

# Memorandum Inter Nos

## Presenting a series of observations on the present state of American Lutheranism on the Synodical Conference and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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### Preliminary Remarks to Aid Approach

This Memorandum was written in Germany some time after an extended trip to the United States. It is addressed to American pastors and perhaps also some capable laymen for the simple reason that there is a certain historic decision that must primarily be made in America. On this decision depends the weal and woe of Christendom in more than one way. Whatever the outcome of this particular issue may be, it will gravely affect the author and all true Lutherans in Europe, in fact all over the world.

Since the author is unknown to most of the kind brethren to whom he addresses this paper he feels that he owes it to them briefly to sketch his background, but above all to indicate the origin and aim of this publication.

The author was born in Colorado at the end of the last century, and educated primarily in the schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod though also attending the University of Chicago. After graduating at St. Louis in 1922, he was sent to Europe. He did church work in Germany and England ever after. Since 1947 he has been teaching at the new Seminary of the Lutheran Free Churches at Oberursel, a suburb of Frankfurt am Main. *Die Lutherische Theologische Hochschule zu Oberursel*—established on spacious and very beautiful grounds bought by Missouri Synod after the War—took the place of two former Lutheran seminaries, which had been operated for many decades east of the present Iron Curtain. Up to the second World War only the so-called Saxon Free Church had been in fellowship with Synodical Conference Lutherans. But as the result of doctrinal negotiations after the last war all of the independent Lutheran Churches of Germany, each with its a colorful history, but also with troubles of its own—in all some 80,000 souls in both parts of Germany—are within our communion, whereas the former state churches of Germany, at present called *Landeskirchen*, are not.

In 1935 the author, then pastor of the congregations in London, England, was sent to attend Missouri Synod's Convention in Cleveland. In 1958 he determined to spend his first "sabbatical leave," which exempted him from teaching during the summer term, in the land of his birth, his second visit after he left in 1922. The fact that he has for seven years been the chief editor of a theological quarterly of a certain academic standing, *Lutherischer Rundblick*, added a special incentive, if not duty. The 1958 trip took the author to all parts of United States excepting the extreme Southeast and the Pacific Coast. He met with as many pastors and congregations as possible. Apart from this he focussed his attention on institutions of learning, especially those of theological status. In the states through which he traveled, he visited all the colleges and seminaries of the Synodical Conference, several Lutheran high schools, and Valparaiso University, speaking to the student bodies and meeting in extended conference with the professors, especially at St. Louis, also at Springfield, Thiensville, and Mankato. It was to him a valuable experience to be present at St. Louis for the general conference of Lutheran Theological Professors on June 10th and 11th. Besides this he was privileged to meet with theological professors of the E.L.C., A.L.C., and U.L.C. at the following institutions: St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minn., Maywood (Chicago), Ill., Columbus and Springfield, Ohio, and Mt. Airy (Philadelphia), Penna. He was graciously invited to attend: the district conventions (of the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod) in northern Wisconsin; Missouri's Southern Wisconsin District Convention; the convention of the Synodical Conference at Lakewood, Ohio; several smaller conferences and meetings of groups of pastors; and the large gathering of the Atlantic District pastors in Pocono Crest, from September 30th to October 2nd. Above all, there was extended to him the courtesy of an invitation to be present at meetings of the doctrinal committees of the

Synodical Conference as well as of various other committees, and he was granted interviews with the officials of these synods, especially in St. Louis, and with the Armed Services Commission in Washington, D. C. In general this half year served the purpose of furnishing a picture—as complete as possible under the circumstances—of the present situation and condition of Lutheranism in America.

In the course of this recent visit to the United States the author also had many an exchange of thought of a rather intimate nature, conversing freely with most of the leaders of the Synodical Conference synods, above all of his “home synod” Missouri, and also with its theologians of note. Certain convictions of his, accompanied by references to the historical background, of what is going on today, attracted attention. The result was that this visitor from Germany was solemnly requested to commit to paper a summary of his convictions and conclusions on the present crisis of American Lutheranism so that it could be made use of in responsible corporate deliberations. Let it be stated plainly that the author’s personal friends in America had no connection whatsoever with this idea, nor did other Lutheran synods in America or any group in Missouri Synod. On returning home the author, in one sense, failed to comply with the request and yet, in another sense, he has yielded to the suggestion. He was not willing to prepare a syllabus of the remarks he had made in conversations because he feared that, lacking that context, they would of necessity be misunderstood. He is conscious of a responsibility incurred also by this refusal. He might have preferred writing a book dealing with all the topics involved. But not having the time to do this nor the means to publish more extensive findings he settled on a middle course. He attempted to do his duty toward the Lutheran Church in America by preparing a PRO MEMORIA or MEMORANDUM, providing enough detail to be intelligible to all pastors and educated laymen who make an earnest effort to follow his thoughts and yet brief enough for the average busy brother. On account of the many aspects involved it took more than a year to complete the task. A few copies of a preliminary draft of certain sections were sent to men of judgment in advance. The present writer went beyond the original suggestion and his own earlier intention by penning his investigations and conclusions not only in the interest of certain high quarters in Missouri Synod, but of the rank and file of fellow clergymen and thoughtful Christians there. By giving this treatise the name MEMORANDUM INTER NOS the author wants to stress its “conversational character.” The aim is not to pass that sort of a final judgment which a church historian might perhaps consider his duty. This writer’s purpose is rather to cause the mature reader to think and thus to move him to supplement (and also to correct) these observations, by a creative effort of his own in order at long last to overcome the present crisis.\*

A final remark on the point of view seems advisable. The author would consider it presumptuous folly on the basis of his reading and a six-months visit to pretend to know the whole inside life of so large a section of American Christianity. As to facts, any alert mind on the scene will know more details than this visitor. What moved many a worthy brother to discuss present issues frankly with the author and what prompted the decisive request for this Memorandum may have been two circumstances. On the one hand, the writer can still be considered a “Missourian” both in a narrower and in a broader sense. He was born and trained in the Missouri Synod, and after twelve years in Germany he became pastor of the two Missouri Synod congregations then in England (1934-1939). Also since then, he has remained in close theological contact with the home scene (except from autumn 1939 to spring 1945). On other hand, the German adage “vor Bäumen den Wald nicht sehen können” (not to see the forest for trees) contains at least a kernel of truth. From a distance there are advantages of perspective which also a church must utilize. From a marked point of vantage it is less easy to see each hill, but the mountain panorama stands out in bolder contours.

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\* Friends of the author at separate centers of Missouri Synod church life have taken upon themselves the expense of having this Memorandum printed and distributed. Prof. emeritus C. August Hardt, D.D., of Milwaukee, Wis., has assumed moral responsibility for this undertaking. Whoever would like to help along a little and to share in the cost is requested to fill out the enclosed blank and to mail his letter in the attached envelope, accompanied either by cash or by a check (perhaps \$1). The contribution is, of course, applied to all three instalments of this Memorandum. The second instalment carrying the major sections of Part III, more detailed than the first two parts, will follow as soon as possible. The last instalment is not due before the latter part of the year. Whoever wants further copies can get them at \$1 for all instalments from the address given on the envelope.

It seems almost superfluous to add in this connection that this entire undertaking is, of course, strictly the author's personal affair, neither the Lutheran Free Churches nor the Oberursel Seminary bear any responsibility.

Today American Lutherans are facing directly the New World with its pressures to conformity. They are no longer separated by language barriers from the general population. They have to cope with the influx of great numbers of newly-won members of most divergent origin. They are as well face to face with the strong theological impact of Germany and the rest of Europe and the tremendous Ecumenical Movement, represented in its peculiar way also by the Lutheran World Federation. How are they standing up against all this? What, above all, is predicable and predictable of the Synodical Conference and of the largest *Gnesio*-Lutheran<sup>1</sup> unit in the world; the Missouri Synod? Such are the questions and concerns of this Memorandum.

Like all endeavors of this type this survey is fragmentary. The data can claim neither to be complete nor fully documented, since this is not a book. A historical point of view is attempted as developed both by the climate of the two decisive Protestant countries of the Old World and by ten years of teaching systematical theology at the Theological Seminary of the Lutheran Free Churches in Oberursel near Frankfurt am Main.<sup>2</sup> Although the final draft of this paper took much more time than envisaged, there is at least a double advantage in the delay. On some of the crucial points of Part Three additional material of a decisive nature could thus be incorporated. Powerful reactions against defection, also the beginning of official steps, have since made it plain as daylight that the function of this Memorandum is not to provide initiative of any type whatsoever but by means of an appraisal from a distance to aid those nearer to the scene to attain a balanced view and to do their full duty in days of destiny.

The author is conscious of his own limitations and his unworthiness before God. He presents his findings only because after all that he saw, heard, read, and was told he is in duty and in honor bound to do so. He adds the humble prayer that the Holy Spirit for Christ's sake may turn this attempt to some good account. God knows the sole aim of this humble effort to be to contribute toward living up to today's truly world-wide *Gnesio*-Lutheran responsibility, remembering Christ's grave admonition: "I come quickly. Hold that fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3, 11).

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<sup>1</sup> Those who stood up for the full confessional position against Melancthon, after Luther's death were called true of *Gnesio*-Lutherans, and the term is applicable again today, the division being between Pan-Lutheranism or *Allerweltsluthertum* that has much in common with Melancthonianism, on the one hand, and a continuation of the genuine Reformation in a line with the true ecumenicity of the church, on the other.

<sup>2</sup> This school is accredited with the State of Hestia as on the level of German universities, presupposing *Abitur* (Senior College diplomas). It is frequented not only by students coming from all the Lutheran Free Churches of Europe and South Africa, but also by a high percentage of youth coming from the various *Landeskirchen*. There is a considerable interchange with the universities. At present the resident enrolment is 47.

This Memorandum is presented in four parts:

The Setting.....	(I)
Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference Assets .....	(II)
Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference Liabilities.....	(III)
The Conclusion .....	(IV)

## I. The Setting

There are vital *dogmatical presuppositions* to an adequate view of the present moorings of American Lutheranism.

The Lutheran Church is not a sect among sects. Its name is the result of historical circumstances and not really fair. The Evangelical or Lutheran passion is to trust only in Christ, to bank on who He is and what He did, and what He says — in order to give Him alone all honor. True Lutheranism, therefore, is nothing but consistent Christianity. As such it adheres to Christ's apostolic word. It therefore recognizes only One Church, the *Una Sancta Catholica Apostolica*. Its Christians and its theological teachers refuse to betray Christ's One Church. They are not willing to surrender *Una Sancta* apostolicity to errors devised by Satan or to a pseudo-union, manufactured jointly by pious enthusiasm and impious indifferentism. While they are happy to acknowledge that every true Christian, every soul trusting alone in Christ's merits, is part and parcel of the *Una Sancta*, they are conscious of the fact that they cannot look into anybody's heart. The Communion of Saints or believers is not seen. As true Lutherans we realize that we can be certain of the One Church's existence at any given place only if the saving Word and Sacraments are in constant use there, for they have God's promise not to return void. Actually, we must see the marks of apostolicity and catholicity, the pure word and the genuine sacraments, to be in evidence before consciously joining a local congregation. The One Church of the One Christ is the church of the One Truth (Tim. 3, 15), not of a medley of truth and error. Pure symbols mark its way.

The name Lutheran actually does mislead — after the lapse of centuries. It attaches by inheritance to many large communities who have suffered *häretische Überfremdung* (heretical estrangement or deformation, Peter Brunner of Heidelberg), many as long as fully 200 years ago.

All European Territorial Churches, in German parlance *Staats- und Volkskirchen*, have for a long time allowed, and still permit, heresies to reign more or less unchecked for the very reason that they want to continue their history in a wrong way and appear bigger and more entitled to national privileges than they are. Seeing that they claim millions of indifferent, secularized, hostile, and anti-Christian Europeans as recognized members, although only a tiny fragment shows up on Sundays, they are forced to grant these secularized communities an enormous influence on their own inner nature and actions. They can have no unity of doctrine. There is no spiritual consistency and honesty in church action or practice. They are, all of them, in some way definitely linked up with Reformed Churches in joint worship and communion, also in this respect negating apostolicity. All of this does not amount to saying that there cannot remain great missionary opportunities in these territorial churches which originally were Lutheran. But these opportunities cannot now be consistently realized.

Moreover, also in American Lutheranism there has been a grave defection. The United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod offer *prima facie* evidence of advanced disintegration, not to speak of others.

Under these circumstances it is senseless to say that the mere Lutheran name nowadays predicates apostolicity. If we regard the demands of non-sectarian churchmanship or true ecumenicity, then heresy entrenched in "Lutheran" bodies excludes fellowship of faith with such off-color Lutherans just as definitely as full-fledged heresy precludes it with Rome as a partner. There can be no such thing as a partial church fellowship. *Communio una est*. Christ has founded only One Church, and there is only one legitimate fellowship. Though Christians are—owing to God's grace and human confusion—in heterodox bodies, they are by virtue of faith not *of* Babylon.

This principle has bearing also on appraising the patent unionism of American Lutheran bodies, which is increasing. The sinister syncretistic malady means—first in principle, then in practice—that not only one, but many and ultimately all heresies are to be tolerated. In all apostate *Christian* church bodies, no matter of what degree of corruption, the *Una Sancta* is still present. More than that, it is still witnessing—even in the Church of Rome. Without the Word of God they would not be churches at all, no *ecclesiae* and therefore also no *ecclesiae falsae*. But since Satan’s counter-church is also speaking, having even somehow secured equal rights, be it *de iure* or *de facto*, apostolicity has yielded to confusion. The visible body as such is “a house divided against itself.” The *Una Sancta* represented by true Christians is still there, but it is as it were in Babylonian Captivity. This captivity dare not to be accepted, dare not be pronounced Christian, but must be fought. Confirmed error is to be shunned and departed from, 2 Cor. 6, 14-18; 2 John 9-11; Tit. 3, 10.

Let us turn now from this primarily doctrinal introduction to the *historical presuppositions* of the present day assessment attempted in this essay. What is the historical background of American Lutheranism, also of its right wing, operative in these years from 1958 to 1960?

The New World Lutheran Church — now using the term as though it were a denomination — has in the course of three centuries become a church that is accepted as belonging to America. In spite of the successive waves of immigration from various countries, it today is practically everywhere an English-speaking church, fitted into the American scene and adjusted to its customary way of life. Tremendous implications naturally attach to all metamorphoses changing men’s lives on short notice. For the Middle West the total lingual and cultural adjustment was in many places effected in less than a life’s span. Inevitably sweeping outward changes entail certain inward revolutions. In part they are likely to be beneficial, in part also detrimental. Surveying the recent New World theater of history, including the now dominant Middle West, it is proper to ask how the past and the present of American Lutheranism are related to each other and how they compare.

As to *de facto* orthodoxy, that is actual, practiced apostolicity, it is a strange and impressive phenomenon that, for about 80 years, after the Saxon arrival in 1839, there was a continual growth in the determination of the various groups of German and Scandinavian Lutherans of the Middle West and even of the already more Americanized states of the East to adhere to the contents of the Lutheran Confessions as genuinely representing the voice of the One Holy Apostolic Church. Abdell Ross Wentz in his book “A History of Lutheranism in America”<sup>3</sup> admits this growth of confessional conviction.

If we accept the earlier eastern process in what are now the component parts of the U.L.C. as being the first language transition, *der erste Sprachübergang*, the great Middle West lingual and cultural change after the first World War may justly be counted as the second and even more momentous *Sprachwechsel* within American Lutheranism. On the positive side it at long last gave the American Lutheran Church everywhere a missionary approach to millions of fellow citizens who before had always been tempted to consider Lutheranism an imported faith. The result of intense evangelistic efforts, combined with natural increase, has been a startling growth in membership and worshippers. There can hardly be any doubt that American Lutheranism can, in the next few years, reach the figure of 10,000,000 members, most of them most likely actual churchgoers. No doubt the Missouri Synod’s evangelistic enterprise (especially the great outreach of the Lutheran Hour and other endeavors) has greatly contributed to Lutheranism’s becoming a major factor in the United States. Of course, we discount much in the present “surge of piety in America,”<sup>4</sup> which outwardly benefits also the Lutherans and their statistics but may prove a grave liability in the end.

A concomitant of the rapid expansion will be the further outward unification of American Lutheranism. The process of aligning practically all bodies outside the Synodical Conference and of even organizing them into two church bodies — The American Lutheran Church and the envisaged Lutheran Church in America — is almost completed. Via N.L.C. and L.W.F. there is between the two mergers now on the way already a cooperation and fellowship which virtually amounts to church-fellowship. To deny it would be deceiving ourselves. It is only logical that at Saskatoon, Sask., Canada, all N.L.C. bodies are jointly operating Luther

<sup>3</sup> Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1955, p. 155ff. and p. 238-247.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Roy Eckhardt’s book bearing this title (Association Press, New York, 1958) and Martin E. Marty’s *The New Shape of American Religion* (Harpers, 1959).

Theological Seminary since September 1958. Probably the real reason why the idea of one N.L.C. church body has so far met with defeat is the wish of the central section of American Lutheranism not to lose their chance of closer relationship with Missouri too quickly.<sup>5</sup> As soon as the initial difficulties of a new body have been overcome The American Lutheran Church (T.A.L.C.) will no doubt make an enormous effort to establish altar and pulpit fellowship with Missouri *without* changing the T.A.L.C. platform and program or sacrificing the present close association with the U.L.C., Augustana, etc. The struggle promises soon to be as dramatic in

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<sup>5</sup> The "Lutheran Standard" April 6, 1957, p.12, published the following, resolution of the American -Lutheran Church with appended official explanation:

"Wherever congregations and pastors of the A.L.C. find they are mutually agreed in confession and practice with congregations and pastors of other Lutheran Church bodies they may in good conscience practice fellowship both in worship and work."

"Since we have reached the place in discussion where *we find no doctrinal differences* between ourselves and the other major Lutheran bodies in America, and since we are agreed that all bear properly the name Lutheran, and since problems arise only in the area of practice, such a declaration is not only possible but practical. It takes into account existing, practices within the Church. The district presidents have been assigned the task of devising a practical system for implementing the resolution." [Our emphases on the decisive 5 words.]

This document merely shows the *double mind* that actuated the chief body of the Center in *all* negotiations of the last decades. Dr. Reu agreed with Missouri on Verbal Inspiration and at the same time signed the Pittsburgh Agreement with the U.L.C., which the commissioners of the latter body explained in the opposite sense. The A.L.C. plainly wanted union with the Right (Synodical Conference) and with the Left (U.L.C. and Augustana) simultaneously. A very prominent man of the A.L.C. admitted in conversation with the present writer that this desire to embrace both outside wings of Lutheranism had been the driving force of their church politics and that this double-dealing probably was the real reason of the failure ever to gain Missouri Synod. Since the Left has no doctrinal objections, the Center practically already enjoys that easy church fellowship, and the question remaining is how to bring in the Right, too.

Evidently Dr. Hermann Sasse was correct in his realistic article on "Selective Fellowship" (*The Australasian Theological Review*, Sep. 1957, p. 45ff.; in German *Lutherischer Rundblick*, 1958, p. 76ff.). After ruling out two simpler assumptions to explain the attitude of the A.L.C. he went on to say (p. 48):

"There is a third possibility. 'We find no doctrinal differences' (A.L.C. statement 1957). Since we probably do not regard our fathers as having acted carelessly and not conscientiously when they remained separated because they did find doctrinal differences, and since these differences have not yet been settled, could it be that we have lost sight of the differences and their serious character? Could it be that during the past thirty or more years our churches have developed in the direction of dogmatic indifference? Such developments have taken place and can take, place in any church, the sons no longer understanding the problems of their fathers. Nominally, of course, and most certainly *bona fide*, the present generation maintains the doctrinal standards of the confessions as they have been inherited from the fathers. But a confession cannot remain a real confession, if it is only inherited. It must be confessed. We can confess it only if we are deeply convinced that it is the true interpretation of Scripture... No one wants to be insincere in subscribing to the Book of Concord or the Augsburg Confession (which means the same because we regard the later confessions, as did the Formula of Concord, as the correct interpretation of the CA). But we all should ask ourselves whether we have studied them properly. How many students of theology have even read the Book of Concord from cover to cover? How many of our candidates for ordination have even read the New Testament in Greek from cover to cover, to say nothing of the Old Testament? Our fathers did that. How many psalms do we know by heart in Hebrew, how many passages of the New Testament in Greek? How many articles of the Augsburg Confession do we know by heart, in Latin, of course? If we consider these questions we might understand the changes that have taken place in the Lutheran Churches, and we have to ask ourselves, every one of us: Is this not perhaps the deepest reason why 'we find no doctrinal differences' any longer where our fathers found them?"

It is strange that the Center group of Lutheran churches in America can go on fraternizing with the Left even if no rebuke is administered when prominent representatives of the U.L.C. publicly repudiate Christ. A shocking instance was Dr. Fred Nolde's joint prayer with Mohammedans and Buddhists. The details were reproduced in facsimile by the *Christian Beacon* 1960, April 7, p. 2. Secularized Dr. Nolde, member of the Mt. Airy faculty, represents both the W.C.C. and the L.W.F. as head of the respective departments on international affairs.

North America as it is at present on the Australian Continent. The drawing-power of this suction will very likely exceed the power of discrimination of many laymen, uninformed pastors, and giddy theologians.

What is the overall picture of theology in America's Lutherland? It seems to this observer that the U.L.C. theologians in Maywood are definitely wrong when they claim that today there is a more loyal attitude to the Lutheran Symbols than there has been for a long time. That this is true of some individual theologians and on the fringes may be granted. But fringes are fringes. It depends on what one means by the terms used. It seems more likely that since the Lutheran merger movements, which inaugurated a successful phase in 1917 and today have already reduced the 17 bodies to practically three, very nearly two, there has been a constant decline in the normative sway and rule, in what the Germans call *Geltung*, of the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions. The mergers have never spelled out a full position, always they have compromised somewhere. Abdell Ross Wentz in his book heads the section on the years from 1910 onwards with the telling legend: "In an Age of Larger Units." Those years saw the formation of the Federal Council—now the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCCUSA)—and the general impact of great union endeavors by American Protestants.<sup>6</sup> The eager pietistic unionists of the John Mott type were worldly-wise indeed, in utilizing both the outspoken Liberalism or Modernism of the first decades of this century and the Neo-Orthodox, Existentialist trend that has, on the whole, superseded it. Judging by Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, certainly prominent and influential representatives, also the present dominant mood is by and large more apostate than truly Christian, although it is to be, conceded that more of Christian terminology has returned, almost with a vengeance, to be wrestled with. Theological and scholarly interest has witnessed a certain renaissance. In some cases genuine spirituality has increased. Among the lay people and simple preachers much of the old Word of God and Blood of Christ piety has survived and is active, greatly supported by the hymns. The Old World and the Asian and African "Younger Churches" have been drawn closer to the American continent through the Ecumenical Movement.

This "ecumenical climate" vitally affects Lutheranism. The relation to the One Church has rarely been sufficiently spelt out. Superficiality has abounded. There was insufficient preparation to meet pseudo-ecumenism by gnesio-ecumenism. Lutheran doctrine is now losing ground while the names of Luther and his church are becoming popular. An optimistic Mission Pietism within the Lutheran fold, especially in recent decades, and the desire to recognize sophisticated scholarship and to get into the Ecumenical Movement have brought about a state of great uncertainty with reference to what even of late seemed the certain truth of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Mark the bold attack in the spirit of Gustaf Aulén on Christ's vicarious satisfaction by Prof. R.A. Harrisville in a letter to the *Lutheran Herald* (March 7th 1959, p. 13). It is hardly a secret that the *manducatio oralis* and the *manducatio indignorum*—eating Christ's body with the mouth even if unbelievers partake—are no longer Shibboleths of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Prof. Warren Quanbeck's attitude at Kloster Loccum, where the Lutheran World Federation conducted a theological conference in the summer of 1958, struck my Oberursel colleague Gerhard Rost as being to a considerable extent a mixture of Historicism not yet digested and of Existentialism gulped down. Even in former centers of a sort of Lutheran Biblicism the Bible is rapidly losing the position of authority as the very Word of God. All distinctive Lutheran doctrines are little by little being relegated to a lower place where in the end they represent only a sectional "tradition" which does not belong to the essence of apostolicity.<sup>7</sup> Sectarian contacts as well as the influence of state-church Europeans have succeeded in injecting today's idol, Personalism, into the American Lutheran scene to take the place of the Bible and the Confessions, *Schrift and Bekenntnis*. Personalism places such one-sided emphasis on the fact that God is a Person who at this moment encounters me

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, very strict Anglo-Catholic Anglicans are involved, too, and so are Greek Catholics, not to mention Lutherans, but the tune is Protestant, let us say, Protestant Episcopal or Methodist. American Reformed Protestantism acquired the form of countless divisions on insufficient grounds, which in consequence cannot be upheld. In cancelling unnecessary separations, all distinction between truth and errors is dropped as well, and sentimental inclusivism becomes the order of the day.

<sup>7</sup> Many weak Lutheran authors are of late beginning to take the concept "tradition" in a way influenced by modern Anglican Ecumenism. The man who undertakes to represent Lutheranism in the American "Faith and Order" branch, Keith Bridston, showed no insight into the true *Una Sancta* position in his series in the *Lutheran Herald* (1957, p. 1239ff.; 1938 Jan. 7, p. 7.f.; Jan. 14, p. 5 f.).

as I meet Him that doctrine ceases to be continuous, and the once-for-all (ἐφάπαξ) of Scriptures can no longer stand. Full-fledged Personalism agrees with sectarian Enthusiasm, but not with Lutheran apostolicity. Faith relies on the Christ outside of us, on the promise of grace as EXTRA NOS and as continuously certain.

More details are necessary. Several incidents are worth relating here. The men of Northwestern Seminary in Minneapolis, who to some extent made possible the 1957 heresy trials of the Northwestern Synod of the U.L.C., are quite certain that, together with the Canadian Synod, they represent the most conservative wing of the U.L.C. But the Seminary President is translating Paul Althaus, "*Die Christliche Wahrheit*," as though that Lutheran of many facets—by many called a chameleon—were much better than Rudolf Bultmann. In St. Paul the former president of Luther Seminary wants the Bible to be acknowledged as the Word of God, but a wise professor emeritus of the E.L.C. admitted that, by having Luther Seminary's men get their degrees in Princeton, the young professors who came back had been to some extent importing Reformed theology and a spirit with a liberal tinge and, since the reign of Scotch J. Mackay and German Otto Pieper in Princeton, had acquired also some species of Neo-Orthodoxy or attitudes related to it, and he admitted further that the systematic department formed no exception. In Columbus the story is the same. They call only men supplied with the necessary academic degrees, but, as the then President admitted, so far they have never seriously taken up the question whether they stand a chance of retaining their institution's solemn dedication to the Bible of plenary inspiration and of attendant inerrancy witnessed to by their catalogue. Inevitably some of the men who come back with the coveted titles have imbibed principles diametrically opposed to simple Bible belief. Here the work of meeting the issues and sizing up the actual orthodoxy of the present new "brain trusts of progressive minds" would begin. So far, too, Columbus has done little thinking about the question whether it is possible to maintain one attitude at Capital University under aging Fendt if another has already invaded Wartburg Seminary and also Luther Seminary and if, in addition, the new T.A.L.C. — even as the U.L.C.—is in the Lutheran World Federation and besides that in the World Council of Churches with its multicolor, mongrel American subdivisions frequented by radicals.

The President of Missouri Synod was vehemently attacked some time ago for stating that in the middle-group merger (now organized as "The American Lutheran Church") doctrine is still "in flux." E.L.C. and A.L.C. point to the "United Testimony on Faith and Life." Although that document is in itself insufficient, particularly with regard to Church and Church Fellowship, it is above all irrelevant, so much so that professors can publicly attack the vicarious atonement and, in general, can come back unchallenged from universities and from diverse "meetings of spirits" imbued with views differing totally from what their bodies stood for, determined sooner or later to teach what they like. If this is the problem of American Lutheranism in general, it is above all that of its middle-group merger. "United Testimony" is insufficient as an orthodox statement for our times. This is doubly true if it is partially a fig leaf, if it spells out decidedly more on paper than what holds good in actual public teaching. Since these church bodies are now all in the stream of Ecumenism, which thaws up and melts away doctrinal distinctiveness, remedy for them seems well-nigh impossible. If "heretics outside" are brethren, does not logic demands that heretics be accepted as brethren inside also? The fraternal heretics and heresies outside are bound for a while to outdo those permitted inside and thus to offer developing dissidents ample protection until they catch up with the apostasy prevalent in more radical bodies. Lutheranism's center group politicians have for a long time been trying to square the circle, since they were too much of Pietists or organisation men to see reality. The greatest bane to the truth in church bodies are not the heretics that are bound to spring up, but the routine mediators who find the common denominator for Christ and Belial. Dr. Behnken was right in his "in flux" statement, even if he retracted soon after. The close associations already in the N.L.C. and the L.W.F. operate to water down the import of "United Testimony," as far as the work of Dr. Fendt and others goes, and a ratified doctrinal agreement with the Lutheran Church in America would inevitably reduce its worth almost to worthlessness. Inclusivism and apostolicity cannot be wed, as scheming politicians and as pious, unwitting enthusiasts dream.

As far as one can gather, the older generation of A.L.C. and E.L.C. theologians in spite of remonstrances looked to Missouri for an impressive lesson in conservatism, equally adamant against Rome and Geneva and no less against all types of Liberalism. But this epoch seems past. Nowhere have the new elements that after the

debacle of *Kulturprotestantismus* forced their way in, first in Europe, then in America, been properly challenged by New World twentieth century Lutheran theology, including St. Louis. Some good things were said, but not enough. It seems that in the N.L.C. bodies the only people who fully know what they are doing are the typical U.L.C. and Augustana leaders of a liberal or semi-liberal type. I am thinking of Dr. Fred Nolde and also of Dr. Franklin Clark Fry and his synod's able and versatile theological leader, Dr. Martin J. Heineken (originally trained by Dr. Reu), the real author of the libero-existentialist Manifesto in answer to the mooted heresy trials of the Synod of the North West, which appeared over the signature of most U.L.C. professors in the *Lutheran* Feb. 1958, p. 29ff. I am at the same time thinking of the Lundensian type of Augustana men. These leaders are on the side of full swing modern Ecumenism and have joined the most powerful theological alliance operating today. Those who go along with them in other quarters are deceiving others or even themselves.

To isolate the American Lutheran thinking from the general scene of American Protestantism would be a mistake. Masonry is still a power and with it an all-faiths syncretism. Of late America is turning to science, and its scientists as a group are almost as godless as the Bolsheviks.<sup>8</sup> But the major theological factor today is an impressive league between two or three parties. To make intelligible what follows I may add that in theology the American vanguard usually, in person or in thought, hails more or less directly from Europe — more so again since the rise of the Crisis Theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner and the monistic ontology of Paul Tillich than in the decades before that. What I now record are my conclusions based on my general study and on conversations with various theologians mainly outside of our own circles. As I have stated, they point to the dominance of a theological duet or trio.

On the one hand, there is the New Exegesis, which superseded *Religionsgeschichte* both in German and in British universities. It has produced a stupendous work like Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. Many of the findings of this great collection of Biblical word studies cannot be ignored. They point out and often bring out in bold relief the unique character of revelation as distinguished from heathen and Greek thinking. Thus they are an aid to true theology and have in some respects produced a shift toward the right. But on the whole the New Exegesis shows no deference either to Biblical canon or to any continuity of doctrine. Both Personalism and Rationalism are strongly represented. The exegete is supposed to be a man of science—a *Wissenschaftler*—over against the Bible, a secular historian whose word on the basis of purely secular proof or more often conjecture is final, especially if applauded by his kind. To his scientific exegesis he adds a theological interpretation or a homiletical application. In general, the dominant trend in all Protestant or partly Protestant countries has been to give up the old Rationalist way of being *only* rationalistic, humanistic, and “critical.” Rather, exegetes want to remain unreservedly critical toward the Bible and yet at the same time “listen” to its message. The New Exegesis has therefore in Anglo-Saxon countries arrogated to itself the somewhat pretentious title of “Biblical Theology.” “Biblical” is here used in a dialectical, paradoxical way.

On the other side there is the rise of the New Systematics as operative not only in exegesis but also in dogmatics itself. Its new component is Barthian or semi-Barthian existentialism, at times in new assortments which are far to the left of Barth.<sup>9</sup> It is a new ENTHOUSIASMOS, even in its semi-Lutheranized forms, for instance in the Aulén type of Lundensian products. All “*est*” positions are abandoned, or are at least cut short, in favor of “*fit*” positions. Werner Elert, of course, tried to oppose Barth, but without an adequate Formal Principle and with innovations *de lege et evangelio*.<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Vogel and Regin Prenter are partly neo-orthodox. This holds true of others. A lucid description of this theological pair, *theologisches Zweigespann*, the New Exegesis and the New Dogmatics as they appeared and work together on Anglo-Saxon territories, has been given by

<sup>8</sup> See *Christian Century* 1960, p. 215ff. on the general attitude of scientists on the occasion of the Chicago University centennial celebration of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Thanksgiving Day, 1959.

<sup>9</sup> A more specific analysis of Karl Barth's theology and of Neo-Orthodoxy in general will follow in Part III.

<sup>10</sup> That Elert stressed the *Realdialektik*, the real difference of the “two words” was very good. Being a great Lutheran historian and critic, Elert was able to size-up Sören Kierkegaard in an unsurpassed manner (see *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, Berlin, 1960, p. 99ff.), and in doing this he got at the root of basic misconceptions of Karl Barth, too. On Elert's mistake, which affects the Satisfactio Vicaria, see my article “De tertio usu legis” in *Lutherischer Rundblick*, 1956, p. 13ff. — To be fair, also Lund has been trying to oppose Barth, but in an illegitimate manner, since the basis is Kantianism or analytic philosophy, and one of the ruling concepts is an actualism very similar to Barth's, no matter who fathered it.

James I. Packer in *Christianity Today* (Nov. 24th and Dec. 5th 1958) in an article entitled “Contemporary Views of Revelation.” What Packer’s brief article and sections of his book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (London 1958) describe is precisely the weird, sinister alliance which, together with Ecumenism—the still more influential third partner, one with great sympathies also for Romanism—is at present undermining the authority of the Bible and its chief doctrines in the semi-conservative sections of American Protestantism. I am not here interested in depicting the counter-attack of more or less Calvinistic “Evangelicals” in detail. They seem at present to be rising, over the temporary set-back of early Fundamentalism, gaining depth and breadth, which in new fashion brings them back to the level of Warfield and Machen. But they naturally lack in the full distinction of Law and Gospel. Yet they are not only more scriptural, but also more evangelical than Neo-Orthodoxy. However, they have so far not notably affected American Lutheran leadership in general, since through the L.W.F. this is tied to Liberal European Lutheranism and to the W.C.C. This continual hobnobbing with main stream forces has caused the intellectuals of American Lutheranism to prefer lining up on the side of Neo-Orthodoxy to tending to their own business, defending their own grounds.<sup>11</sup> The negative double—or more properly triple alliance alluded to is at this very time passionately busy in demolishing the hereditary doctrinal fidelity of considerable sections of American Lutheranism. It is a strange, yet logical thing that the very association of forces which makes American Liberals less radical than they were at the beginning of the century is drawing conservatives, and in particular Lutheran conservatives, into the orbit of what is in effect Neo-Liberalism. Here, then, are the environmental powers which are most effective today in undoing the work of C.F.W. Walther, who had so great a share in orienting the great bulk of Lutherans in the New World toward the Confessions, that is to say, toward the heart of Christianity.

What no doubt aids the present attacks on pure doctrine is a certain naiveté in matters historical which always adheres for quite a while to newer countries and has as yet not been properly seen or combated in the U.S. Things in recent, boyant, individualist countries tend to emphasize the aspect of persons, of “fellows perhaps not too bad” (including Barth, Tillich, Niebuhr, Bultmann, Mikoyan, etc.).<sup>12</sup> Patterns that move as it were with inherent logic in the framework of history, superpersonal “powers that be” which most definitely will continue to be, are not easily recognized. They are even quickly pooh-poohed away because naive New World belief in free man does not relish historical obstructions that stand in the way of pet optimistic presumptions. Aid and comfort is given to the new enemies also by the great lingering effect of Pietism, once a concomitant of

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<sup>11</sup> The reader will bear with me if I anticipate briefly what will later be dealt with more thoroughly in its proper context. The bias in favor of Neo-Orthodoxy betrays an abysmal theological confusion. How is it that Lutherans fail to see that of all who study theology, they are the very last to be able to compromise with Barthianism and its illegitimate progeny? If you grant that faith depends on the divine word of the Gospel which begets it as a message from the outside and which remains transsubjective, being the *vis-a-vis* or *Gegenüber* to which it clings ever anew when terrified by the Law and the sense of guilt, it surely is the height of folly then to try to tie Luther to Karl Barth or to make Wittenberg a suburb of Basel. It is a mark of nothing short of satanic obsession to assume that the Lutheran position is subjectivistic—as is Liberalism—and that it waives a Formal Principle, leaving that to Geneva’s legalism. There is an uncanny delusion involved. On the one hand it is considered distinctively Lutheran to side with destructive Bible Criticism if only one is modern enough by means of Barth’s *hic et nunc* formulations in a roundabout way to bring in parts of Lutheran teaching. On the other hand it is pronounced un-Lutheran to stand up for the Bible as “the Holy Ghost’s book” (Luther) and with the first sections of the Formula of Concord to avow continuous doctrine in a continuous church. What a testimony of puerility on the part of so-called Lutherans: to get scared if someone raises the hue and cry “Fundamentalism” when it is so simple to show that in the center of the apostolic church’s teaching is the distinction of Law and Gospel and of the Two Realms, which makes all the difference. The Reformed never quite attain to it. The proper thing is to outdo valiant, sober Evangelicals in emphasizing Sola Scriptura and its authority, but to approach fully from Christ, the Center, not from a partially off-center position, and to do and say all in an evangelical, unapologetical manner which nowhere and never relies on outward proofs for the Bible or for the Church. Only a ludicrous travesty of Lutheranism seeks to cast out “Fundamentalism” by Neo-Orthodoxy. It is not amiss to suspect that the inroads of Darwinism and of gross scientific unbelief cause superficial, pragmatic men to try Neo-Orthodoxy as a “way out.” But it will lead their churches yet deeper into the morass and mire of man-centeredness, from which the true Reformation rescued men.

<sup>12</sup> Compare as an example of emotional, popular hero worship applied to heterodox teachers the series entitled “Adventure in Theology” in the *Walther League Messenger*, beginning April 1959, p. 11. Particularly the featured study on Karl Barth—expressly admitting that there were influential neo-orthodox theologians in all church bodies, including Missouri Synod—shows the judgment of journalistic theology. This is the art of writing well on what one does not understand. It would seem Christian youth deserves the efforts of mature, responsible authors and editors.

the European *Erweckungsbewegungen* of all types. To this add the prevailing democratic philosophy of tolerance, dominant as long as mass hysteria is not in control, and the new air of academic objectivity which goes with the turn toward scholarship.

What—in view of later parts of this Memorandum—may look like an irritating prolepsis and prove a duplication cannot be totally avoided if we are to consider seriously the setting surrounding the Synodical Conference bodies before we investigate their own particular assets and liabilities.

To resume the past thread of our tale, American Lutheranism in general is imitating certain general patterns, be they of neighbouring Protestant provenance or of Old World provenience. Professors' conferences of all Lutheran bodies are a fertile breeding-place for what the Germans term academic adjustment, *akademischer Ausgleich*. Prof. Igor Bela of Springfield, Ohio, on June 10th 1958 at St. Louis bluntly made Psalm 1 out to be a late product of heretical Pharisaism. How difficult it must be, and actually is, in an assembly that by its very name pretends to be Lutheran, in such circumstances as these to expose such a fellow-savant as a heretic or semi-heretic! If it is not done — how can you wound feelings continually as long as you are within a groups? — such an assembly begins to take also Liberal spokesmen for granted. I mean even the orthodox members acquiesce in unionistic coexistence on specious grounds. It is so natural to associate with others under the tolerant flag of some sort of Lutheranism. But those who do rush in usually have given little penetrating thought to all the implications and the final outcome of their action. Indeed some wire-puller or *spiritus rector* may know them, but he will not publicize them. What must be kept before the mind and guarded in such enterprises is not only an outward non-unionist set-up, but the spirit. What is imperative is not withdrawal from combat and perhaps from all associations, but fully facing up to the situation and the exigencies of unrelenting total war—Math. 12, 30; Rev. 20, 7ff. —, thus drawing the well-meaning but hesitant along to side with truth against every error, as did the Reformation. This is a tremendous program, extending to all domains of theology, also in the learned grasp of the subject matter. But no quarters are given. Either we as confessional Lutherans move forward, or we recede backward until we are undone. If we, the called servants, continue to dodge issues, American Lutheranism before even waking up will accede to equal rights for true and false doctrine, the very *Gleichberechtigung der Richtungen* which destroyed the *Wahrheitsernst* and *Bekennnistreue* of all territorial European Lutheran universities and churches. To repeat: as is the case in Europe's state universities and state or territorial churches, so in American Lutheranism's schools all shades of thought on this side of patent atheism or of open adherence to the Pope will increasingly be permitted and admitted as being well within the range of Protestantism and Lutheranism. There is hope only in repentance. If God so wills, truly ecumenical Gnesio-Lutheranism must set a new tune, as did Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther in days not less dangerous, but naturally less complex in America.

Once more to take cognizance of the theological team of New Exegesis and Neo-Dogmatics, let us add that there is ample justification for regarding the new beginnings after World Wars I and II as an improvement on the cultural Liberalism of Europe in the first decades of the century and on America's coarser period of the Social Gospel. But there is absolutely no warrent for believing that subjectivistic and anthropocentric apostasy has, on the whole, really been vanquished. Since true repentance, the existential turn from guilt to grace, and, the certainty engendered by Gospel preaching, faith which relies on God's unconditioned promise as stated in the Bible, are lacking, the new critical attitude toward man and the new emphasis on God's sovereignty easily produce a sort of semi-Agnosticism or semi-Nihilism. This is vehemently bent on removing all objective factors that make faith certain, leaving only the subjective. But the Ego has also been divested of its Renaissance standing, so that only anxiety, *Angst*, remains. This is better than *Kulturoptimismus*. There is more room for the call to repentance. But it is self-delusion to think that without dividing Law and Gospel—all Barthian impulses work against the *discrimen legis et evangelii*—and without acknowledging the Bible to be the Word of God one has returned toward full Christianity. Besides, men do not bear such tensions very long. "Fear" becomes a sophisticated mannerism, and the old carnal security is running the whole show, in fact doing it more securely than ever before.

After what we have presented we feel justified already in this introductory section to put a very decisive question. Why should the genuine Lutherans of America, who never succumbed to the falling away of the early

decades, in these strange days bow to an improvement on the Liberal hoax which still is far inferior to what they as a true Lutheran Church had at the beginning of the century and have today? Schleiermacher, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was an improvement on the vulgar Rationalism of the intellect only. But what were the fruits of the Schleiermacher Century? It may well prove to be the greatest failure of American Lutheran conservative theology in recent decades that the ability, was lacking properly to size up the Twentieth Century Continuation of man-centered Nineteenth Century Theology, namely the *nachreligionsgeschichtliche Exegese* and the *Barthsche und nach-Barthsche Dogmatik*, as well as the theological impact of the world-wide Ecumenical Movement. As far as I can see of conservatives only the late Professor Fred E. Mayer, though he seemed to me weak in his personal reactions against the heterodox and too much impressed by Elert and Lund, was making a major effort to get at the roots of these thought movements. He was able to incorporate a little of what he observed in his book *Religious Bodies in America*, and then he died. But no major book on the real issues was produced by American Lutheranism. The journals, too, were and are a disappointment. The basic approach of Jaroslav Pelikan in *From Luther to Kierkegaard* is superficial, if not destructive. His Companion Volume to Luther's Works is no better (more on that later), his widely-heralded *Riddle of Roman Catholicism* deceives. *The Lutheran Quarterly* of the N.L.C. Synods has been a theological hotchpot, incapable of really fighting for scriptural and confessional truth, very frequently the agent of heterodoxy. It has already reached that point where it lives by equal rights to orthodoxy and heterodoxy, *Gleichberechtigung der Richtungen*, and would cease to exist without this latitude. The same must be said of the *Lutheran Times*, the English edition of the *Lutherische Rundschau*. But *Concordia Theological Monthly*, too, has failed in leadership for some time. In spite of many very good articles it has had, on whole, a rather indistinct and of late, in certain areas even a confused record. The journal's whole relationship to Ecumenism, including the L.W.F., as spelled out also in book reviews, was shown a certain basic uncertainty in regard to the doctrine of the Church. The editorial policy has seemed to lack an over-all doctrinal and historical instinct and a wholehearted determination to fight those that fight Christ. Some details must be touched upon later.

To this writer, in the recent turn which American Lutheranism seems to be following really only the attitudes, of the extreme U.L.C. and Augustana Liberals do make sense; they know where they are heading.<sup>13</sup> It is beyond belief how American Lutherans, still retaining some grasp on Law and Gospel and having churchgoing congregations, could come to see in Barthianism and its alloys and amalgams any salvation for their churches. Even the insistence on the "here and now", in so far as it is legitimate, is not new to Lutheran doctrine. Lutheran teaching has never considered the Bible to be just an inerrant written document, *mortua litera*, a mere code of regulations and conditions in Rome's and Geneva's legalistic-enthusiastic fashion, tearing letter and spirit apart, placing the Spirit beyond and on top of, instead of into, the Word. The Church of the Reformation knew the prophetic-apostolic Word, as it now still reaches us directly in *Scriptura Sacra*, to be possessed of the Holy Spirit's dynamics, a *vis vere divina*. Even seventeenth century theologians defended it as God's living power against both outside opponents and also against the enthusiastic inroads of mystic Pietism. At this point compare Johann Gerhard's controversy with Rathmann.<sup>14</sup> Missouri Synod theology, above all, has been distinguished by the proper emphasis both on the distinction and on the correlation of Law and Gospel. These "dialectics of freedom," the Gospel on the Law background speaking to sinners, associated, as needs be, with Scripture's inspired *authority*, mark the prophetic-apostolic word in Scripture. Law and Gospel preaching was Missouri's tenor and talent. Thus preaching Scripture as God's living voice is wholly superior to any new revelation of mystics or new concoction of rationalists. There are in American Lutheranism a few not generally read publications of a somewhat differentiated Right Wing Opposition to the Libero-Existentialist Left who for a number of years have at least sensed that a fight "to be or not to be" is on for true Lutheranism in America and tried to rectify things in various ways. How strange that a Lutheran Church of many limitations but of a remarkable spiritual depth around 1890, 1900, or 1910 could in the course of the first half of this century become so relatively sterile in meeting theological issues in its own predestined pneumatic way. How piteous a tragedy that an uncritical, treacherous alliance with a somewhat transformed and yet unrepentant Liberalism and

<sup>13</sup> They have ardent, followers in other synods, but are not yet fully in control of the more conservative headquarters.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bengt Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards*, Lund, Sweden, 1951, p. 253 ff.

with the Social Gospelism of Niebuhr and others, which certainly has become theologically even more dangerous since it was decorated and reinforced, should today be advertised by cheap U.L.C.<sup>15</sup> and Augustana leadership before the ears of eager intellectual youth and even be able to enlist traitorous assistants everywhere. The resultant doctrinal potpourri will soon be passed on to the bulk of unsuspecting American Lutherans, unless there is a profound change of mind and heart. All this is transpiring at the very time and hour when the Anglo-Saxon world on both sides of the Atlantic, a trifle chastened by its failure to win the peace after World War II and given to reflection on the One Church, is perhaps more willing to listen to Lutheran testimony than it ever has been since the death of Henry VIII. The frequent Lutheran associations with sectarian Liberals have induced observers even outside of the Lutheran fold to exclaim: “Why do they not rather try to continue wholeheartedly their efforts to evangelize the godless masses and in addition exert a good influence to win over those who love the Bible and who pray to Christ to the whole divine truth through doctrinal negotiations. Why do these people chase firebrakes and court Will’-of-the-wisps? What a late hour delusion makes them hope to profit by adulterous leagues which embroil them with prominent leaders of apostasy? Are these Lutherans still aware of the lesson of Matthew 4?”

That part of the world which for a long time constituted a sort of *Corpus Christianorum* has become so denuded and bare of the Word and of the Holy Spirit that America, in spite of its polyglot denominational character, its often insincere emotionalism, and its dangerous syncretism is in a sense the foremost Christian and also the foremost Lutheran land. There are probably more Lutherans who are believers and who as such *regularly* hear the Gospel and practice Christianity in the United States today than in all the formerly Lutheran European countries taken together. In spite of scholarly weaknesses and historical immaturities which everybody admits, American Lutheranism has been endowed with a sacred trust. It has received a talent from God which it is charged to retain. It is to continue its own *charisma* of live congregations gathered about the Scriptures and the Confessions. It is most certainly not to ape moribund European state-church traditions. God moves in a mysterious way. Some of the best spiritual insights still come from Europe, often Germany, coupled with seasoned standards of scholarship. But man-worship, *Personalgemeinden* within parishes that as larger units are dead as dead can be, not even 5 per centum of the baptized members being in church on Sundays, and a foot-loose highly technical theology, going its own way at public universities and insisting on academic freedom or *Lehrfreiheit* for the intellectuals, are part and parcel of the past European pattern. But these churches with huge sums of easily gotten public money, yet without congregations are most certainly facing their doom as far as this set-up is concerned. The end of the Constantine-Theodosius Era is in view. This holds true not only in the Soviet Zone of Germany, where tax funds for the church are decreasing and where state control and persecution are increasing and youth seems lost.

The new solution for the problem of the relationship between Church and State which was arrived at in the American theater of church and state interplay is no doubt more conducive to the successful propagation of the Christian faith and to the expansion of genuine Christian influence in the modern world all over the globe than the superannuated fourth century legacy. This for Protestantism generally meant the “broad membership pattern” of everybody belonging irrespective of commitment. One of the most remarkable achievements of American Lutheranism has been the ability to avoid both hierarchical Episcopalian (also rigid Presbyterian) and loose Congregational church polity and to combine the scriptural position of the Holy Ministry with a form of free church organization—both congregational and synodical—that seems to have been devised by Matthias Flacius and others with Hamburg’s consent in Antwerp and then transported to Holland, and from Holland to the eastern part of the United States. Under Missouri’s leadership this was more intimately connected with Luther’s constant theoretical vision and repeated strivings, especially before the Peasants’ War, to establish the local congregation as the pivotal unit. It is the place where the means of grace are in operation, where the marks of the church are directly recognized, where above all I as a Christian am certain by what I hear that Christ and his One Church are present and in operation. The local church is therefore not just a part of a larger visible

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<sup>15</sup> It is by no means accidental that *The Lutheran* of the U.L.C. has been featuring articles by Reinhold Niebuhr it seems for decades. Note Niebuhr confessing his unrepentant Liberalism far to the left of Karl Barth in *The Christian Century*, 1960, p. 248 ff.

structure, but is in itself EKKLESIA and free. The Reformer adhered to this insight to his very end. It is still very vocal in the Formula of Concord (Art. X, Ep., paragraphs 4, 10, and 12, Trigl. p. 828 ff.).

Missouri would not have achieved its congregational success without its determined stand on the Bible as the Word of God, its doctrinal unity as an uncompromising church of the Lutheran Symbols, and its singular evangelical power in dividing Law and Gospel, taking both seriously. In a sense this was the general direction in which American Lutheranism was moving in second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The Constantine-Theodosius Foundation in back of state-churchism cannot cope with Communism. In Russia itself it seems, generally speaking, that of all the Protestants only the Baptists, who have always worked on a congregational basis, are left. Europe's former state churches are tottering up to the Ural Mountains and down to the Black Sea. Taking a broad view, American Lutheranism, which readies only a fragment of the large American nation, has become the most vigorous section of Lutheranism in the present world. It may not be incorrect to attribute this to the following factors. There was the nineteenth century Lutheran immigration (in part rural, conservative, and devout, especially in so far as it had been affected by the *Lutherische Erweckungsbewegungen*). There followed that great internal confessional consolidation which proceeded from the Middle West, to which reference has been made. But this was accompanied by an effective development of the details of church and mission work in a free and courageous new country, by a practical impetus of reaching out, above all by "circuit riders," *Reiseprediger*, followed up by new vigorous thrusts of external expansion among the general population of America after World War I and of late.

The present writer is very far from seeing light only in the Synodical Conference and nothing but outer darkness in the other synods, not to mention live faith also in Reformed bodies. He had practically no opportunity to become, acquainted with congregational life in the N.L.C. bodies on his trip. Still he would readily agree that a great number of congregations, especially in the new merger (T.A.L.C.), are even today very similar to their Synodical Conference sisters. He cannot assess directly just how far the blight of reckless unionism and of the ever-invading Deistic lodge religion has destroyed grass roots. Beyond that, his acquaintance with pastors, even of the U.L.C. and of Augustana, has taught him that there are thoughtful men among the clergy everywhere, who often are still closer to a consistent pattern of Gnesio- or true Lutheranism than the better type of state or territorial church pastor here in Germany usually is. They have a greater respect for the Bible, they know to build real congregations. It is always true that on the right wing of a left body you may have men who are further to the right than some left wing, extremists on a body that is very far to the right. What affords a clear-cut division for good is leadership, both theological and ecclesiastical, and for ill it is the clasp of entangling alliances. One thing is certain: in times like these smooth optimistic, activist middle-of-the road Pietism serves the interests of Liberalism, although usually intending to do the opposite. .

Luther's America seems today to be in a perilous state of instability and transition. Besides the mobility of the population there is a strange intellectual and religious mutability of many pastors. The great question is: Whither now? In what direction will American Lutheranism move and how will it influence New World and Old World Lutheranism and Christianity? Will it follow the course of pseudo-ecumenical Lutheynism, selling out the, distinctive tenets, merging also with the Reformed, and, most sad to say, fraternizing even with starkest apostasy? Will the One Holy Church be betrayed in the direction of HEN PSEUDOS ("Εν ψεῦδος), a colossal sect coalescing to operate alongside of Rome and perhaps Moscow? To a large extent this question will be decided by the Synodical Conference and in particular by the Missouri Synod. Whither, then, Synodical Conference? Whither, Missouri Synod?

This leads directly to the heart of today's story, to what to this writer is the soul and center of The Great Struggle of This Era which challenges his attention. What does this observer see afoot and ahead for the right wing of American Lutheran Christendom when he tries to assess its assets and liabilities, as he has been charged to do?

## II. Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference Assets

No effort is made to separate this chapter strictly from the preceding one or, for that matters, from the one following. The heading then, does not serve the purpose of indicating a clear-cut new subdivision of the subject matter—this would isolate items too much—but rather to focus attention on important particulars. In what follows this interest attaches to the credit side of the ledger of our own synods, taking them as they now are.

Out of the period of confessional emphasis, which predominantly of course had been coupled with language isolation, Missouri ventured forth as a rather strong body. At any rate it had a great number of fairly well indoctrinated congregations with parochial schools; pastors who were, on the whole, faithful shepherds dividing Law and Gospel and clinging to the whole body of divine truth; still some measure of evangelical church discipline; a major system of institutions of higher education for the training of pastors and of parochial school teachers; a carefully adapted and motivated and workable New World polity; and, above all, what must in a double sense be termed “confessional strength”: combining rising evangelistic fervor—the Lutheran Hour—with apostolicity, the stress on purity of doctrine still being implemented by theological works and analyses distinctly Lutheran. Though a remoteness from European scholarship was gradually reducing the breadth and the vigor of thought, and though the practical and often pragmatic American mind, was coming to the fore, for instance in men like W.A. Maier and John H.C. Fritz—the first a distinct loss and the second by no means an unmixed blessing—it seems that devotion to Christ and his word still ruled the whole body. Therefore apostolic ecumenicity was still the chief driving force. It continued to motivate the vigorous polemics against the religion of the world and all forms of theological defection, if one judges motives by the canon of charity. How much alloy of the type of a human *esprit de corps* and of too superficial an espousal of tradition may have been beneath the surface of this vibrant form of New World Lutheran churchmanship is very hard to tell. The present indifference toward important theological questions not infrequent with a certain generation of pastors, on the one hand, and the vehement reaction against traditionalism on the part of some of the younger clergy, on the other hand, seem to indicate that not all was well in the past. But in order not [to] be unjust let us not overlook the great effort in home missions which accompanied Missouri’s whole confessional career, including the period before World War I. Missioners in Wynken’s style continually advanced toward the West, North, and South with the stream of German immigration. What resulted were not outward *de propaganda fide* victories in Roman style, but conquests of God’s Spirit acting through genuine Law and Gospel preaching. This is the tie of which it is safe to assert that it still binds the majority, as it was the real Missouri Synod cement in the past. Thus were established ever new links in a chain of outposts which finally extended into Canada and Alaska, into Brazil and Argentina, and even back into Europe.

In a general way one can say, that the smaller bodies of the Synodical Conference took part in this advance of an orthodox Lutheran Church. They also were virile. Above all, also these synods were composed of churchgoing congregations which, responded to the Gospel and were not slaves driven by legal scheming. But the strongest missionary advances, proportionately, were those accomplished by the Missouri Synod. Under Dr. Behnken’s administration the inevitable language transition, which could easily have had immediate devastating effects on a conservative body, was at least for the time being turned into major outward victory. There was something breathtaking about it. Who will not be impressed by the following figures?

1937: 3,925 pastors and 1,322,466 baptized members.

1957: 5,663 pastors and 2,351,805 baptized members.

With Dr. Behnken serving another term as leader of the Missouri Synod it may well be that during his total incumbency from 1935 to 1962 or in 27 years; this body will almost have doubled its size. Of course, if the main thing were the increase in numbers, if statistics, and especially financial accomplishments, were the ultimate legitimation of a church, then the palm would inevitably go to Rome, whose “success” is unparalleled.

The true story of any church is that of divine miracles of faith and love, which on the inside can never be measured by human yard-sticks, often remaining hidden until Judgement Day.

There may be various reasons why the Wisconsin Synod has not had a similar outward growth in the last decades. The bulk of its congregations was not so exposed to the rapid Americanization process because they were rooted more in traditionally Lutheran and even German areas. In consequence they are perhaps today not in the same strategic positions to gain members among the English speaking population. They are still more inhibited by the habits of the German, often Pomeranian, farming communities, who are not inclined to move very fast. The lack of a more generally known and for a long time embattled name (like that of the larger body) may also have militated against them. Can it also be that the particular training of laymen which grew naturally out of C.F.W. Walther's polity did not so quickly become second nature to the smaller body? Or did perhaps Wisconsin's comparative lack of modern synodical machinery retard the growth of missions? In joint areas the better staffed larger body will quite often come to make first use of promising openings. While an analysis of these causes and effects may seem none of my business, the fact dare not be overlooked that for some time Missouri's headstrong super-progressive groups have drawn comfort from the circumstance that conservative Wisconsin, which criticizes them, has been slow in growing. "They are not really witnessing to the Gospel," they have concluded. Set-backs must very often be borne as a cross by a truly confessional church, they can pile up precisely when a church serves God best, since the Kingdom advances *sub specie contraria*. But they may also be self-imposed.

Be that as it may, we should hardly be fair in saying that in general Missouri's rapid local growth has proceeded patently at the expense of quality. During my seven months' stay in America I came to speak in more than fifty Missouri Synod congregations in diverse sections of the country, in large cities and in rural areas. I visited new and old churches, including congregations in metropolitan areas inhabited largely by Negroes. This gave me a variety of opportunities to contact local pastors and laymen. A few sad stories reached my ear, of prominent pastors with a big name, intoxicated by the quest for numbers, admitting new prospects to be confirmed as adults after showing up at less than half a dozen lectures. It also became evident to me that in some cases the lodge has taken root without proper synodical measures having been resorted to for decades. Local pastoral conferences testified, but officials would not act. The machinery for Home Missions may also at some places have succumbed to externalization, in a crave to achieve quick visible results, especially in metropolitan areas. Here is a thing to be watched.

Still, the general impression was altogether different in various states where the Missouri Synod is relatively strong and also in some outlying territories like Texas. Here an unbiased observer who judges by the canon of charity, as he should, will in most cases have to admit that Missouri's rank and file, both clergy and laity, are reasonably sound. Many pastors, if not perhaps the majority, are very faithful in adult instruction. Some of these adults are most valuable assets. As a whole the Synodical Conference and Missouri Synod presented to me the picture of a laity and of a clergy who as yet cherish God's own Word and can be effectively ruled by the Gospel. In spite of very many *admixti hypocritae et mali* (Augsburg Confession VIII)<sup>16</sup> and in spite of some threatening developments which may very soon change the greater part of the scene, the canon of charity even today assesses a numerous orthodox and spiritual people, a tremendous asset wrought by, and still in the hands of, the Holy Spirit. As far as my knowledge goes, Missouri Synod is the greatest doctrinally fairly homogeneous unit spreading the Gospel of salvation in the present world.

American Protestantism in general has developed forms of church work which are invaluable for the future of Christianity on all continents. They are destined to supersede the relics of the Constantine-Theodosius Epoch, which, unfortunately, still stifle Europe to this very day. But the genuine Lutheran edition of these experiences and approaches as developed and tested in the Synodical Conference presents the real lesson to Continental Europe. By going back to the roots presented in Luther's New Testament conception of the Church and to the congregation as its pivotal unit and by making God's Word in Law and Gospel as proclaimed in the Bible rather than man the one point of departure and of reference and therefore quite naturally giving the

<sup>16</sup> "Although the Church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith..."

Lutheran Confessions their proper place and the Public Ministry its proper role, Dr. C.F.W. Walther became a chosen instrument whose significance extends to all continents. The presupposition for utilizing this gift today is that the home base continues to recognize the extent of its commitment.

There can hardly be any doubt that the San Francisco Convention, June 17th – 27th, 1959, preceded by the first meeting of a major new development, the Conclave Theologorum in Oakland, definitely proved that an overwhelming majority in the Missouri Synod—besides being as mission-minded as ever—is not only still conservative in a loose way, but wants to uphold the full-orbed, detailed doctrinal position of Synod. This was demonstrated more convincingly by the intense debate than by the mere balloting of so vast an assembly. This dogmatic stand of Synod means not only honoring the Scriptures as the Word of God, so that what the canonical Scriptures says is final, but also acknowledging the contents of the Book of Concord as Scripture's doctrine, as the doctrine of the One Church of Christ, so that these contents are the public teaching (*publica doctrina*), not merely in a vague sense the historic common denominator (*Lehrgrundlage*). Accordingly against efforts to pay merely lip honor to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, the elucidations which Synod was forced to work out in its historic career are to be in force, above all the *Brief Statement*. Also the new Synodical Conference Statement on the Scriptures, with direct antithesis also against Bultmann, was adopted. Dr. Behnken was reelected in spite of advanced age. The sense seemed plain. At this time the boat is not to be rocked. The Conclave Theologicum is to meet for major work already in July 1960. A firm basis has thus been provided for meeting challenges which everywhere seem to be in the air.

But is today's Missouri Synod still confident of itself in terms of its top row intellectual climate, that is, within that inner circle of thinkers and constructors who, humanly speaking, sooner or later shape the destiny of any church body? The fact cannot be denied that the first generation which ventured to operate exclusively under American-born and American-trained leadership experienced something of a cultural and theological lag, let us say in the first half of this century, and that native leadership under the exigency of quickly supplying literature in the language of the country resorted to methods of simplification and traditionalism, copying instead of creating. However, to dramatize this, interlude would be wrong. It in no way justifies what may be termed proneness to succumb to an inferiority complex on the part of genuine Missouri. But this at present too often characterizes the men who want to abide by the standards of Missouri Synod. They do not seem to know what to say when in their own Synod shallow opponents, who have attached themselves to "other masters," make light of them as men retarded in their development. Conservatism and obscurantism is subtly becoming the derisive dual tag. The cultural side of theological workmanship decreased in the first decades of this century, and the slackening no doubt had its two sides: human inadequacy on the one hand, and the inescapable structural law or morphology of historical succession on the other. A similar phenomenon will occur in South America and in Asia and Africa in this or that way when indigenous thinking takes over. It is true that pure isolationalism as an answer would have produced sterility. But the alternative is not "selling out." It rather ought to be "moving in" and "moving on." It is imperative to see that spiritual aggressiveness should not be restricted to practical mission and church work, but should include the whole legitimate range of theology as well. There must be scholarly and historical exploration, but not in the sense of throwing away that true spirituality which embraces obedience to Christ and His norms. The conquest of new territory and of luring heights must, on the contrary, involve the heart and conscience as much as it does the mind. It must be effected by the faith in Christ which the Holy Ghost produces, not by mere human daring and well-aimed indefatigable labor. It must be extremely expensive and yet expansive, probing conscience and all depths as did the Reformation, true to the criteria of 1. Cor. 2, 14. 15 and 2. Cor. 10, 4-6. The substance underneath the simple shell, the body beneath the somewhat carelessly fashioned cloak was decisive in former days and is decisive now. A doctrinally faithful church with live congregations on the scale of Missouri and the Synodical Conference is an almost unprecedented phenomenon in the modern world. There is no reason to surrender to defeat, but rather every reason to ascend to further victory.

In particular there is no justification for an attitude of defeatism when reviewing within the confines either of a century or of half a century the spiritual record of the theological seminaries within the Synodical Conference, above all St. Louis. Of course, "*schola semper reformanda est*" (a school is always charged to

improve itself). No institution of learning can ever afford to rest on its laurels, to remain as it was and is. Cessation is retrogression, as the Germans say, “*Stillstand ist Rückgang.*” Changes at St. Louis in the recent forties and fifties certainly could not be avoided, nor were they. No doubt, changes are imminent in Thiensville no less than they are here in Oberursel. Some experimenting goes with these efforts to be true to the constantly varying demands of the march of time. It is wrong to see red wherever there is a turn, transformation being the very law of history. Tremendous issues must be studied anew. The time-honored questions: What is the Church? What is in and for the Church the final authority? (*quid sit ecclesia et quid valeat in ecclesia*) though answered must be subjected to incisive investigation in order to be adequately spelled out for this epoch. This involves risks. The young men with pronounced intellectual and theoretical abilities no doubt demand that they can face the total theological situation of the day, and this requires that traditional procedure be not overdone, least of all in methods. According to the unanimous verdict of all European observers America’s top schools in general are still too much addicted to procedures adapted to the junior college level. Spoon-feeding, too much dependence on text books at the schools, and a sort of inbreeding too often in evidence in the literary production of the recent past, must continue to disappear also in our circles. There is still this specific lag. Independent work requiring historical insight is not yet what it must become very soon if Gnesio-Lutheranism is not to be outdistanced. Let it also be seen that a new-nation’s craze for measurement and organisational efficiency most definitely results in retrogression, not in progress, when the concern is not mechanical improvement, but the work of the mind and spirit, *Geistesarbeit*. Incidentally, America’s university degrees in the subject of education often seem rather questionable assets. One can risk saying that the individualism of earlier days not infrequently was more conducive to the dimension of depth than today’s collectivism and emphasis on sociological concepts. Past and present handicaps cannot be smugly overcome by money, buildings, and degrees. Such things as accreditation are necessary, so is intense specialisation in various departments of theology. But these measures are merely means to an end. Even the immense knowledge of pertinent facts which a prodigious memory can acquire, though useful, is not yet theology, *Gottesgelahrtheit*, *λόγος περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ*. It can be “polyhistorism” in the negative German sense, knowing all without really knowing anything. A passion to move ahead also in these things was necessary and still is necessary. But are correct paths to be forsaken merely because they must be pursued farther? The tremendous, almost unheard-of factor of live congregations, of orthodox pastors as an overall fact was the result of Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference schools. It would be an ungrateful species of modesty to refuse to recognize that God in all these decades graciously granted to the synodical colleges and seminaries the ways and means of producing genuine parish and mission pastors. On my extended trips in so many parts of North America, I have often marvelled at many of the parish pastors. I was above all impressed by their unpretentious open mind toward their people and the surrounding communities, by their devotedness and *Aufgeschlossenheit*. Much of the work of the past exegetical departments (do not forget the legacy of Stöckhardt or August Pieper), of the past dogmatical departments (C.F.W. Walther, F. Pieper, and Adolf Hoenecke), and especially of the past departments of practical theology, was—and in its present equivalents still is—simply excellent and unique in its way. I can in no wise agree that the training of clergy at European universities is superior, even in those technical respects which really matter, to that of St. Louis (or of Thiensville and in its way of Springfield), unless all you want is a limited number of *Privatdozenten*, incipient professors. No doubt conservative Lutheranism in America ought to have been in a position to provide its serious students with first class academic degrees very much earlier. A church must be intent on training some of its gifted young men in a very thorough theoretical way so as provide future professors, even as it must be bent on educating the great majority along somewhat more practical lines for the pastorate. An orthodox church must also meet the theological challenges of the day, wrestle with the decisive problems. It must consider theological leadership an essential gift of God. Still it is a thousand times better to bear the cross of certain, grave deficiencies a little while longer than to join the ranks of the enemy and thus, by betraying Christ, to gain the dubious satisfaction of being “in the main stream of scholarship” and “on the wave of Ecumenism.” Taking all in all, let American Gnesio-Lutheranism not throw away that which God has given—a great legacy indeed, which charges the churches thus blessed to keep what was bestowed and at

the same time to reach out for what must be complementary to the past. May God grant genuine progress on the unshakable foundation (Matt. 16, 16; Eph. 2, 20), adhered to loyally along paths of sane historical continuity.

But this requires suppressing treason. It solicits prayer for a very great miracle, for one of those rare full victories of truth after some serious falling away which God was importuned to grant now and then. Of this the signal rallying of the Lutheran confessional church after Crypto-Calvinist defection in the period of the Formula of Concord (1577) is the most noteworthy example. We are approaching the momentous problems of Part III.

### III. Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference Liabilities

This Pro Memoria continues, in what may be called its most difficult section, to record the impressions gained during my trip to the United States. Material is also naturally drawn from current reading. The liabilities to be set against the assets stand out conspicuously. The aim here is to help sincere men in a valiant struggle to remove them. As pointed out in the preliminary remarks, there is nothing dramatically new in my essay, neither in the tenor of what preceded nor of what now follows. Dedicated men everywhere well know what to do. But my trip and what I was advised to do force me to carry through my assignment. May the first commandment and its explanation motivate those who read these lines to guard against the natural attitude of corporate selfrighteousness.

The debit side of the ledger is best introduced by placing at the head a summary of ills. A malignant growth, long nascent, is approaching maturity. It seems to have progressed even since the year 1958. The malady is of the nature of a cancer which eats ever deeper into the vitals. It is none the less also a contagious epidemic spreading in all directions. It aims to contaminate all affiliated bodies in the world, some of which already carried noxious bacilli of their own endangering the corporate future. Growing in virulency the American contagion which is ravaging our body has in part already destroyed the Doctrine of the Church. It is now busy disintegrating the Formal Principle, *Sola Scriptura*. Already it is also violently attacking the Material Principle, *Sola Gratia*. The defection is of universal appeal, since it is in line with the basic this-worldliness, rationalism, and selfrighteousness of natural man. This seems a staggering accusation against a strong current in our own churches, but proof follows.

Our first effort must be to trace the development that leads to the present situation. The purpose of this Memorandum is by no means to bring about immediate effects. This would be presumption on the part of an outside writer; even if he can point to the fact that he was a member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by far the greater part of his life, nominally also throughout the last war up to Nov. 1945. What brethren and leaders in 1958 impressed on him as his duty was a *historical evaluation*. This means seeing how things came about and how that compares with previous church history. If of late there have been sensational developments, they derive from antecedents which certainly were far less sensational. These must be looked at first, for it is important for the future. This Memorandum is dedicated to a constructive purpose, otherwise it would not be published. This purpose is not, however, primarily related to what was or is (though this plays its role) but to what is to be, to our joint future in all parts of the world. Such a goal excludes short cuts. It may produce the conviction also in the reader that these various ills cannot be cured by just removing a few men from positions (although obedience may force him to press for that), but that there must be a reassessment of the direction in which the whole body is moving, a reassessment similar to that before the adoption of the Formula of Concord in 1577.

There is no easy way. Instead of proceeding from things least debatable to those most debatable the present writer will move in the opposite direction, from premises and appraisals which to the reader may seem not incontrovertible to conclusions which he cannot deny. This manner of presentation necessitates dividing this Third Part into four sections:

- A. The Thin End of the Wedge,
- B. The Doctrine of the Church Attacked,
- C. The Formal Principle Attacked,
- D. The Material Principle Attacked.

Funds at hand will at this time not permit printing to go beyond a part of C. The rest will go into print when the author, God-willing, is back from another trip to the United States and Canada scheduled for July and August.

## A. The Thin End of the Wedge

### *Pietism and Unionism*

When churches threaten to decay it is a mistake to look only for patently carnal causes, although increase in worldliness and unbelief always is the chief driving force. A very decisive factor is also a misguided and defective spirituality. The blight now beginning to cover the luxurious, verdant growth of Missouri Synod and of the Synodical Conference is an aggregate of various fatal fungous growths. It seems that Pietism and Unionism originated the attack on an outstanding confessional Lutheran body. They doubtless were thought of as ways of accelerating its growth and improving its health.

*Pietism* is always the first declension of lapsing Lutheran orthodoxy. A cultural lapse and lulling days of peace may filch from orthodoxy its vigorous theological work and determined polemics. A Lutheran church with live congregations tends toward overrating religious feeling. This type of religion is, in its way, intensely pious. Yet its regard of God falls short because of lack in depth. The surrounding Reformed bodies, especially Methodism, are thoroughly permeated by Pietism, and the American species of Pietism are activistic. Activism is vibrant activity which is yet deficient in action against Satan. It is busy doing the Lord's work by following impulsively Martha's line almost to the exclusion of Mary's. It is rashly confident of defeating Satan by adding human religiosity to the divine Word. Satan laughs when obedience yields to sentimentality, to various species of enthusiasm, and to business strategy. This sort of Pietism soon turns out to be externalistic. In the end it becomes grossly indifferent to doctrine. Antinomism Auras out to be nomism or legalism.

To diagnose the parent force of Pietism, the basic prerequisite for an analysis of other causes and effects involved, we must carefully study Pietism's record since the eighteenth century as an incipient ill predisposing the body ecclesiastic to various infections. We must ever keep in mind that what is now at long last reaching the citadel of Lutheran conservatism is not different from what has long been decomposing Europe's Protestantism. It has already disintegrated America's sectarian camps. Often moving from the East to the West, the semi-Methodist obsession has for decades tightened its grip on the N.L.C. synods. In Synodical Conference circles the infection is frequently caught by way of contact with the other Lutheran bodies. Pietists are usually mystically inclined. This numbs their sensibility to the cardinal points of the Material and the Formal Principles. Since they are by temperament sanguine and averse to the duty of guarding truth carefully, they almost invite deception, if only the deceiver indulges in pious talk and ardent enterprise. Neology, moving in next door, is on the alert first to pose as church-minded enthusiasm. Naturally, men of our camp, when succumbing to atmospheric pressure, try for a while to remain closer to the classic Lutheran forms of expression than the semi-Lutherans who induced them to move away from the balanced legacy of truth. In the hazardous enterprise of making traditional terminology include heterogeneous new ingredients, a certain type of German and Scandinavian university professor gives ready assistance. They too pretend to be Lutheran, but are yet in some respects Liberals and to a degree Existentialists. They know how to make mixtures look magnificent by admixtures of learning. Also in our circles Pietism, succeeding Orthodoxy, finally becomes the bed-fellow of apostasy. It is prone, in fatuous blindness, to adhere to its superficial course even when the results emerge. Aversion to dogmatics, self-love, and fear of strife combine to induce Pietists to march along with heretics, trying to build Christ's Kingdom in coexistence with Satan if only external peace be preserved and outward gains result. Certain leading men of a journal and of a publicity bureau of considerable influence and the majority of the originators of a certain statement seem to have been confused American Lutheran Mission Pietists.

It seems to belong to the *métier* of Pietism that it pushes in when it is most out of place, and then misses every boat except that of momentary mission success. When this familiar ghost first began to haunt our Zion on the Mississippi, it did not at once show its Methodist—or Protestant Episcopal—or half-Modernist face. Its visage seemed as yet fairly Lutheran. But it worked over time to bungle the great transition period *as far as ultimate values were concerned*. Missouri's Pietists paid no attention to the dykes at a moment of high flood. Changes were due. The new contacts, the air of mergers, the global dimensions that had to be met—all of these

circumstances demanded a great theology. All dry-as-dust conservatives are on a side-track in such days. When the air around a body changes, the focus of attention and the mode of expression must take this into account. This requires creative effort. But Pietism is not theologically minded at all. Accordingly mediocre minds of this type first try to handle the issues of the day by an oversimplified, unpolemical continuation of their past doctrinal tradition and then by a theology which is in part enthusiastic, in part learned and scholarly, but no healthy organic whole.

Whatever may have been the precise gradations at the beginning, the dominant disease in the present complication of maladies is no longer Pietism. Illusory piety has given way to *Unionisms*. This is waxing so bold that, instead of repeating the phrases of Canaan, it already resorts to gruff, intimidating language. Unionism is the devotee of unity success. It is a distortion of true spiritual zeal for union, since it agrees to disagree in matters of God's truth. It pretends communion, it practices what purports to the Biblical *κοινωνία* in violation of the oneness of the Church. The basis of church unity is lacking where there is no joint obedience to the One Lord's revealed will. In these days it is our solemn duty to represent and encourage the Ecumene of God which is loyal to Christ's word. But Unionism flouts Christ's command, creates confusion in Christ's ranks, and fraternizes with Satan's Fifth Column. If we in any way share in moral responsibility for false teaching we deny Christ's veracity and the wholeness of the *Una Sancta* (John 8, 46; 10, 35; 1 Tim. 3, 15; Gal. 4, 26). To the extent of our indifference and treason we surrender Christ's Holy Bride to the Harlot, we betray the true Church to the Counter-Church.<sup>17</sup> Churches of confusion join together what dare not be joined, linking up a satanic counterfeit of Christendom to Christ's community of believers, wedding error to the Gospel.

It must be admitted that weakness also ever and anon touches teaching, that some errors seem to be casual rather than fixed, that various borderlines admit of dispute, yes, that as far as the persons are concerned degrees even in obstinate erring ought to be recognized. But these complexities by no means annul the divine instruction with reference to errorists and their adherents: "Come out from among them and be separate (2 Cor. 6, 14-18), avoid them (Rom. 16, 13; 1 Tim. 6, 3-5)." In Matth. 18 we have a parallel case. The inevitable practical difficulties of congregational procedure against manifest sinners cannot invalidate Christ's solemn command to exercise church discipline. The Holy Spirit will show a way. Now pure doctrine, teaching and preaching Christ's own Word, is the fundamental concern. It is yet more imperative than pure living. It is the direct gift of heaven. It is the divine fountain-head of faith, the power-house of the godly life. It is our primary request in the First Petition.

### *Defining Unionism*

Fortunately we are not here forced into a detour. We need not first debate the question how our churches, obedient to the Word, are to describe and delimit Unionism, so that it can be properly recognized and combated. The import and compass of Missouri Synod's *Brief Statement* admirably serve this purpose. This medium or instrument of clarification and of confession was passionately reaffirmed as an operative norm at San Francisco. This was the real sense of the resolution, which would have been improved by the omission of reference to other synodical statements. If definite, binding clarification is illegal and unconstitutional, then the confessional writings and all provisions of the constitution as to teaching become perfectly useless, since it is the nature of error to come under the cloak of accepted truth. The Formula of Concord *had* to clarify the Augsburg Confession. If the *Brief Statement* is a necessary and *true* clarification, it is eminently constitutional in a confessional body, unless the confessional principle itself is cast overboard. As a matter of fact the *Brief Statement* excludes a host of misrepresentations both as to what the Bible is and as to the contents of the Lutheran Symbols. These travesties became prevalent in the last century in the name of Lutheranism and are today still basic aberrations. Naturally, one of the primary objects of this synodical elucidation was carefully to define church fellowship and thus to expose Unionism. In doing this the *Brief Statement* did no more than to

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<sup>17</sup> See Luther's masterful analyses in the middle part of his Philippic "*Wider Hans Worst*," 1541 (St. Louis German edition XVII 1313 ff.; Weimar edition 51, 469 ff.). — This section ought to be available in English.

underscore the constitutions of the Missouri Synod and of the Synodical Conference. These documents are unique in church history in ruling out *a limine* all unionistic assumptions and maneuvers. The pertinent sections 28 and 29 of the *Brief Statement* read:

“*On Church-Fellowship*. — Since God ordained that His *Word only*, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4; 11; John 8, 31. 32; 1 Tim. 6, 3. 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7, 15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16, 17. We repudiate *unionism*, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16, 17; 2 John 9, 10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2, 17-21. The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of and subscription to an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is *actually* taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. On the other hand, a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20, 30; 1 Tim. 1, 3.”

### *Concord as Implemented by the Book of Concord*

This does not exhaust the *Brief Statement*’s testimony on this point. If it is true that the Holy Ghost calls by means of the one Gospel keeping all believers “with Jesus Christ in the one true faith,” though many in weakness fail to see and live up to the whole import of the One Teaching,<sup>18</sup> if the Body of Christ *as such* cannot be divorced from orthodoxy (1 Tim. 3, 15), then the local churches, taken both singly or in groups, are strictly charged and graciously enabled to be orthodox. For Christian congregations this is the normal condition. They are churches only by virtue of the One Church which is present in them. Orthodoxy is possible if Christians through the Holy Spirit accept the true confession of Christ, faith as taught by God’s own Word, without injecting their own wisdom. That naturally presupposes that believers adhere to the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures as being God’s own Word, distinguished from all other traditions and excluding every other claim of revelation, and that they above all confess the heart-beat of the Scriptures, the saving Gospel of Christ. This will cause them under the leadership of their pastors and theological teachers—offices which dare not be slighted—also sincerely to recognize the Symbols collected in the Book of Concord as being the true position of scriptural truth and a historic deposit of faith. The *Brief Statement* therefore adds paragraphs on our Symbolical Books. They are in keeping with the first sections of the Formula of Concord and with the Thorough Declaration, Art. X, § 31. They delineate and define a normal, obedient, twentieth century confessional church body. The pertinent sections 45-48 read:

We accept as our confessions all the symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580. — The symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines.

Since the Christian Church cannot make doctrines, but can and should simply profess the doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because our Church has made them, nor because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself.

Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not “in so far as,” but “because” the symbols agree with Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrines set forth in the Lutheran

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<sup>18</sup> Here again compare Luther *Wider Hans Worst*, also *Von der Wiedertaufe an zwei Pfarrherrn* (Weimar ed., Briefe V, 504 f.; German St. Louis ed. XVII, 2188 ff., esp. § 7 ff.).

symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

The confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated *ex professo* but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines.

The obligation does not extend to historical statements, “purely exegetical questions,” and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols. All *doctrines* of the symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture.

All bodies of the Synodical Conference were in full agreement with the *Brief Statement* and its anti-unionist implications. Its essential concepts showed up again very conspicuously in the *Einigungssätze* of the German Lutheran Free Churches (theses of agreement, which are in force since 1948 and 1950, respectively).

## B. The Doctrine of the Church Attacked

### *Concord Concerning the Church, the Starting Point*

Behind the official accord of our churches on Unionism is their basic unanimity in apprehending the Doctrine of the Church. As bodies they agree with the Scriptures and the Symbols, as all these various documents and past consonant acts attest. As is evident, the Lutheran Confessions take an ecclesiastical approach which differs totally from that of legalistic and priestly Rome. They proceed from justification through Christ’s merits by faith only (Augsburg Conf. IV). They bring into bold relief the fact that the vital emphases of *Sola Fide* (by faith only) and of *Solo Verbo* (only through the word) also determine the scriptural understanding of the Church. It is the justified body of Christ. This at the same time predicates a reborn people of God, serving Christ in voluntary fealty. If only believers and all believers (*vere credentes*, Augsburg Conf. VIII) are the members of the Church, it is bound together and set off from other entities as an otherworldly unity which is beyond the reach of visible demonstration and must be believed. Outward organizers cannot build Zion, nor can they promote her real oneness.

“Faith is by hearing,” ἐξ ἀκοῆς (Rom. 10, 14-17). Accordingly the only means of locating the hidden One Church is the continual repetition of those saving acts by which the Church lives, the *constituentes ecclesiae*. These creative or constitutive factors are the theme of the Augsburg Confession in Articles V and VII. As to the seventh article, observe the Augsburg Confession’s deliberate use of the durative: “The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is purely taught—*docetur*—and the sacraments are rightly administered—*administrantur*.” The Holy Ghost’s activity in calling sinners by the Gospel is never totally frustrated. *Wherever* the means of grace are in constant use, believing, justified souls are gathered together as the body of Christ. The *constituentes ecclesiae* are naturally also the *definientes ecclesiae*, defining its limits. It is nowhere but where the means of grace are. Furthermore its oneness is evinced by the oneness of saving truth. After stating: “The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is purely [best reading] taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered,” Augsburg Confession VII proceeds to say: “And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As St. Paul says: *One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father* of all, etc. Eph. 4, 5. 6.”

It is self-evident that, since unbelievers are *admixed*, what is seen is the *ecclesia large dicta*, a body larger than the body of *Una Sancta* members in it, and what acts is the *ecclesia repraesentativa*, but with *Una Sancta* power conferred on it by God himself.

*Is Concord Still Defeating Discord in our Midst?*

This outline of the doctrine of the Church takes us back to our theme of Unionism as the firstborn child of Pietism. At the same time it points to the right way of dealing with the very serious problem posed by denominationalism, the scandal that mutually exclusive churches all purport to represent the One Church. There must be an answer; especially in days of instability, of multitudes moving about; and the answer must be Biblical. If the apostolic word and sacraments are the Spirit's sole means to gather Christ's chosen flock and to mark it as Christ's own unit, then the thrust of the two adversaries—of Heresy, which gainsays what God says, and of Unionism, which tolerates some error and in the end all error—is directed against the One Church's very source and essence of life. Both foes militate against the only true spiritual unity extant on earth. Moreover, it is impossible to say that in doctrinal matters each congregation can be taken all by itself. There is no basis in fact for this theory of Selective Fellowship. Doctrinal reality always embraces groups of congregations, *ecclesiae particulares* of a certain geographical extent, and must thus be judged of as the Augsburg Confession in Article VII, second part, presupposes.

What, then, is the proper way to deal with denominations as such, which crystallize and perpetuate division, and also with deviating Lutheran bodies no longer properly representing the One Church? It cannot be the easy way out so often looked for, namely to acknowledge these bodies with conflicting doctrines as being in harmony with the One Church and the One Christ. We can never act as though the public reign of error did not matter. This fraudulent posture is excluded, even if we consider only initial stages. Yet we are certain that the One Church can still be, and normally is, present within these organizations—namely, as long as Christ's Word and the Holy Sacraments are present in essential parts, *in essentialibus*, as long as truth is still being constantly used alongside of error. The proper thing to do is to thank God for that fact, but for this very reason to fight the errors that threaten saved souls through the fault of their own churches. In whatever ways God may indicate we are to help liberate separated brethren from the enemy's clutches. This again must be done by the Word, even as it is the Word only which reliably indicates that there are believers also in these heterodox or polydox—many-faith—church bodies.

If such organisations are not yet very far enmeshed and are otherwise close to us, let us say, still in an appreciable sense Lutheran churches, we are to negotiate with them and to warn them that if they persist on the path of unionism, they are greatly offending God and are destined sooner or later to pay the price by losing their heritage altogether. As long as the sway of the Latin adverbs *pure*, “purely”, and *recte*, “rightly” (Augsburg. Confession VII) has not been reestablished, we cannot do joint church work with them. See Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration X, 31.

### *Our Official Concord Jeopardized*

Unfortunately, the doctrinal unity, which connects our churches and which includes also the loyal rejection of Unionism, was not properly implemented during the last decades. Indifferent, externalistic Unionism is with us, showing its face quite unabashed. As a result, total defection is now rapidly forging ahead. The destructive new patterns of thinking and the attendant wayward ways of acting in church life, dominant in mentally powerful, but spiritually weak minds in our midst, have progressed beyond the introductory pietistic phase. Unionism has far outdistanced the stage of *A Statement of the 44*. Today it is wedded to Neo-Theology, it is reflecting Neo-Liberalism, it is in league with Neo-Romanism. It is cousin and kin to the key figures in the train of modern organized Ecumenism.

### *Des Zwiespalts Einfallstore or Discord's Avenues of Approach*

Other continents, too, are important for Gnesio-Lutheranism, but America is today's land of destiny and decision. The preceding parts of this treatise have emphasized this. If, in spite of God's past beneficent way of dealing with our American Lutheran churches, Unionism and gross doctrinal deviations have succeeded in mounting the stage in our midst and are now playing their parts as prominent actors, then this is not merely the result of wonted, haphazard historical modifications. Nor is it due only to the sudden major increase in outward

contacts with diverse religionists, which followed on the heels of the final language transition. There must have been, during the Pietist phase, dangerous unofficial and official changes. Moves and measures of consequence must have opened the doors to enemy forces, including a lapse in discipline, above all in doctrinal control—and shifts also in the education of the clergy.

Perhaps a glance at some aspects of general practice will show where the cessation of doctrinal control finds its avenues of approach, *Einfallstore*.<sup>19</sup>

### *Practice as Touching Matt. 18*

The general health to be desired in matters of practice is, on the one hand, never extant, least of all in times of rapid growth. On the other hand, a confirmed false practice—especially wherever it touches on church fellowship and on doctrinal control—can effectively negate the official doctrinal position held by a church. Not a mere legal or *de iure* position of correct Symbols determines apostolicity, but the doctrine as it is actually preached and taught.

Since the concrete questions of practice which trouble the synods of the Synodical Conference are in the process of adjudication through the blessed work of the doctrinal unity committees of these synods, it would be foolish at this time to carry a few additional coals to Newcastle. I am leaving out the Scout issue, the Chaplaincy as such, and similar matters. My general remarks may well happen to apply to all the Synodical Conference synods.

Starting on the level of the local congregation, there is abundant evidence that evangelical church discipline is dying out. People are stricken from the congregational roster in various ways. Admittedly, this will in itself make for a healthier situation than that which obtains in Europe's State Churches or semi-State-Churches (*Landeskirchen*). But where is Matt. 18, 15 ff. functioning by and large? There is a great danger that where cases of *Kirchenzucht* can no longer be handled in the Biblical way, Antinomianism, seeing the Gospel no longer against the background of the Law, will gain a foothold. The gravity of impenitence and the seriousness of God's judgment are forgotten. How long can the Gospel continue to be taken seriously as the forgiveness of sins, and how long can the enormity of the sin of false doctrine and the necessity of action against it be realized if congregations no longer know how to take some such action as Corinth was instructed to carry through (1 Cor. 5)? Are hitherto live congregations thus gradually reverting to the broad or open membership type of churches? Are they becoming *Volkskirchen*, primarily social groups? Is the religion of the American Way of Life supplanting the religion of the Bible and the creeds?

Logic would suggest that the perilous situation with reference to lodge members, wherever it does exist—and there are such cases—has something to do with scant attention to church discipline. It is probably also due to a falling short in the work of Visitors who are appointed for this purpose and who are to render the indispensable service of the larger church body to the local church. Circumstances can easily conspire against their working effectively. If the main aim is to reach financial or budget aims, spiritual and doctrinal concerns become secondary.

### *Misapplying Matt. 18*

Not much attention ought to be paid to the irrational plea of the Pietistic mind to force every procedure against public false doctrine raising its head in our midst into the Procrustes bed of Matt. 18, 15 ff., requiring all the hurdles of negotiating with the individual to be taken first, perhaps even increasing them through arbitrary rules and regulations. It has always been the *publica doctrina* of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that it is lawful according to 1 Tim. 5, 20 to combat erroneous *public* teaching at once in public, and that this direct course of action becomes the bounden duty if there is grave danger that destructive false doctrines are

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<sup>19</sup> A transitory traveler's and a rather casual reader's impressions are here presented—because of their impact on the main issue.

spreading. Pietism has an inclination to neglect the full scope of Matt. 18 where it applies and to introduce this text in the interest of subjectivistic freedom where it does not apply.

### *Bitten by the Bug of Bigness?*

This whole matter of practice introduces the question of congregations too large for the cure of souls. Such congregations may indeed attract brilliant preachers—but will not even these tend to become mechanical functionaries, primarily executives? Ought not the glamour of size be resolutely de-mythologized? If secularisation is not to triumph, the prestige of the great number of parishioners a pastor is ministering to ought to be reduced to its logical relevance.

Of course, bigness is in the air in the whole social stratum in which today's Synodical Conference Lutherans gyrate. Their individual social rank in the United States is rising. They are pushing beyond middle income, reaching toward higher education and greater power. Nothing could be more dangerous than to create in these souls, which as a rule were hitherto led by God's Spirit in a spiritual way, a this-worldly Lutheran group consciousness, a new carnal corporate ambition, a publicity itch of Lutherans doing this or that for the paltry purpose of self-glorification. The true church of Christ dare move its members only by means of Gospel motivation, not by astute political appeals. Our church's journalists are forever tempted to forget the heavenly motivation, lured to try the short cut of cheap catering to pride by portraying Lutheran victories, even on the baseball diamond, instead of Christ's victories. As far as I could tell, the brethren most exposed and susceptible to this danger are of the new Lutheran big-city newspapers. Why not work out a line of demarcation to clarify in what respect these papers are mere secular undertakings, officially no more representative of the Lutheran Church than the Appleton Insurance, and to what extent the church is "given space" for Christ's spiritual message? An even more vital concern is that official synodical papers do not follow suit in getting "newsy" in this cheap sense, but remain on the high plane of the church's mandate, of Christ speaking to His people. If church papers would despair of publishing God's real message, which certainly embraces sound doctrine, who then will step forward to testify? Will broadcasting alone keep to the line? Will thus corporately giving way to secularism not also tempt pastors to comply to the "easier approach," to try to serve men rather than God (Gal. 1, 10)? What Luther calls *AKEDEIA*, getting tired of God's Word in the fourth and fifth generation, is very definitely in the air, and Satan loves to co-operate with eager publicity fans.

### *Is the Church Basically a Sector of Society?*

Special danger seems to threaten from looking on the Church as part and parcel of American secular society instead of keeping in mind the other-worldly nature of Christ's holy Bride. Though the One Church is on this earth, though it is locally represented through believers known *in toto* though not individually by their gathering about Christ's Word and Sacrament, yet the local fold of saints owes allegiance to no man and to no party. It is Christ's fold. Its earthly whereabouts and its geographic bounds, and even the sins daily forgiven, do not secularize it. It shares the Kingdom's and faith's eschatological orientation. It remains exclusively heaven's colony. For a season the heavenly assembly is sojourning in this aeon as in an inn for the blessed purpose of bringing as many as possible of the still unsaved inhabitants of the world into the mansions of eternal bliss. It is thus evident that no congregation in which the One Church of Christ is on the spot can be viewed as a democracy which in any sense is on the level of the great American experiment. Of course, the metaphor of a democracy can serve a purpose, for Jesus says in Matt. 23, 8: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." We are equals because only He rules as King. This, however, establishes, the "monarchy" of Christ rather than people's rule. The United States form of government, in turn, has nothing to do with the church's spiritual type of brotherhood. Right now a concerted attack of muddled thinking is developing also in the Missouri Synod, directed against the Scriptural and Lutheran distinction of the Two Realms.<sup>20</sup> American

<sup>20</sup> Compare Augsburg Confession 28 and Luther's portrayal of *Gottes Reich zur Linken and Gottes Reich zur Rechten*, especially in his great expositions of Matt. 5.

Lutherans are at present giving in all along the line to Calvinism's theocratic patterns of thought, which are also incessantly inculcated by Neo-Orthodoxy. The present Social Gospel Modernism, especially active in the NCCCUSA, and the equalitarian and Masonic strains or chords, vocal in American political philosophy since the French Revolution, are trying to make the churches believe that they as churches must back the Supreme Court's decision against school segregation. As though Christ had come to underwrite political philosophy, be the latter wise or unwise, a recipe citizens ought or ought not to support! Evidently some of the pastors encouraging and demanding the newfangled integration thinking act in single-hearted devotion to their missionary task. They are orthodox in insisting that Christ's Church is there on equal terms for all mankind and dare not become a group's Church. They are trying to win the non-Caucasian population surrounding their formerly white churches for Christ and are offering illustrious examples of great personal sacrifices and teaching their congregations to do the same. But it seems to this observer that the Valparaiso Institute for Human Relations, with certain pastors and professors as agitators, is gradually pushing Missourian thinking into sectarian humanitarian fogs, contradicting our Lord in Luke 12, 14. Paul in his epistles never even touched the question of the abolition of slavery, although many members of the Church were slaves and others the owners of slaves. Synodical resolutions must reflect the doctrine of the two realms. Was this vital distinction really fully spelt out in San Francisco?

Whoever, in opposition to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, foists on the church the alien task of recasting outward order, trying to "make this world a better place to live in" by legalistic measures, forces the church into the political arena. In this case huge power constellations are a practical necessity. So line-ups of the type of the NCCCUSA become imperative. Unionistic inclusivism thus becomes the church's solemn duty. A semi-Calvinist ambition, naturally assuming the garb of a Lutheran *pro domo* zeal, telling Lutherans that they are now becoming key figures in reforming society, is behind much of the surprising eagerness of today's American Lutheranism for church union enterprises of diverse types.

### *Is ECUMENIAC UNIONISM Out, or In-Between, or Where?*

Missouri's 1956 resolutions which declined membership in the Lutheran World Federation for conscience' sake were in line with the facts of the situation and with God's Word. L.W.F. membership actually implies church fellowship with church-bodies not true to the Lutheran confessions. Professor Peter Brunner of Heidelberg as a member of the respective L.W.F. committee was directed to examine the constitution and nature of the Federation. Last year he published his findings.<sup>21</sup> To his mind the structure and nature of the L.W.F. simply demand that all the bodies who have officially joined the L.W.F. enter into pulpit and altar fellowship with one another. He pleads for an increased and legally ratified fellowship within the Federation. Peter Brunner seems not to have borne in mind what he himself has been saying time and again about the actual conditions obtaining in all the Territorial Churches nominally Lutheran. Both he and Walther Geppert<sup>21a</sup> have made it abundantly clear that for all churches still under *Walther Geppert* "Ist Kirchliches Lehrchaos Protestantisches Schicksal?" 1953. the inexorable law and logic of Protestant territorialism the first concern is to keep the non-Roman population of a given territory within the historically given church body. Doctrinal imperatives simply cannot be decisive in this set-up at this late hour in Western Europe. Whatever confessional standards are alleged are not insisted on seriously. The ordination vows to remain faithful to the Lutheran Symbols cannot be adduced as evidence that Lutheran preaching is assured, since it is no longer earnestly intended to guarantee orthodox teaching. The flood of devils' doctrines which has been inundating all the churches of Lutheran governmental establishment since the days of Enlightenment was never pushed off or in the main shut out. Territorialism will not permit a serious house cleaning today. Just imagine anything of this kind happening in Sweden or Hamburg or Thuringia. In many cases these so-called Lutheran churches have been communities of pseudo-Lutheran character for centuries, "*heterodox überfremdet seit Jahrhunderten.*"<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ev. Luth. Kirchenzeitung* (Berlin) of Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> 1959.

<sup>21a</sup> Peter Brunner "Das Lutherische Bekenntnis in der Union," 1952, p. 38 f. —

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Peter Brunner's slants in *Ev.-luth. Kirchenzeitung*, 1954, p. 242.

Some are churches composed almost completely of semi-heathen heathen folk. Even their official organization is in some cases permeated and “overlaid” with heterodoxy to such a degree that some earnest Reformed churches are preaching more of Christ and are more loyal to His Word than large denatured sections of Lutheranism, ruled by lukewarm learned Sadducees.<sup>23</sup> Today all are in the boat of Ecumenism and linked up in some sort of communion at the altar even with the Reformed. Of course, this is not the whole story of the ancient Lutheran churches. There *are* pastors and even a few church officials and professors left who are personally devoted and perhaps even profound Lutherans, and there are sections of these countries left where one can speak of a Lutheran consciousness of congregations, the habit of going to church, and of at least some doctrinal convictions. There are as a matter of fact some excellent Lutheran young people coming here to Oberursel to study with us who hail directly from territorial-church parishes. Certain solid lessons in historical experience and in scholarship, acquired during centuries, also dare not be neglected. There is furthermore some justification for stressing that a Lutheran ordination vow at least provides a platform to fight for a Lutheran church. But a church *is* Lutheran only if it teaches Lutheran, and this involves not merely one congregation, but all—unless a lonely pastor and his flock on the basis of confessional commitments fight heterodoxy in earnest, taking up a deliberate position *in statu confessionis*. This sets them off from their surroundings *in transitu*.

One negative aspect often overlooked is that there are practically no Lutheran theological faculties in all Europe. Oberursel, of course, and, in a sense, Menighetfakulteten in Oslo and, to a still lesser degree, Augustanahochschule of Neuendettelsau are exceptions. All other faculties, for instance also Heidelberg and Erlangen, are not bound by any consideration of the Symbolical Books whatsoever. They usually are totally independent of the official church. By and large, no matter whether with a greater or a smaller admixture of truth, every school also teaches every heresy. There is as a rule no way of distinguishing or classifying even professors as being Lutherans, Evangelicals, Reformed, or non-descript, except by their expressed predilections and by their publications. The name Lutheran as a general etiquette does not mean much in continental Europe. Realizing that Luther is the great German hero, I followed up his prestige when I came to Germany. It is so great that I actually am surprised that the radical American sects and the Roman Catholic Church in Germany have not found still more effective ways to become associated with that great name. At any rate, religious Liberalism has said practically everything it ever said under the guise of following Luther. Existentialism observed the same tactics. Bultmann is Lutheran, Paul Tillich is Lutheran—who not?

Besides being to a surprising extent composed of very un-Lutheran, secularized churches, especially in Europe—the Lutheran Federation is also part and parcel of the World Council of Churches.<sup>24</sup> You cannot say A

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<sup>23</sup> Dr. Simon Schoeffel, the late Bishop of Hamburg, called Hamburg’s 1580 original print of the Book of Concord *das größte Märtyrerbuch der Stadt*, the chief martyrbook of the city. He related that since the sixteenth century every pastor had subscribed personally, vowing to remain faithful to the Lutheran Symbols even *in phrasibus*. But it meant so little during the last two centuries, he went on to say, that during the first World War a pastor, having subscribed, entered the pulpit of his famous *Hauptkirche*, stating in his inaugural sermon that he could not pray the Lord’s Prayer because the Christian concept of sin was all wrong. There were no such “debts.” Even in his own days, Dr. Schoeffel told me, Liberalism had been so strong that when the Nazis demanded giving up lodge connections one half of his pastors had to renounce Masonry.

<sup>24</sup> In Norway the Lutheran Mission Society under the leadership of Rektor Fr. Wisløff has determined to leave the International Missionary Council the moment the latter is incorporated into the W.C.C. The reasons given by Rektor Wisløff in the Norwegian journal *Fast Grunn*, (1959, No. 5) were:

- 1) The W.C.C. has so indistinct a basis that there is room in the Council’s leadership for the influences of extreme Liberal theology.
- 2) There is free play in the W.C.C. for High Church or Romanizing tendencies ... There is no reference to Scriptures alone as being the foundation for all discussions on faith. There are member churches which officially do not share this Protestant and Evangelical principle, since they coordinate Scriptures and the tradition of the church.
- 3) The W.C.C. is a potent instrument of men who aim at one organized World Church.
- 4) The W.C.C. is being used effectively to create a certain ecumenical climate of minds, enthusiastically in favor of “unity,” in disregard of the truth according to God’s Word.

without perforce adding B. Perhaps some good former E.L.C. men know that by now. If you sell away your No against false doctrine, you vitiate your Yes of assent to Christ and His voice. Some sections of the Missouri Synod who clamor for joining the L.W.F. do so because they actually want to get into the full stream of today's Ecumenism. This was very evident on October 2nd, 1958, with reference to the majority decision of Atlantic District pastors at Pocono Crest, petitioning Synod to join the L.W.F. In fact, one prominent advocate of this *Anschluß*, when challenged by a conservative to admit to his amphibian tendencies, refused to deny that, as far as his doctrinal conscience was concerned, he could leave Missouri and join the U.L.C., where certainly he would at once even be in the NCCCUSA. There probably are synodical districts with similar situations. Several members of the St. Louis faculty must here be referred to, who with their friends are agitating for reversing Missouri's traditional position. They detest what they dub as their Church's "isolationism" and try to rush Synod into the Ecumenical Movement, this hodgepodge of various ingredients—for instance enthusiast mission pietism, sentimental humanitarian love of man, and rationalistic apostasy. Above all, the editors of *The American Lutheran* know that they have campaigned for more than the mere First Base. No doubt many who want to get into the pan-Lutheran boat are far-sighted enough to realize that this must involve dropping Missouri's hitherto strict doctrinal position altogether. One cannot fraternize with other theologians with whom there is no faint possibility of agreeing doctrinally, thus by-passing the command to "avoid them" and choosing rather to work together with them for Christ's Kingdom, and, in spite of all this, insist that their errors are of grave consequence. Through fraternizing and fellowshiping with them, one sugar-coats all their errors as being only deviations in non-existentials, *Schulmeinungen*, that do not call for vigorous protest, let alone any thought of separation. Now, there is no agreement even on "fundamental doctrines of the first order" in most of these churches and movements. Really intelligent Missourians eager for ecumenism well know whither they are bound. They realize that if they succeed in bringing Missouri into the "ecumenical" stream most of the doctrines in the *Brief Statement* and in the Lutheran Confessions themselves will automatically become pious opinions which anyone may cherish as long as he does not cause trouble, but to which pastors cannot be pinned down even in their pulpits. Complete doctrinal laxity as a normal consequence will finally also invade the congregations. The process of decomposition at the grass roots has begun already, and certain societies accelerate it. Some congregations will for a considerable time escape the rot. But Synod as such, by joining up with union bodies, will have become a dishonest union church. The ominous union color *grey* will of necessity advance in every direction until it covers the area of all districts of Synod and creeps into every circuit, if not into every pulpit.

#### *The Problem Posed by the Unionist Character of the L.W.F.*

Unionism is of the essence of the present Lutheran World Federation. This holds good by virtue of the charter of that league, by virtue of the character and the deliberate self-interpretation, *Selbsverständnis*, of the bodies which constitute it, and on the strength of its functions in, and its relationship to the World Council of Churches as written into its very constitution. The Lutheran World Federation, being spaciouly housed anew on Geneva's World Council grounds, is to such an extent a part of the Ecumenical Movement that to join it implies joining the W.C.C. This was correctly stressed in the Oslo Report of Drs. Fuerbringer and Bretscher. Actually, Missouri is being asked simultaneously to join the L.W.F. *and* the W.C.C.

Let us indulge in a flight of fancy to illustrate the studied "approach by degrees" of this dual L.W.F. and W.C.C. temptation. Imagine that Queen Elizabeth I, who waged a determined diplomatic war at the Lutheran

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I adduce another witness. The Norwegian Sigurd Aske, in a review of Leslie Newbigin's new book, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, has demonstrated that the doctrinal indifference of the Ecumenical Movement and the Liberal attitude toward the Bible which it is prone to foster has become a serious obstacle to mission work in heathen countries. Non-cooperating Protestant missions of various types register much more conviction and success. This is a surprising admission on the part of an L.W.F. member, writing in the League's German language organ *Lutherische Rundschau*, 1959, p. 243 ff.

It is decidedly worth while also to compare the carefully worded declaration of the Ev. Luth. Church of Australia on the World Council of Churches, adopted at Toowoomba, March 1950. Our Australian brethren as a minority are often forced to face issues before majority bodies feel constrained to go into the doctrinal side of the questions in detail.

courts to prevent the adoption of the Formula of Concord, had after her many disappointments found this clever way out: “Well, since they simply insist on adopting this disagreeable Formula of Concord or Discord, we’ll reach our end of getting them into a church union by founding a league or FOEDUS on a very broad basis at first. Let these Lutherans define all their doctrines, let them pen as many antitheses against the Reformed as they care to, if only we can at the same time create a Pan-Protestant World Council and get them into it too. Since to cooperate with us in the spiritual work of the Church is too much to ask of them at first, let us make it a sort of double affair. We shall of course ask *Reformed* church bodies on the basis of league membership at once to co-operate in things spiritual, *in sacris*. But the Lutherans at first need co-operate only in the area of externals. Then, *if once they are in the maelstrom*, SACRA will soon follow EXTERNA.”

Elizabeth never even attempted such a move. The English certainly were not deficient in diplomatic skill. But the Queen’s theologians knew that this stratagem was ruled out by the decision readied in Art. X on the basis of Gal. 2. The Lutheran Confessors had ratified the decisive axiom: *in casu confessionis vel scandal nihil est adiaphoron* (in cases where circumstances demand a confession or where offense would be given, matters which in themselves are subject to free choice cease to remain such). Hereby the mediating position of Melancthon and his colleagues with reference to co-operating with Rome in the perilous Interim situation (1548) had been flatly rejected. If a heterodox church or a league, in asking for some form of co-operation, seeks to gain a point of principle, whether by blandishment or duress, you cannot give in. Then you dare not even grant the requested little finger by first co-operating in externals.

The principle of the Formula of Concord X, applies definitely to the invitation of the Lutheran World Federation, which entices Missouri to walk in at the Geneva joint offices of the L.W.F. and of the W.C.C. (Remember that whoever says A, L.W.F., also says B, W.C.C.) The confessional question put squarely before our world-wide Gnesio-Lutheran camp is precisely this: “How must the compromise of co-operating which Ecumenism in EXTERNIS, in a *roundabout* way, be judged of on the basis of Formula of Concord, Art X, and of the texts of Scripture there cited?” After Missouri’s public refusal in St. Paul to join up with the others, no wise politician will expect Missouri to walk in through the main aisle of the L.W.F. But, perhaps—through some side-aisle. Even to the pressure group behind *The American Lutheran* this might seem sufficient for the first. The final odds are then in their favor. On the one hand, a considerably large and very vocal sector of Missouri is already committed to unionistic “inclusiveness” by dint of false principles enshrined in a heterodox doctrine of the Church. In the other hand, every advance from the National Lutheran Council and the Lutheran World Federation to open a seemingly unobnoxious door to secure Missouri’s co-operation will reflect the hope of repeating with Missouri the history of the N.L.C. and of the Lutheran World Convention (*Lutherischer Weltkonvent*). Both began their co-operative history with EXTERNA, soon continuing it with INTERNA or SACRA. Though Missouri, on the basis of a report none too lucid, declined entering the N.L.C. some years ago, the co-operation which Missouri practiced in several departments has already seemed to the others, especially to certain E.L.C. observers, a half-way measure which in fact compromises the former strict doctrinal position. Editor Malmin, commenting on Dr. Behnken’s refusal—later on reversed—to contemplate new talks with the N.L.C., found the half-hearted, meandering co-operation that marked the last decades quite puzzling, especially no doubt the Armed Services Agreement as it is being handled. He saw sense only in Missouri’s *either* walking in all the way, if *κοινωνία* is right, or walking out—if it is a sin to co-operate in spiritual undertakings with those differing in doctrine. Must not some of these areas be studied anew? No matter how harmless or sensible some forms of co-operation may be on paper, is not the *casus confessionis vel scandal* reached the moment unionist agitation is definitely being encouraged without and within? Even large bodies dare not tempt God without being deserted by God. Have temptations ever been overcome by yielding to them partially? Moreover, this whole N.L.C. and L.W.F. question from the very beginning involved also the other synods of the Synodical Conference as well as all bodies across the globe in fellowship. Here joint matters vital to conscience are in the balances. The recent move of Missouri’s Home Mission Department to join a subdivision of the NCCCUSA is due for reconsideration in view of the Formula of Concord, Article X, and the pertinent *sedes doctrinae*.

One of the reasons urged why Missouri should join the L.W.F. and the N.L.C. and then, of course, also the W.C.C. and the NCCCUSA, is theological conversation in free conferences. But must free conferences not

of necessity be free, namely, from entangling alliances, from every form of *κοινωνία* posited as a presupposition of entry? Again, how can a free conference be conducted with an organization which as such (be it N.L.C. or L.W.F.—not to mention the larger ECUMENE) has no doctrines at all, but only a general “doctrinal basis,” even that being grossly violated as a matter of course by many of the member churches?

*An Either/Or Question Affecting the Orthodoxy of the Home Base*

Although hard to believe, it is a fact that to join the Lutheran World Federation as it is today has become the public goal, vociferously demanded by editors, by professors, by pastoral conferences, and even by a few officials both of Missouri’s districts and its general body. Unless men do not know what they are doing, they are trying to ruin their synod and all of us by enmeshing confessional Lutheranism in gross unionism. In this case, as always, syncretism is the equivalent not of one, but of many heresies. This crucial aspect transfers the whole question from outside contact to inside relationship. How can Missouri in the long run be in doctrinal unity with men in its own midst who wittingly or unwittingly try to sell out its doctrinal unity, who are patently sinning and aggressively enticing the whole body to sin? Evidently the rather neutral pamphlet sent out by the Presidium to the pastoral conferences early in 1958, asking for conference discussions and resolutions without even repeating the reasons of conscience given in St. Paul for not joining the L.W.F., was likely to create the fatal impression that both sides of the case could confidently be argued. Are there two sides to moral questions, for instance cheating or not cheating? Was this appeal to the general clergy not taking too much for granted? Were the conferences not overtaxed, considering that so very little *factual* material to guide decision has ever been published? A typical American public, like Missouri’s pastors in general, is unacquainted with the actual congregational and theological conditions in the major L.W.F. bodies. Even the doctrine of the One Church and its apostolicity, as applied to such ambivalent federations or FOEDERA, has hardly ever been adequately treated, except to a limited degree in the Three Men Report for St. Paul. The official papers barely said a word to guide conviction, excepting, for good, Dr. Behnken’s pleas in the *Lutheran Witness* and, for ill, the superficial treatment of the BATAK PROTESTANT CHURCH by an inexperienced Seminary student, J.P. Ellwanger, in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, January 1959. When Dr. Sasse’s San Francisco lecture was published in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1960, the introductory note by Dr. Piepkorn neutralised Dr. Sasse’s timely warning and twisted its points. Meanwhile *The American Lutheran*, operating on the basis of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, which for many years has been receiving synodical money through authorized collections, has been campaigning incessantly for entering the L.W.F. Its public advocacy of this and of other types of unionism has never abated from 1935 to this very day. Certainly an option cannot be held: for sirs or against sin? The resolution in San Francisco to await another Committee Report is insufficient. A new and healthy atmosphere cannot be created unless sin—sin which destroys orthodoxy—ceases to be looked upon officially as permissible. After all, doctrinal sin is the most destructive type of sin, far worse even than coarse sexual immorality. See Luther on Gal. 5, 9.<sup>25</sup>

To rule out the right brazenly to agitate for unionism incidentally involves exploding the fallacy, dear to publicity folks, that the highest laws in Christ’s Church are those of freedom of the press in a democracy. Synod in its essential functional aspects is on a transmundane level. It is a church body. According to its constitution it must function not merely as an outward association but also as an *ecclesia composita*. Being a church body, synod as a whole and its congregations severally are the dominion of Christ the King, not of men. His sole rule must be acknowledged. Synod’s orthodoxy involves the orthodoxy of all of its congregations and of all the ecclesiastical bodies in fellowship with Missouri. Dr. Francis Pieper said: “If it were shown us that even but one pastor were preaching false doctrine and that even but one periodical were in the service of false doctrine, and we would not put a stop to this false doctrine, we would thereby have ceased to be an orthodox Synod and would have become a unionistic fellowship. In short, it is, the earmark of an orthodox fellowship that throughout its domain the pure doctrine is not merely officially recognized, but that it actually prevails.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Large Commentary on Galatians.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted by F.R. Webber in *A History of Preaching in Britain and America*, Northwestern Publishing House 1955, Part II, p. 437.

Are not some men of considerable stature light-heartedly incurring the gravest responsibility before God by rashly siding with Ecumenism, often not even wrestling with any articulate doctrine of the Church, just running with the crowd and chanting today's popular slogans?

### *A False Doctrine of the Church*

Behind this alarming growth both of casual and of fanatical unionistic thinking is a spurious doctrine of the Church. It is steadily gaining ground. Even if this new ecclesiology at first reflects a foreign device, cliché, or *Leitbild*, coming into our circles from outside sources through mimicry, and has as a rule not yet achieved conscious, careful formulation, it nevertheless supplies the motives and maxims for destructive acts and actually constitutes heresy in action. The One Church of Christ is erroneously no longer thought of as a spiritual body consisting only of true believers. The basic truth is spurned that you can never be certain of the Church's residing at any specified place unless the true means of grace are in use there. Luther's decisive New Testament syllogism (the other side of his doctrine of the hiddenness of the Church) is no longer understood, namely: "The Gospel invitation *cannot* return void. Here I hear the One voice of the Good Shepherd. By this I know that here is Christ's fold, to which I belong" (cf. Smal. Art. Part III, Art. XII). In breaking up Missouri's basic ecclesiology, which very decidedly rested on Luther's New Testament insights as tremendously quickened and illustrated by Reformation experiences, there seems to have been a succession of shifts. First, there was some lively campaigning against the concept of the One Church as being *abscondita* or invisible in the sense that only through the means of grace as "notes" of the church can one be certain of it at a given place. Here lenient Dr. Fred E. Mayer also gave way a little, lacking in resistance. When a vacuum had been created by ruling out the Sola Fide concept of the Church as strictly fundamental, at once a short-sighted Pietist view of the One Church just being "all pious people everywhere *as they can know each other*" entered in. This was a transition, for immediately an externalistic doctrine in line with the predilections of the so-called Catholic Churches came into full swing. The advocates of Ecumenism utilize both approaches, but of late Missouri's ecumeniacs have drawn steadily nearer to Anglo-Catholic doctrine and practice. Ecumenism as a movement, we know, needed a "respectable historic halo," and it naturally got it from England. Anglicanism is the compromise *par excellence*. Canterbury is more of a *complexio oppositorum* than even Rome. The "Branch Theory" is typical of the broadminded type of Anglicanism. True faith in Christ has never been the dominant factor in England's state church. The "Illustrious Prince" at the beginning practically stood on one level with Christ. State interests were time and again as important as New Testament faith. Intensely practical, yet also mystical present-world England proved in the long run more decisive than the Thirty-nine Articles. Dr. Bell, the late Bishop of Chichester whom I knew personally, acknowledged as the thief factors determinative within the Church of England a certain amount of respect for the ecumenical creeds and, to a lesser degree, for the 39 Articles, *above all* the acceptance of the Common Book of Prayer, and—do not overlook this item—attachment to the crown of England. No Lutheran community has been more willing to follow Anglicanism's cultured, but man-centered lead than the State Church of Sweden, where Ritschlianism had prepared the way (Einar Billing's and Soederblom's liberal ecumenical visions). I am now stating the views of those Northern champions of a One World Church who are not extreme Modernists, but "folk church theorists" and perhaps Mission Pietists: You judge by what you can see. If you somehow become convinced that there are Christians also in the Methodist, Presbyterian, or even Roman camp (as indeed is the case), you jump to the conclusion that you thus *see* the One Church in those places and hear *her* demand KOINONIA with all these communities. All visible communions of Christians together are taken to constitute the Una Sancta (Nygren<sup>27</sup>). The major confessional divisions of Christendom, such as Greek Orthodox, Roman, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, are the main branches growing out of one trunk. More minute denominational diversities are little twigs. All together are the tree. If, withal, some principle of apostolicity is to reign—and to advance this claim is of the essence of "Catholicism"—it cannot be pure doctrine in the sense of the Book Concord, but must be some sort of an abbreviation, perchance the "non-doctrinal Gospel" as Lund sees it, perhaps the vague platforms of the Y.M.C.A. and the W.C.C. But

<sup>27</sup> Anders Nyggen in *Die Einheit der Kirche* (Berlin 1957) p. 98 ff.

why not have something more tangible if not visible: the Ecumenical Creeds as a general point of reference, or holy orders, the historical episcopate, and the like? After all, if doctrine is not the decisive factor—as indeed the VII. Art. of the Augsburg Confession makes it out to be—then some impressive outward symbol readies for its place. Hence not Sweden’s nor Germany’s Lutheran state university professors or bishops, but rather Anglican churchmen—who are past masters in the art of bypassing doctrinal issues—take the lead, drawing all successful Ecumenical experiments and organisational set-ups sooner or later into their wake. Take India as an example. Many foolish Neo-Romanists of the Lutheran fold support the primacy of wayward Anglicanism. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry at the head of the Central Committee of the W.C.C. has neither the vision nor the power to remove Anglicanism’s effective lead. As the German adage says: “*Man meint zu schieben, und man wird geschoben*” (imagining to be a-pushing, one is being pushed).

### *Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan’s Doctrine of the Church*

Let Synodical Conference Lutherans right now study the concepts of the church underlying the fascinating book *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* by Jaroslav Pelikan (Abingdon Press 1959). The author proceeds in the manner of most historians, taking the phenomenal side of church bodies, particularly the facade of Rome, more or less at face value. This becomes especially evident from page 177 onward. He nowhere states that only believers—since they alone are joined to Christ—constitute the One Church. Nor does he mention anywhere that only the Holy Spirit’s true doctrine is representative of the Church of Christ, so that to the degree of false doctrine becoming publicly entrenched in a church body such an organization becomes oppressive Babylon. Making common cause with Satan’s Counter-Church, it hedges in and imprisons the heaven-born believers who owe their spiritual life to the continued functioning of Holy Baptism and to saving elements of the Gospel message still operating *alongside of* destructive error. It seems that to Pelikan there is no essential difference between the Lutheran church of the pure word and sacrament and wishy-washy general Protestantism, which in his book is the alternate to Roman Catholicism. He recognized no divine mandate for separating faith-denying Modernists from orthodox Christians, for the whole book is frankly ecumenical in the Liberal sense. In consequence, the line of demarcation between what he calls Protestantism and rigid Roman Catholicism is not to be taken too seriously, in spite of what is said of Trent. After all, if you never in a scriptural way define *Una Sancta* loyalty because of a Modernist altitude forward Scripture,<sup>28</sup> what yardstick

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<sup>28</sup> Under the next division, C, this Third Part will analyze Pelikan’s Modernist attitude towards Scripture in detail. He is above all an evolutionist who accepts man’s descent from the brute. — Here two quotes suffice. In the book of 1950 unfortunately put on the market by Concordia Publishing House, *From Luther to Kieckegaard*, the then St. Louis professor stated on p. 113: “...a re-creation of classical Lutheran Orthodoxy was impossible after Kant, he had destroyed the epistemological presuppositions upon which Orthodoxy had built its system.” Kant was a Deist, and the whole theology following him became deistic. Deism, shutting God, what Kant calls *νοούμενα*, out from history, is involved in the historico-critical approach to the Bible. This Kantian approach destroys orthodoxy, certainly, but faith as well. With reference to the historico-critical presuppositions Prof. Martin H. Franzmann, writing in *Concordia Theological Monthly* 1960, has stated the Christian position on p. 159 f.: “The interpreter is not a critic; there is no legitimate technique of historical-theological inquiry (and the interpreter of Sacred Scripture is always both historian and theologian) by means of which the interpreter can separate the miraculous from the historical or can penetrate beyond the *wunderbar* into naked history without emptying this history of that which gives it significance ... The question is: Is God shut out from history, or is He in it, really in it, and free to reveal Himself in it? ... Or to put the question in another form: How seriously do we take the incarnation? ... L.S. Thornton, in his *Revelation and the Modern World* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1950), p. 16, arrives by quite a different route at a conclusion very similar to the one stated above. He deprecates ‘any attempt to distinguish the essence of revelation from the sacred literature in which it is enshrined.’ All such attempts, he says, ‘involve us in a process of discrimination by which we sit in judgment upon Scripture ... It is for the Creator to decide in what manner He will reveal Himself; and God being what He is, the manner of revelation is not a manner upon which man can safely form decisions...’

On page 191f. of *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* Pelikan writes: “A tiny amazing shift has taken place in the study of the Old Testament. During the nineteenth century, the heyday of biblical criticism, Roman Catholic interpreters of the Old Testament resisted many of the theories of historical study of the Old Testament because they seemed to be treating the Old Testament merely as a piece of Near Eastern literature, with little or no reference to its significance as a book of the church. Today most Protestant interpreters take this significance very seriously, but without sacrificing their attention to historical questions; and Roman Catholic interpreters have come to realize that there is no incompatibility between the historical-critical study of Old Testament literature and its use in the

have you? Dr. Pelikan opines on p. 186: “The harsh actuality is that the two [Roman Catholicism and Protestantism] can neither define nor achieve true catholicity as long as they are separated.” On p. 188 he adds: “The conflicting claims of the churches to be apostolic are the battle of beggars over a treasure which all of them want but none can have until everyone shares what he has and accepts what the others have.” Apostolicity, first to be achieved, depends on blending the various traditions in One World Church. In the meantime our author is busy building bridges. On p. 238f. he writes: “Is there, for example, any sense at all in which Protestants are ready to say that a man is justified by faith and works, or that Scripture and the traditions belong to the corpus of Christian authority? And if there is a sense in which such an *and* is permissible, does it correspond to Trent? Or what is the basic difference between the assumption of Mary and the ideas about the ascension of Enoch and of Elijah that formed part of orthodox Protestant theology for centuries and still belong to the faith of many believers? If the latter have room within Protestantism, must a doctrine of the assumption of Mary be ruled out as not only unscriptural but antiscritural?” Of course, these sentences are non-committal. But their total background makes their import hardly less irenic than many lines of Calixtus of Helmstedt. On p. 138 he finds “echoes” of Gnostics doctrines, which are related to Mariology, “in the New Testament itself.” This of course betrays his ruling assumption, that the New and Old Testament *are* not the word of God. On p. 193 he argues: “If, as Protestant interpreters like Dibelius and even Bultmann concede, the Christian community, again through its tradition shaped the forms of the New Testament, then it might well follow that the Christian community, again through its tradition, ought to have some voice in the interpretation of the New Testament. It is for this authoritative voice of tradition that Roman Catholic theology and Orthodox theology have been contending against Protestantism for four hundred years.” Evidently the Bible is for Pelikan not a book by the Holy Ghost to the Church, but a book of the Church, by the Church, for the Church, and he is in favor of doctrine “progressing in and through the Church”—while St. John, representing the New Testament, rejects all progress of the *doctrina divina* in 2 John 9ff. as apostasy, turning against the *προάγων*.

The Chicago man is patently much concerned about a future One World Church with sufficient latitude. Purity of doctrine does not engage him, as it did the Holy Church for almost two thousand years—for him there really is no such thing. A most ardent hope, voiced toward the end of the book, is a Protestant “world view” to match—Thomism, which “maintains a balance between faith and reason that gives each its due without doing violence to the other,” p. 228. Note how he invites Reason to occupy the same seat with Faith. The Rationalist cat jumps fully out of the bag when the author becomes more concrete on the next page: “Yet Protestant theology has proved that it can supply alternatives to Thomism that are just as comprehensive and yet just as Christian. An outstanding instance of such an alternative is the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834).” Schleiermacher, better than a hundred years ago, and Paul Tillich now come close to being the Pelikan recipe for transforming Protestantism in the interest of World Christianity. On p. 220 he introduces the latter: “Over and over again the dynamic of what Paul Tillich calls ‘the Protestant principle’ must be applied to all forms of theology and church life that have come out of Protestantism. In Tillich’s own words: ‘The central principle of Protestantism is the doctrine of justification by grace alone, which means that no individual and no human group can claim a divine dignity for its moral achievements for its sacramental power, for its sanctity, or for its doctrine (sic!)...’<sup>29</sup> Strange “self-critical Protestantism” with a specious doctrine of justification and what

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theology and devotion of the church. As a result, such Protestant interpreters sense a greater affinity with such Roman Catholics than they do with other Protestants who still reject the historical-critical study of the Old Testament.” Of course, this “shift” is not “truly amazing.” Rome must fight for tradition, for “developing doctrine in the Church.” In order to avoid the genuine *Sola Scriptura*, Rome before the Reformation, but especially after, made Scriptures irrevocably depend on the authority of the Church. Rome was even eager to point out all sorts of deficiencies in Scripture, in order not to permit it to qualify as *unicum principium cognoscendi theologiae sacrae* (see Adolf Hoenecke: *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, 1909, Milwaukee, Wis., I, pp. 389ff., 395ff.). As to Pelikan and the Bible, compare in addition his pages 70 and 222f.

<sup>29</sup> On Schleiermacher see Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, I, 171ff., 295ff., also Franz Pieper’s scattered references. Schleiermacher was a hybrid or cross of rationalist and mystic, denying all essential saving elements of our faith. There was for him no wrath of God (... “*denn dergleichen gibt es nicht*”), and in consequence no objective reconciliation or redemption, but merely a change to be effected in the attitude of men. On Tillich compare his sentence in *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, p. 9: “that everything we say about God, is symbolic.” Karl Barth has devastating lines on Tillich’s *a priori* concept of “being” (*Sein*), into which revelation is

Pelikan prefers to see—*sub rosa*—as a somewhat changing Rome are on the way together. They advance slowly toward the “total church of Christ” (p. 224). What a travesty on John 17.

As far as the pen-craft and not the content is concerned, *The Riddle Of Roman Catholicism* makes delightful reading. It is a masterpiece of English on a major, historical subject. As such it is bound to exert an influence also on Synodical Conference circles. The book is distinguished by a sweeping unifying postulate, “identity plus universality.” This serves as a key to unlock Rome’s riddle. As to the historical integration of issues so often bewailed as lacking in American products of the pen, here it seems to have been both achieved and made accessible to the reader with consummate skill. But the true doctrine of the Church and of all other Chief Parts as well has been deserted. As could be expected on the basis of the author’s shifts, this volume reflects the thinking of a Neo-Liberal who is even drawing closer to doctrinal agnosticism, as this painstaking scholar’s considered option for Schleiermacher and Tillich testifies. More proof of Dr. Pelikan’s fundamental deviations, which touch the heart of saving doctrine, will follow in latter sections of this Memorandum. At this point it may suffice to say that, in consequence of his hazy doctrinal concepts, the Chicago professor’s historical presentation is utterly destitute of one essential theological quality, of what the New Testament calls DIAKRISIS PNEUMATON, “distinguishing the spirits.” The book is the handmaid of modern Ecumenism. It shares the ecumenical hope of help accruing to the church from future human developments when the latter annihilate walls of isolation. The author nowhere offers any evidence of that genuine Christian faith which trusts Christ’s Word as it was revealed once for all through the mouth of the prophets and apostles. He does not acknowledge the power of the Holy Ghost who glorifies only Christ (John 16, 14. 15). Pelikan on the contrary mentions a peculiar type of “Holy Spirit”—one in the service of progressive revelation, residing in heterodox bodies as such. On page 181 we have this statement: “Gathered together by our common loyalty to him, we speak to one another as the Holy Spirit enlightens us through our several traditions; and we listen to one another as the Holy Spirit enlightens us through alien traditions. If the outcome of such speaking and listening is a new and deeper, unity, so be it. If it is not, then we go on speaking and listening. The basis of our agreement is not a prayer that our opponents may be convinced of the rightness of our position, but a willingness to have the rightness of all our positions examined in the light of the allegiance we have to Christ and the unity we have in Christ. Whatever may come from such examination, God’s will be done.”

On page 239f. Pelikan pleads for a policy seriously dedicated to reunion with Rome. He hopes to see the time come when Protestantism “may recognize in the church of Rome a fellow pilgrim on the journey to the Heavenly City.” As to Rome, the brilliant author is of course ludicrously naive. So are ecumenical Liberals in general. Seasoned, subtle, steady Rome will never do these men the favor of meeting them half-way or any part of the way.

All of the reviews of *The Riddle Of Roman Catholicism* which so far have appeared in our circles—four reached Oberursel, including that in *C.T.M.* and in the *Springfielder*—seem to this writer to have been not only woefully inadequate but also foolishly fond. Not a line unmasking the unorthodox attitudes involved, no indication of theological penetration experienced in sizing up basic issues. There is in evidence even an undertone—or overtone—of glorying in the flesh, since a Missouri man could achieve Abingdon Press distinction. Who are *we*? Are we in our various churches after all insecure upstarts, poorly clad *novi homines*, dependent on reassurance for poor self through the recognition accorded us in the world of scholars and through publicity success of men hailing from our circle? May much-coveted distinction be gained by betraying Christ and by confusing the Church?

This was a book by Dr. Pelikan on the Church—he has written other books. To every man of judgment who can read English his false position is plainer and more incontrovertible than was that of the usual type of errorists indicted by orthodox Christianity. More will be said on this masterful and in many ways cautious *spiritus rector* of the defection going on. The future of the Synodical Conference bodies and their associate

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pushed as a subdivision. Cf. Barth’s *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 1, pp. 37. 55. The American periodical *Time* wrote some time ago: “Faith, according to Tillich, is not belief in God but ‘ultimate concern.’ Hence an atheist is a believer, too, unless he is wholly indifferent to the ultimate questions ... Tillich can rejoice with Nietzsche that ‘God is dead’—the God of theism—and write of looking beyond him to ‘the God above God.’”

churches in other continents will to an eminent degree be decided by the simple question: "Is it to be a future with or without subversive Intellectuals of this type?" Both moorings and directions are involved. Is the Synodical Conference built on the Rock and is it geared to Eternity? Or is it built on sand and still under the Law, a this-worldly phenomenon, with society serving as the criterion of orientation?

**To Whom It May Concern**

Friends of the author at separate centers of Missouri Synod church life have taken upon themselves the expense of having this Memorandum printed and distributed. Prof. emeritus C. August Hardt, D.D., of Milwaukee, Wis., has assumed moral responsibility for this undertaking. Whoever would like to help along and to share in the cost is requested to fill out the enclosed blank and to mail his letter in the attached envelope, accompanied either by cash or by a check (perhaps \$1). The contribution is, of course, applied to all instalments of the Memorandum. Whoever wants further copies can get them at \$1 for all instalments from the address given on the envelope:

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1638 Main St.  
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This is also the author's American address.

Mindful of funds at hand and also in deference to the *Conclave Theologicum* of all our churches in the world, from July 20-30 at Thiensville, Wis., which also the author has been delegated to attend, the Second Instalment was limited to the preceding part. The Third Instalment is to appear after the trip, God willing.

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