shown, hence doctrine needs no forgiveness of sins.

Therefore it won't do at all to identify doctrine and life: for one letter, yes one single tittle of Scripture is vastly more important than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot tolerate it, if people want to distort it in the slightest. But what concerns the weaknesses and mistakes of life, there we can well tolerate and overlook. For we too are poor men, who daily stumble and sin. . . But our doctrine is by God's grace pure.⁴⁹

To use C. S. Lewis' example of the chess-game: one may play well or badly, win or lose, but one could not play at all except for the absolute rigidity of the squares and the moves! And so the Gospel, the doctrine of God, is the immovable framework within which all our "manifold changes of this world" take place. It is constitutive of faith and Church, objective, outside and before us--whether we sin or triumph, believe or disbelieve, obey or disobey, exult or despair, live or die. Whoever thinks he can get on without such an utterly objective and prior Gospel, does not yet know the Law!

To conclude this section, let me cite Luther's famous simile of the two brothers and the bear, which clearly illustrates the two-fold relation of the orthodox Church to the various "Babylonian Captivities" of false doctrine, under whose yoke so much of the spiritual Israel languishes today:

I say that under the pope there exists true Christendom, yea, the very select company of Christendom and many pious and great saints. . . . Hear for yourself what St. Paul says, II Thess. 2:4: The Antichrist will sit in the Temple of God. If now the pope is, as I firmly believe, the true Antichrist, then he must "sit" or reign not in the devil's stable, but in the "Temple of God." No, he is not going to sit where there are only devils and unbelievers or where there is no Christ or Christendom; for he is supposed to be an antichrist, and must therefore be among Christians. And because he must sit and reign there, he must have Christians under him. For "the Temple of God" means not a pile of stones, but holy Christendom; I Cor. 3:17, in which he is to reign. . . . Therefore we do not rave like the fanatics, who condemn everything which the pope has under him; for thus we would condemn also Christendom, the Temple of God, with everything she has from Christ. . . . they attack the Temple of God and miss the Antichrist who sits in it; like blind people who reach for water and get into fire. Yes they do as one brother did to the other in the Thuringian forest: they are walking through the forest together, when a bear attacks them, and grabs one of them and holds him under. The other one wants to help his brother, stabs at the bear, but misses him, and tragically stabs the brother under the bear. The fanatics do the same thing: they should help poor Christendom which the Antichrist has under himself and which he tortures, and so they set

themselves ferociously against the pope, but miss him, and far more tragically murder Christendom under the pope. For if they would leave Baptism and the Sacrament intact, the Christians under the pope could still escape with their souls and be saved, as happened hitherto; but now if the sacraments are taken from them, they must be lost, for Christ himself is taken away thereby. My dear, that's not the way to come bursting upon the pope, because Christ's saints lie under him. It takes a cautious, modest spirit, which would let remain under him that which is the Temple of God, and resist the addition, with which he destroys the Temple of God.⁵⁰

The "Lutheran" World Federation

If the Church of the Augsburg Confession is as ecumenical as she claims to be, is not the global forum provided by the Lutheran World Federation just the instrument she needs to bear effective witness to genuine Biblical ecumenicity?

Reinhold Niebuhr observed about Woodrow Wilson that "as a typical son of the manse, he believed too much in words." In assessing the nature of the L.W.F., it is important not to be misled by mere words, but to pay attention to substance. At least two questions must be asked and answered: (1) What kind of churches make up the L.W.F. membership? (2) Does the L.W.F. act as a church?

In the first place, since the stream cannot rise higher than its source, we must consider the nature of the L.W.F.'s constituent bodies. A decisive feature of the L.W.F. is the fact that most of its 50 odd million members are supplied by various state and territorial churches of Europe. What is the character of these churches? The Church of

Sweden is in full inter-communion with the Church of England and with the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland, both of which in their official confessions--if indeed one may still call the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles that--reject the Real Presence in the Biblical, Lutheran sense. The Church of Norway, the Church of Denmark, and the Church of Finland also practise inter-communion with the Churches of England and of Scotland. The Churches of Sweden and of Finland also participate in Anglican episcopal consecrations, and vice versa.

Even more curious is the situation of the various German churches in the L.W.F. The relevant portion of our story begins in 1817,⁵¹ with the Prussian King's attempt to unite the Lutheran Church of Prussia (to which ninety per cent of his subjects belonged) with his own Calvinistic Church. This resulted in the so-called United Church of Prussia, in which Lutheran and Calvinistic Confessions, the Real Presence and the Real Absence, had equal rights. The modern, expanded successor of this Union Church is the Evangelical Church of the Union, one member of which, the Church of Pomerania, is actually a full member of the L.W.F.!

The Prussian King, Frederick William III, was sincerely convinced that the "minor" differences between the two churches could be and had to be overcome, also in order to make common cause against the outright Rationalistic unbelief which was still powerful. When conscientious Lutherans refused to surrender their Biblical, Reformation faith, the King regarded this simply as insubordination, and his government took increasingly harsh measures in a vain attempt to force compliance. Some incredible scenes took place.⁵² In the hamlet Hoenigern, 500 soldiers drove the weeping Lutheran women from the church-doors with sabres and bayonets, on Christmas Eve, then forced the church open and escorted the

"United" pastor into it to read his "United" service to the empty pews. Lutheran pastoral acts, such as baptisms, marriages, confirmations, etc., were declared invalid and illegal. People were fined for participating in Lutheran services, for refusing "United" baptism, even for refusing to betray their Lutheran pastors. Midwives were commanded to notify the government of the birth of any Lutheran children. Baptized Lutheran infants were seized by the police and forcibly re-baptized by the "United" pastor. Clergy and laymen, even of the nobility, were imprisoned for the "offence" of holding Lutheran services. No wonder that many hundreds emigrated to America and to Australia, forsaking all things rather than surrender the Faith.

So now there were three Protestant Churches in Germany: Lutheran, Calvinist ("Reformed"), and United

The next significant step came under Adolf Hitler, who, in the manner of dictators, wanted to unify and centralize everything, including the church, in order to facilitate government control. Accordingly the German Evangelical Church Federation of 1922 was transformed in 1933 into the German Evangelical Church, with "Reichsbischof" (imperial bishop) Muell at the head. This combined all Lutheran, Calvinist and United churches of Germany into one administrative structure. However, the attempts to exploit the church for nationalistic purposes provoked serious opposition from all sections. This opposition became crystallized in the famous "Confessional Synod" of Barmen in 1934. The Barmen Declaration, composed by Karl Barth, and addressed by the Synod to the "congregations associated in the one German Evangelical Church," called upon the latter,

irrespective of their Lutheran, Reformed, or United background and responsibility to recognize anew the majesty of the one Lord of the one

church and, on this account, the essential unity of their faith, their love, and their hope, of their confession and their task, and of their message through sermon and sacrament.⁵³ (my underlining)

After the collapse of the thousand-year reign in 1945, the Lutheran churches of Germany had their last opportunity to assert their Confessional integrity. They missed it. Instead they joined with all the Calvinistic and United churches of Germany to organize the Evangelical Church in Germany. This happened at Treysa and Eisenach in 1945-1947-1948. This church, though constitutionally a federation, calls itself a church, and, theologically, undoubtedly acts as one. The initial draft constitution

distinctly emphasized that while the EKD /Evangelical Church in Germany. K.M./ lives in an inner unity which makes it more than a mere agency or federation which exists simply to get some common tasks done, this unity is not--or not yet--legally conceivable.⁵⁴

All the Lutheran member churches agreed to these formulations at Treysa on June 6, 1947:

We trust that in this federation, by virtue of the common hearing and heeding of the Word, the church in the sense of the New Testament is realized.

There is agreement on this point that Evangelical church members are not to be excluded from participation in the Lord's Supper for this reason that they belong to another confession recognized in the EKD.⁵⁵

And the basic constitution of the Evangelical Church of Germany (July 13, 1948), provides:

Regularly called ministers of the Word are not denied the privilege of preaching the Word also in congregations of another confession. . . .⁵⁶

Although some Lutheran member churches have in the past objected to formally declared complete altar-fellowship--informally practised anyway--within the Evangelical Church, this opposition is now subsiding as a result of the "consensus" achieved in the Arnoldshain Theses of 1957.⁵⁷ While these Theses generally straddle the controverted issues, Thesis 5 (c) and (d) can only be construed as denials of the Real Presence in the Biblical, Confessional Lutheran sense.

Dr. H. Sasse, whose testimony gains weight from the fact that he confessed not only in word but also in deed--choosing "exile" rather than comfortable treason within the EKD--has written:

The German Evangelical Church Federation of 1922 proved to be, as a wise leader of the Union foresaw, "the sleeping-car in which the Lutherans are being carried into the Union." . . . In Eisenach, at the foot of the Wartburg, the Lutheran Church of Germany was buried in 1948. Loehe's dream-vision of the burial of the Lutheran Church through its own pastors had become reality. From the sleeping-car of the Church Federation one could still exit. . . . From the grave of the EKD no one shall rise again. This mishmash of Federation and church, a federation which calls itself church and acts as church, a church that wants to be federation--"federal church" they said in 1933--no longer knows any right of secession.⁵⁸

They all /the bishops/ know, without exception, that the EKD is compatible neither with the

doctrine of Luther, nor with the Invariata /the Unaltered Augsburg Confession/, nor with the Formula of Concord. They all know that the EKD is more than a federation. . . And what they don't know, their theologians know. Sommerlath, Schlink, and Merz, to name only these, know that one must choose between the constitution of the EKD and the Formula of Concord.⁵⁹

Widening our perspective to include all of "Lutheran" Europe, let us hear Dr. Sasse's sobering summary-- bearing in mind that he is speaking of the churches which comprise the great bulk of the L.W.F. and therefore determine its character:

The Lutheran territorial churches of Germany have been dissolved into the "Evangelical Church in Germany," whose Council has just decided that in every member church all members of the EKID, without regard to their Confession, must be admitted to the Lord's Supper. The Churches of Sweden and Finland are in intercommunion with the Church of England. An Anglican bishop participates in every episcopal consecration. Bishop Stephen Neill, who "equalises" (gleichschaltet) German students and missionaries at the supposedly Lutheran Faculty of Hamburg, keeps book about how many German bishops already possess apostolic succession. On top of this, Sweden has now solemnly introduced intercommunion with the Church of Scotland, which is practised also by Denmark and Norway. How all this works out in the formerly Lutheran mission fields, above all in Africa and India, is well known. The Church of the Palatinate has solemnly accepted intercommunion with the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the related American sects, but demands that all German Lutherans moving into the Palatinate communicate at the Reformed Communion Table of the Church of

the Palatinate. In Holland altar-fellowship between the Lutheran and the Reformed territorial church has been solemnly confirmed. France will follow. And no one takes offence at this. The German professors go from Tuebingen to Zurich, from Zurich to Goettingen, from Bonn to Erlangen, from Erlangen to Mainz. For "the Confessional age is over," as they assure us. That their students must some day swear an Ordination vow, does not interest them.⁶⁰

Clearly, the "Lutheran" character of these churches, and of their World Federation, is a legal fiction: "To assure the security of the organized church, the legal validity of the confession must not be touched; it is respected as a public document, but in theology and in piety every one goes his own way."⁶¹

In matters of faith, legal fictions are sacrilege. Churches which still have real Confessions, and are still able to distinguish between the Real Presence and the Real Absence in the Sacrament, cannot prostitute their Confessions by going along with the masquerade. They cannot but stand with Luther and the Formula of Concord:

I reckon them all as belonging together (that is as Sacramentarians and enthusiasts), for that is what they are who will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless of Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. WHO-EVER, I SAY, WILL NOT BELIEVE THIS, WILL PLEASE LET ME ALONE AND EXPECT NO FELLOWSHIP FROM ME. THIS IS FINAL.⁶² (my caps)

Of course many more fundamental things than the Real Presence are at stake. As Dr. Sasse observes, "the majority of Protestant churches have long ago broke

with the faith of the Reformation and the faith of the whole Church."⁶³ Let three testimonies suffice to indicate the results of two centuries of secularization:

Dr. Hans Asmussen, President of the Chancery of the Evangelical Church in Germany from 1946 to 1948, wrote in the Lutheran World, an official publication of the L.W.F.:

But this is in fact the picture of wide sectors of our Lutheran church today: clergymen read aloud the Christmas story, which they consider a fairytale. They read aloud the Easter story, to which they find access only after several reinterpretations. At the grave they witness to the resurrection of the dead, which they consider a myth.⁶⁴

The Bruedernrundbrief, a Confessional voice within the territorial church of Brunswig denied that the territorial churches are even churches any longer:

A binding doctrine no longer exists in them. He who maintains of the Evangelical Lutheran Confession that it is binding for all members of the territorial church, is regarded as a foreign body, yes, he harvests scorn and hatred. The Confession merely stands peacefully on paper, in constitutions, and even there "screened" by ambiguous formulations. Practically everyone teaches and believes whatever occurs to him. . . There is no longer any article of faith which might not be denied at will and with impunity. And because this is so, because all allegiance to the Confessions, in constitutions, Ordination vows and other obligations of office, is no longer taken seriously, but is regarded only as empty form, our territorial churches as church-bodies are no longer churches.⁶⁵

And, reporting from Sweden, Pastor Tom G. A. Hardt, contests "the notion that a European national church like the Church of Sweden is in any way a Christian body. There are many Christians within her, both of orthodox and heretical convictions, but the body as such is a social entity, part and parcel of the society."⁶⁶ What is the nature of the aberrations? "I regard it as unnecessary to make a list of heresies within the Swedish episcopacy and clergy. I know of no heresy that is not found there."⁶⁷

Recently, however, a strong reaction to the reign of Bultmannian Liberalism has arisen within some German territorial churches. Movements like "No Other Gospel" have attracted considerable attention. One church-politician who had dismissed the movement as involving but "a fraction of our church population," received the just reply: "Yes, but it happens to be that fraction which still goes to church!"

This is the tragic result of the last centuries' theological dissolution: the churches are empty. When I was in Helsinki in 1963, I was taken by a Finnish friend to see one of the two main down-town churches, in a parish of 20,000. The church seats 3000 people. We asked: "How many attend church here on Sundays?" Our Finnish friend was not supposed to mention this to foreigners, but the answer was: 65! And in the summer even they didn't come and the church had to be closed!

This is typical of the territorial churches. Individual preachers may attract larger audiences, but by and large, attendances are pitiful. National averages of 3 per cent have been mentioned. Bavaria is considered exceptionally good, because 10 per cent go to church.

All this needs to be kept in mind when considering the L.W.F.'s claim to represent some 50 million

Lutherans. These millions exist only on paper. Only a small fraction have any meaningful connection with the organized church. Their leaders are generals without armies. They have plenty of money, because the German state, for instance, hands over to them 10 per cent of all the income taxes collected!

To sum up: Under close scrutiny the "Lutheran millions" of the L.W.F. evaporate into theological and statistical fictions. It transpires that they are neither Lutheran nor millions!

At this point of the argument, when it has to be admitted that the religious situation within the L.W.F. is fairly grim, it is usually said: But the L.W.F. is not a church anyway but only a federation, so that joining it does not imply any spiritual recognition or responsibility. It is a wonderful opportunity to help these dilapidated Lutherans by witnessing to them!

Now, what would you say if I told you: "The U.S.A. are not a nation, because they are a federation of states"? Or: "Australia isn't a nation, because it is a federation"? You would soon conclude that there is something badly amiss in my logic. Why cannot something be both a nation and a federation? The same is true of the Church. The terms "church" and "federation" simply move on two different sets of tracks, and there is no contradiction between them whatever. The one speaks about the inner nature of the thing, the other of its outward organization. It is quite literally nonsense, therefore, to say that something is not a church BECAUSE it is a federation! (The Missouri Synod is supposed to be a federation of autonomous congregations. Is it therefore not a church?)

Certain misinformed or dishonest people have been

spreading the fairy-tale that the last Assembly of the L.W.F. at Helsinki in 1963 has made it quite clear, even through constitutional changes, that the L.W.F. is not a church. The very opposite is the case. It was just at Helsinki that it was made very plain that the L.W.F. is in fact a church!

In the December, 1960, issue of the Lutheran World, Prof. Peter Brunner had published an essay, "The Lutheran World Federation as an Ecclesiological Problem," in which, on the basis of the L.W.F. Commission on Theology's own "thorough study," he argued that L.W.F. was in fact constantly having to act as church, for instance in making decisions involving doctrine (any membership case!). Teaching is "the one absolutely central commission of the Church of Christ. When it teaches, it is undoubtedly acting as a church." And Dr. Brunner concludes that all member churches of the L.W.F. ought to be in full church fellowship.

On the basis of this essay and the resultant discussion, the Commission on Theology presented to the Helsinki Assembly an official report on "The Nature of the Lutheran World Federation." The idea was that this, or some modification of it, should be adopted as an "authoritative commentary" on the Constitution. This Report regards it as self-evident that the L.W.F. has "churchly tasks," and speaks of "the unquestionable fact that the L.W.F. must also be active in the area of doctrine and church policy."⁶⁸ It furthermore speaks of a "tension" between "the federative character of the instrument" and "the churchly character of its purpose and aims" (*italics in original*). The Report notes that by the very fact of membership all member churches accept the L.W.F.'s "doctrinal basis," and concludes:

Therefore, these churches are spiritually obli-

gated, above and beyond their having come together in the L.W.F., to enter into mutual church fellowship and to declare the consummation of church fellowship through their official organs.

Two prominent experts on church law who were present, Prof. Liermann and Prof. Grundmann, however, advised that constitutional amendment was the only way of clarifying the constitution, but that an "authoritative commentary" on the constitution was a legal impossibility. The Assembly followed this advice. It may be added that the amendments proposed to the Assembly had been discussed previously with representatives of the large delegation of observers from the Missouri Synod, who had apparently fallen into the trap and approved them.

When the new version of the L.W.F.'s constitution, as amended at Helsinki, provides that the L.W.F. "shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority" (III,1), this does not mean that it shall not exercise churchly functions, but that it shall do so merely as the agent of one or more member churches. But it is everywhere taken for granted--and certainly was at Helsinki--that the L.W.F. must exercise churchly functions.

The Department of Theology, for example, reported officially that "one of the basic principles of the theological work of the L.W.F. is that it is carried out in the fellowship of the Church."⁶⁹

If the churchly nature of the L.W.F. has not always been made clear in the past, the reason is purely church-political. Prof. E. Clifford Nelson, one of the main essayists at Helsinki, said in his lecture, "The One Church and the Lutheran Churches," which was received with tumultuous applause:

No doubt the leaders of the Lutheran World Con-

vention and the Lutheran World Federation felt they were acting wisely in making disclaimers of intentions to being or becoming "a church" in a constitutional sense. But, that organized world Lutheranism was an expression of the ekklesia had already been recognized (Jørgensen: "It is a Church".) Nevertheless, a prudential concern dictated then that haste be made slowly, in order to dissipate anxieties and to avoid shattering by precipitous action what had already been achieved.⁷⁰

Prof. Hans Liermann, in his post-Helsinki article, "The Legal Nature and Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation," which seems to me to be the most thorough, indeed the definitive treatment to date, concludes that "the Lutheran World Federation is a church in every sense of the word. It possesses a confession and fulfills churchly tasks. It is entrusted with direct proclamation of the word."⁷¹

At this point I could conclude with a hearty Q.E.D. However, Prof. Liermann adds some observations which are so important, that we should not overlook them here. He says that the L.W.F. "represents a type of church answering to the demands of the modern world, and with a quite new character, but rich in promise for the future." This is so because the tendency today is away from a centralized "empire"-type of church structure, toward a federated "commonwealth"-type. And the L.W.F. fits nicely into this picture. Indeed, Prof. Liermann notes that even Rome, the classic example of an ecclesiastical empire, had discerned the signs of the times, and has begun a "cautious loosening and decentralising" showing that "possibilities of transition to the new form of world church are being prepared."

Whether the Vatican can absorb the World Council of Churches and transform itself in the process from

"the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof" (Hobbes) to a more modern ghost of a commonwealth of churches with the Pope as its figurehead, remains to be seen. But all signs seem to point in that direction. While naive and not so naive Lutherans look about them and cry incredulously, "Where, where is this dreadful Super-Church?" they are at that very moment building it, and being built into it, through all those innocent-looking federations now so popular! Whether it is L.W.F. or L.C.U.S.A., N.C.C., or W.C.C., the illicit and un-ecumenical premise is everywhere the same: that Christian unity can come by way of "ORGANISATIONAL RECOGNITION OF FRACTIONAL OBEDIENCE TO THE ONE LORD" (Franzmann)!⁷²

And when the Behemoth Church shall at last stand before us complete, as a theologically ever looser but organizationally ever more centralized federal structure in which everyone may believe and teach as he pleases--except for the heresy of "separatism"--will that be the one, united Church of Christ? No, it will be the great Counter-Church, or Babylon, of Rev. 17!

Lutherans should be the last to be deceived by this fraud. For it was Luther who saw the issue so clearly:

The holy Church of Christ speaks thus: I BELIEVE one holy Christian Church; the mad church of the Pope speaks thus: I SEE one holy Christian Church.⁷³

In these last days of sore distress, when the Word of God is crowded out of the Holy Place more and more by secular abominations of desolation, the Church of the Augsburg Confession has a unique opportunity to teach men to walk by faith and not by sight, to seek Christ's Church by her pure Marks,

and not to be misled by masks. When men find the Shepherd--by His pure Voice (St. John 10)--they have also found the Sheepfold. But if they look merely for sheep, they may follow a wolf unawares into the valley of the shadow of death. To proclaim Christ's Life-giving Voice, to be a humble but incorruptible stewardess of His mysteries, this is the massively ecumenical task of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. In fulfilling it faithfully she is in fact the true Ecumenical Movement of our time. This is her grace and her glory--but also her judgment!

Footnotes

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Department of Theology, L.W.F., Report, 1957-1963 (Helsinki Assembly, 1963, Document No. 7), pp. 15 ff.
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8. Ibid.
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10. Martin Chemnitz, Examen Concilii Tridentini
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20. H. Sasse, "Gedanken zum Jubilaeum der 'Oekumene'",
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No. 67 (Advent 1960), p. 137.
21. F. Pieper, Die Lutherische Lehre von der Recht-
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Seminary Press, 1916), p. 58.
22. Augsburg Confession, VII, 2.3, Tappert, op. cit.,
p. 32.

23. See the trend of the patristic quotes cited by Dr. Walther in an orthodox sense, as testimonies to the doctrine that the pastoral office is a divine institution, in C. F. W. Walther, Kirche und Amt (Erlangen, 1875), pp. 210-211.
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30. Ibid., Rule and Norm, 9, p. 503, and Preface to the Book of Concord, ibid., p. 11.
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57. Ibid., pp. 122-124.
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EDITORIAL NOTE:

The Winter and Spring issues of this periodical contain the four Luther lectures which were delivered at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, on October 30 and 31, 1967. This presentation was a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's observance of the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. The lecturer was Pastor Kurt Marquart of Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. These lectures were designed for and delivered to pastors and lay people.

Pastor Marquart speaks of himself as "a European-born American living in Australia." He was born in Estonia in 1934 and lived in Austria during World War II. On several occasions his family found it necessary to take flight, to escape

Communism. He came to the United States in 1949.

The essayist spent two years at Concordia Collegiate Institute in Bronxville, New York, and received his theological training at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He was graduated from that institution in 1959. His B.D. thesis compared the "Prolegomena" (fundamental theological principles and assumptions) of F. Pieper with those of G. Aulen.

The first two lectures, entitled THE WORD AS TRUTH, are presented in this number of the Quarterly. In them Pastor Marquart examines the matter of Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Hermeneutics. The next issue of this journal will contain the two presentations on THE WORD AS LIFE, in which the essayist considers the Word as the Source and Center of practical Church life. (Extra copies of the full set of lectures may be had for \$2.00)