

## Fellowship & Federation

Dear Brothers in the Office!

The events in the church of this year now passing, particularly the great ecclesiastical sessions of Willingen (World Mission Council), Hannover (Lutheran World Federation), Stuttgart (German Evangelical Kirchentag) and Lund (Third Word Conference for



Faith and Order), have with great urgency directed anew to us Lutherans the question of what the theological conditions are for altar-fellowship, church-fellowship and ecclesiastical federation. The question is certainly not new. It had already been thoroughly dealt with in the nineteenth century, so thoroughly in fact, that one is amazed at the thoughtlessness with which the theology of our time dismisses the answers given then, though these answers still today have significance at least for canonical law.

But perhaps it is asking too much of our generation, whose experience of church history began with Barth's Römerbrief of 1919, or even only first with the German Church Struggle of 1933, yet to understand the struggle and work of the fathers of the previous century, upon whose shoulders we stand. Still less can this be expected of the American Lutherans who since 1917 together with their nation have undergone a transformation the depth of which can only be compared to the transformation which the Russian nation has undergone since 1917. The American of 1952, even if he should belong to the Lutheran Church, is an entirely different man than the American before the outbreak of the first world war.

If Lutherans at the beginning of the century could read their church and synodical newspapers of today, they simply would not recognize their church in them. Thus it appears senseless to appeal to the faith and decisions

regarding matters of the faith of the fathers, when the great question of the relationships of the churches is the matter under discussion. We must go back to the confessions of the Lutheran Reformation and to the teaching of the New Testament.

1.

The decision regarding the relationship between the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, as is well known, was rendered at the Marburg Colloquy and dogmatized in the Confessions. All attempts to re-interpret the meaning of Augsburg Confession Article X have ended in failure and have only lead to the forsaking of the Lutheran Church. The “they reject those who teach” of this article is only a mild form of the anathema which precludes church-fellowship with the deniers of the real presence as it is taught in the Catechism.

The Wittenberg Concord of 1536 too, by which the South Germans and the Lutherans were united, can be understood in no other way than as it was interpreted and taken up by the Formula of Concord. The decisive question is whether Luther was justified when at the conclusion of the Marburg discussions he refused to the Reformed altar-fellowship and the recognition as brothers which they had sought. It was not that he was not basically inclined to oblige Christians who thought otherwise. This is shown by the Marburg Articles themselves, in particular by the formalization of the article on the Supper, and also by the last offer for union which he made, and which the trustworthy [witness] Oekolompadius has preserved for us: “We confess, that by virtue of these words, ‘This is my Body’, ‘This is my blood’, the body and the blood of Christ truly, that is substantially and essentially, not however, quantitatively or qualitatively, nor locally, are present and offered in the Supper.” (Cited according to W. Koehler, *Das Marburger Religionsgespräch 1529, Versuch einer Rekonstruktion*, 1929, p. 131 f.) Luther was satisfied with the mildest form of the doctrine of the real

presence in the sense of a substantial and essential [presence], though not a local and quantitative presence of the body and blood of Christ under the elements. But where this was not acknowledged there could be no altar- and church-fellowship for him. The denier of the real presence was for him no Christian brother, and he well knew what he did when in Article XV he maintained that each side ought show Christian love to the other, then added the words: "so far as every conscience can allow". (WA 30,III,170,30 f.)

While the Zwinglians and the later Reformed have always declared that the Lutheran doctrine of the Supper is indeed false, but not church dividing, Luther and the Lutheran Church, as long as they took their confessions seriously, have always viewed the difference on the Supper as church dividing and the Reformed doctrine on this point as a heresy precluding church-fellowship. For more than 400 years the right hand of fellowship of the Reformed has remained outstretched. For more than 400 years we Lutherans with our Reformer have had to hear the accusation of unbrotherliness and lovelessness, because we have refused this hand.

This fact must give us serious cause ever and again to examine whether or not Luther's conscience was perhaps on this point an erring conscience. Woe to us if we would base the denial of altar-fellowship on the tradition of our church or the example of Luther. If we did this we would no longer be Lutherans. Perhaps our opponents have not been totally incorrect if they have often felt our standpoint were essentially only traditionalism. With many Lutherans this is actually the case. This renders their position dubious and explains the defection of so many Lutheran Churches from the position of old Lutheranism.

In Sweden today it is declared without concern (as it happened only a short time ago with the World Conference of Faith and Order), that the old rules of church order are a hold-over [from the past]. Those who come to the altar

are not questioned concerning their confession, rather one is prepared to give the sacrament to anyone because the Lord does the same thing at our altar that He does at the Reformed and Anglican altar, namely, He gives Himself in the real presence. Thus open communion is advocated. In fact, if we have to do here only with a human tradition, then the Swedes and their Nordic and German neighbors are entirely correct when they defect to the practice of open communion which has been advocated by the Reformed since Marburg.

But before we follow their example the Swedish Luther scholars must explain to us then why Luther so firmly held to the literal meaning of the words of institution and what these words meant for his faith. Why, for instance, did he demand from the Bohemians, whom he so kindly addressed in *Vom Anbeten des Sakraments des heiligen Leichnams Jesu Christi* of 1523 the acceptance of the doctrine of the real presence as a condition for church-fellowship? Indeed, he did so for exactly this reason, the words of institution are the gospel, which one must simply accept and may not change: "On these words rests the matter completely. Every single Christian should and must know them and not allow them to be taken from him by any other teaching, even if it were an angel from heaven. They are a word of life and salvation, so that to him who believes through such faith all sins are forgiven, and he is a child of life, has overcome hell and death. The greatness and power of this word cannot be expressed; for they are the sum of the entire gospel." Luther was convinced that no one can understand the entire consolation of "given and shed for you" who does not believe "This is my body," "This is my blood." The question upon which everything depends is whether this is Biblical or not.

2.

The Holy Scriptures simply teach that church-fellowship is altar-fellowship. "The cup of blessing which we bless is the koinonia of the blood of Christ,

the bread which we break is the koinonia of the body of Christ.” (I Cor. 10:16) The Apostle connects this participation in the body and blood of the Lord immediately with the assertion that, as the bread is one, so we who are many are one body, because we partake of one bread. (v. 17) The Corpus Christi sacramentale and the Corpus Christi spirituali sive mysticum, as our dogmaticians say, belong essentially together. Ecclesia, “church” in the strict sense of the New Testament is there where the people of God come together at one place and celebrate the Lord’s Supper. There the body of Christ in the double sense is reality, though it is of course not only there. From this view of the New Testament, that altar-fellowship is church-fellowship and church-fellowship is altar-fellowship, it follows that the boundaries of both coincide.

### **Where does the boundary of altar-fellowship in the New Testament lie?**

It is significant that all our documents concerning the oldest Christian Supper, in-so-far-as they bear a liturgical character, describe a boundary for altar-fellowship. “The doors! The doors!”, cries the deacon before the Creed yet today in the liturgy of Eastern Church. With this the liturgy of the “believers” begins, reminiscent of the first Sunday of the church, when the Lord came to His own behind closed doors. (Jn. 20:19) “No catechumen, no hearer, no unbeliever, no heterodox” shall be present at the Supper according to the liturgical cry of the Antiochene liturgy in the eighth book of The Apostolic Constitutions (ch. 12), and among the believers no one should have anything against another, nor should a hypocrite approach (Compare the text of Brightman, Liturgies Eastern and Western, I, p. 13). “Santa sanctis”, “Holy things for holy ones” sounded the warning call before the communion. And so that no one thereby understood that the church was a union of pharisees, the response of the holy people of God sounded: “One is holy, One is the Lord, Jesus Christ, to the honor of God the Father.” (Compare Brightman p. 24 et passim.) The fact that all liturgies of the old

Greek Church contain such a cry by which a fence was placed around the Supper points to the fact that this is a very ancient practice. The way in which Justin (Apology. I, 66) in his account concerning the origin of the Supper emphasizes that Jesus at the institution of the Supper gave bread and wine to the disciples only – who else could he have given it to? – shows that the “to them alone” is essential to his understanding of the Supper. The admonitions and warnings of the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles corresponds to this. “No one is to eat or drink from your Eucharist unless they are baptized in the name of the Lord. For concerning this the Lord has said: Do not give that which is holy to dogs.” (Didache 9,5) Thus follows the “rubric” in the liturgy, “He who is holy, come; he who is not, repent.” (10.6) This same writing prescribes confession and absolution before the Sunday celebration of the Supper in the same way the later liturgies and church orders do: “But every Lord’s day do gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord.” (Here follows the citation from Malachi 1:11 & 14, which in this passage for the first time is applied to the Supper, though not yet in the sense of the later theory of the sacrifice of the mass. For the “sacrifice” is here still the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in the Biblical sense, applied to the “Eucharistia”; (Didache 14). When we look at the New Testament in this light then we see immediately several passages containing the early Christian concept of the “closed Supper”, namely that the Lord’s Supper is celebrated behind closed doors, to the exclusion of those who do not belong at it.

First, it is certain that wherever in the New Testament there is the demand for the holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14), the “kiss of peace”, the later “Pax” which preceded the

communion, is in view. The demands for this kiss occur as they do at the conclusion of these letters of Paul because they were read before the gathered ecclesia which then proceeded to celebrate the Supper. Thus the letters conclude with the “Apostolic Blessing” in its simple form, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” or in the developed Trinitarian form such as we find in 2 Cor. 13:13. Is it mere coincidence that in the Greek (the liturgy of Chrysostom) and in the Syrian (e.g. in the liturgy of Theodor of Mopsuestia) Churches they do not begin the preface with “The Lord be with you” but with the formula of greeting from 2 Cor. 13:13? The conclusion of the book of Revelation should also be compared with the Pauline letters. Is it merely coincidental that the “Maranatha! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!” of 1 Cor. 16:23 is repeated in Revelation 22:20 with the words: “Come Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.”? Was not Revelation written to be read in the liturgy (1:11; 22:18) as much as the letters of Paul? Even if it is not possible for us to know all the details of the liturgy of the first century (Pliny gives us the responsories for the time immediately before the turn of the century; the *sanctus* is verified for the first century through Clement of Rome.) the letters of Paul certainly show us this much: Besides the words of institution, which belong to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, there is the demand for the kiss of peace; and then follows immediately the warning against schismatics and heretics, the anathema (Rom. 16:16 f.; 1 Cor. 16:20,22); then the ancient petition of the congregation for the coming of the Lord (still spoken in Aramaic in the Pauline congregations); and finally the benediction. The similarity of the letters of Paul with Revelation and the *Didache* show that these were fixed liturgical usages.

What interests us here is the close connection between the “Pax” and the “Anathema”; the kiss of love and peace, which expressed the unity and fellowship of the church, and the inflexible exclusion of schismatics and

heretics from the Supper and thereby the church. At the conclusion of First Corinthians, which is directed against the divisions in the church of Corinth, it is the stubborn schismatics to whom the Anathema is directed: "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be Anathema." (16:22) For the one who arrogantly splits the congregation, which is the body of the Lord, cannot love the Lord. In the Letter to the Romans the admonition to greet one another in peace with the kiss of love, and the assurance that the church of Rome is in this kiss bound together with all churches of Christ, is followed by the express warning over against heretics: "Now I urge you brethren, note those who caused divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." (16:17 f.; compare 1 Cor. 16:20). The fellowship of the church, the deepest and most intimate fellowship which there is, presupposes an inflexible separation from heresy (1 Jn. 4:1-7; 2 Jn. 9 ff.; 2 Co 6:14) because it is at the same time both fellowship between believers and fellowship with the Triune God (1 Jn. 1:3). And this separation finds its essential expression in who does and who does not receive the Supper [Abendmahlszucht]. The fundamental axiom of canon law that there can be no "sacramental fellowship with heretics", comes directly from the early church and has its dogmatic basis in the New Testament.

3.

Luther's view of church-fellowship and altar-fellowship can be understood only on this basis. It is not true, as is heard time and again, that Luther no longer correctly understood the fellowship-character of the Supper. One need only read his sermons on the Supper to realize that the opposite is the case. The following passage from the work cited above from 1523 shows how deeply the Reformer understood the relationship between the

sacramental and the spiritual body of Christ: “Thus it is now true that we Christians are the spiritual body of Christ, and altogether one bread, one drink, one spirit. Christ does all this, who through His body makes us all one spiritual body, and we all alike partake of His body, and so among ourselves are alike and one. Likewise, because we partake of one bread and drink, this also makes us one bread and drink. And as one member serves the other in such common love, he thus also eats and drinks the other, that is, he partakes of him in all things and is indeed the food and drink of the other, so that we thus are pure food and drink for each other, in the same way Christ is for us pure food and drink. With these words, St. Paul has laid out the riches and nature of faith and love. In the same way natural bread and wine also signify as much. For out of many kernels which are ground up, there comes one bread, and each one forsakes its form and becomes the flour of another. Also, many berries become one wine, and each berry gives up its own form and becomes juice to the other. So also Christ has become everything to us, and so among ourselves each has become everything to the other. This is how we are Christians; what one has, belongs to the other, and if one lacks, this effects the other as though he lacked it himself...” (WA 11,440,34 ff). One must have such passages in view in order to understand the “No” with which he denied the hand of brotherhood and the fellowship of the Supper to Zwingli. This “Anathema” too can only be understood against the background of the “Pax” which for Luther belonged to the Sacrament of the Altar. And for him the body of Christ in the Supper is a reality such that he knows that the fellowship of the church rests upon the participation in this body. The church is more than a fellowship of the Spirit and spiritual people as the humanists Zwingli and Calvin thought. It is the body of Christ, because the consecrated bread is the body of Christ. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all...”

(Eph. 4:4 ff.) This fundamentally important passage of the New Testament on the unity of the church, upon which also the doctrine of the one church in Augustana VII is based, says with perfect clarity that the church is not merely what we men call a “spiritual fellowship.” As, according to 1 Corinthians 6:19 our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit; as our body is baptized and thereby at once on the last day will become “like unto His glorified body” (Phil. 3:21; compare Rom. 6:4 f.), so the church is also one body (notice that the “one body” precedes the “one Spirit”). We do not know how the church is the body of Christ, just as we do not know how the consecrated bread is the body of Christ. The later theological distinction between the *corpus Christi mysticum* and the *corpus Christi sacramentale* is an attempt to formalize [a solution to] this problem. But there is no solution, as the Greek fathers also occasionally designate the sacramental body as the “mystical” body. Thus the Lutheran church must avoid turning the “est” into “significat” in both cases. Just as we reject every figurative meaning for the words of institution, so also we reject every understanding of the church as un-Biblical which sees in the church only a fellowship of pious souls, a society of believers, who join together in common prayer and for the fostering of their faith. Thus we must also reject the encyclical “*Corporis Mystici*” and Roman theology which sees in the designation of the church as “body of Christ” only an image for the social character of the church, which is compared to “corporate participation” in one body. Certainly no one can conceive of a comparison which adequately describes the fact that the church is the body of Christ, just as indeed reason cannot understand or describe the relationship between the body of Christ in the Supper and the body of Christ in the church. For Scripture says nothing of this. What we have to accept in faith is the simple truth of the Bible, that the *ecclesia* is the body of Christ as certainly as it is the people of God, what ever the relation of the body of Christ which is the church to the true body [of

Christ] which we receive in the sacrament.

Accordingly, if a deep correspondence obtains between the Sacrament of the Altar and the church, then the destruction of this sacrament must of necessity lead to the destruction of the church. Here lies the basis for which Zwingli and the other “Sacramentarians” were for Luther destroyers of the church, with whom there can be no ecclesiastical fellowship. If the Apostle only acknowledged that spirit as legitimate which confessed “Jesus Christ come in the flesh” (1 Jn. 4:2), and then treated the denial of the incarnation as a manifestation of the Anti-Christ, then Luther found himself in an entirely similar situation over against the deniers of the flesh and blood in the Supper. For him incarnation and real-presence belonged so closely together that he believed the incarnation was no longer correctly taught where the real-presence was denied, and in making this point he called upon the Gospel of St. John, the apostle of the incarnation. In view of the Christological controversy which in the sixteenth century was directly connected to the question of the Supper, it cannot not be denied that the doctrinal difference regarding the Supper stretched deep into the Christological [question]. Luther perceived the Reformed denial of the participation of the divine nature of Christ in the attributes of the human, and vice versa, as a destruction of the Biblical Christ. When Zwingli called it an “alloiosis” when it was said that the Son of God died for us, because only the human nature could die, Luther called this separation of the person of Christ “the most horrible heresy that has ever existed” and he asked, “What Christian heart can hear or suffer such [teaching]? Indeed, thereby the entire Christian faith and the salvation of all the world [and] all things are taken away and damned. For he who is redeemed by humanity alone is certainly not redeemed.” And Luther continues: “I confess for myself that I regard Zwingel as non-Christian with all his teaching, for he maintains no part of the Christian faith correctly and has become seven times worse than when

he was a papist... I make such a confession in order to be exculpated before God and the whole world, since I have no part in Zwingel's doctrine nor indeed ever will." (Vom Abendmahl Christi, 1528, WA 26,342,13 ff.). This can only be understood when one conceives of the abyss Luther must have glimpsed when he saw behind the theology of Zwingli and Bucer (who would become Calvin's teacher) that theology emerging which has effectively conquered modern Protestantism; a theology in which the incarnation is no longer taken seriously. For the incarnation of the eternal Word becomes mere words where the eternal Word remains also outside of the flesh and where the God-man since His exaltation is no longer present with His church according to His human nature. Where this is the case, the sacraments fall to the wayside. Baptism, in which the entire man, soul and body (compare Luther, Large Catechism, 4, BS 700, line 5 ff.; Trig. p. 475) has been buried with Christ into death (Rom. 6:4), so that the entire man may rise, body and soul, becomes a symbol of a psychological transaction [seelischen Vorgangs]. And the Supper without the real presence of the true body and blood of Christ ceases to be the Sacrament of the New Testament. It becomes a celebration in which nothing else happens than that which according to Matthew 18:20 occurs wherever two or three are gathered in his name. But where the Supper falls away, so also does the church. Even if it retains its outer organization, still it ceases to be the church of the New Testament, the people of God, the body of Christ, and remains only a religious society. Thus it was for Luther, and is for the Lutheran Church of all times, that altar-fellowship is church-fellowship. And precisely because it rests upon the fellowship of the body and blood of Christ which is impervious to reason, church-fellowship is thus not a fellowship which we men can create, and for this reason neither can we arrange it.

4.

Thus if Supper-fellowship and church-fellowship are essentially one, then it

is self-evident that any change in the practice of Supper-fellowship demonstrates a change in the concept of church and in the understanding of the Sacraments. There is absolutely no doubt that the decline of the Lutheran understanding of the Sacraments, in particular the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar, is the deepest reason that so many Lutheran churches have given up the old boundaries over against the Reformed and thereby Lutheran principles of church fellowship. This happened in the nineteenth century in the form of lawfully constituted unions of various types [regelrechter Unionen verschiedenen Typs]. As varied as these may be -there were in Germany some five or six various types of union, which deviated so much from one another that up to the present it has proved impossible to unify these unions – they all had this in common: They all accepted Zwingli's and Bucer's view that altar-fellowship and thereby church-fellowship is also possible where there are differing doctrines regarding the Supper. The Lord Christ, so it is said, instituted the Supper for his disciples to celebrate in common, not for them to fight over. An Anglican slogan which has been influential in the more recent ecumenical movement stated: "Though we may not be united in the definition of the Supper we can indeed be united in its celebration." Indeed, here we are directly informed that by first experiencing altar-fellowship we can be helped to correctly understand the Sacrament. Thus the united celebration of the Supper has even become a means to achieve union. But also in this case the following applies: All this is only possible if the doctrine of Luther and the Lutheran Church are surrendered de facto. At the Third (and perhaps last) World Conference for Faith and Order at Lund in August of 1952 only an insignificant minority of Lutherans advocated the Lutheran view of closed communion (indeed, one each from Hannover, Saxony, and the ULC in America). All other Lutheran members of the section which dealt with the question of "inter-communion" advocated open communion. Thus one can

see how grave is the situation of the Lutheran Church as Church, and this all the more since the few who advocated the old Lutheran practice in regard to altar-fellowship either were immediately disavowed by members of their own church, or they advocated a law which in their churches only obtains today de jure. It has hitherto been impossible to check the movement which has passed through the Protestant world since the beginning of the nineteenth century and which has also brought Zwingli's and Bucer's views on altar- and church-fellowship to victory even in the Lutheran Church. Even those Churches of the Lutheran Confession which have held themselves far distant from the union are themselves influenced by it more than they know or would want. Here lies the deeper reason for why in Germany the EKID [Evangelical Church in Germany] has become a matter of concern for the "evangelical" populous, while the thought of a "United Evangelical Lutheran Church" only gains ground with great difficulty, and this only among theologians. There is only one thing which can again bring to the Lutheran view of altar- and church-fellowship recognized validity: The real renewal of the Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament. There is no doubt that this understanding has slowly grown among theologians in recent years. But just how far we still are from a re-discovery of the real presence in the Lutheran sense is shown by the otherwise so influential lecture of Peter Brunner of Heidelberg on "The Nature of The Church's Liturgy" delivered at Hannover. In this paper we first we read with joy concerning the words of institution (preliminary printing of the manuscript, p. 15): "They say what the food in this celebration is. The relationship which the word of Jesus establishes between bread and body, wine and blood, is not 'a connection by analogy...', rather a connection by identity' (Lohmeyer). Bread remains bread, wine remains wine. But in the power of the instituting words of Jesus this bread is His body given up for us, and this wine His blood, shed for us." But our joy is immediately shattered by the definition of "body" which then follows.

“Jesus’s body, which we receive in the Supper, is the embodied humanity of Jesus [leibhaftige Menschsein Jesu], in which He worked redemption for us. Jesus’s work of salvation, Jesus’s salvation-suffering, Jesus’s salvation-victory, Jesus’s entire corporeal life lived for us and death suffered for us, and the victory won for us is in His body and is His body, which we receive under the form of the bread in the Supper. Jesus’s body is above all His sacrificial-body. This body and His sacrificial death are one.” Can this really be said? What Brunner goes on to say is indeed correct: “In this sacrificial-body we have His sacrificial death. Also in Jesus’s blood of the covenant Jesus’s covenant-sacrifice for us is present.” But this is only the case if we have the essential, the substantial body [of Christ], as the fathers put it. But do we actually receive the true, essential, substantial body? Or is “body” used here only to designate the true humanity, life, death and victory of Jesus? This is what the cited passage says plainly enough. Is this not a repetition of what we have seen previously in Paul Althaus for whom the gift of the Supper can under no circumstances be the glorified body of the Lord as it is for the Catholic Church, for Luther and indeed – according to his peculiar understanding – for Calvin. Althaus rather understands the words of institution as though Jesus speaks “of ‘body and life’... thus as the life as the one dying in the sacrificial death” (Die Lutherische Abendmahlslehre in der Gegenwart, 1931, p. 40)? We read again in Brunner: “The duality of bread and wine, of body and blood points to this, that the sacrificed body and the covenant-effecting sacrificial blood of Jesus, and thereby His sacrifice on the cross itself, are present under the eucharistic food and presented and received through the distributed bread and the distributed cup.” It can certainly be said that where the gifts offered up for sacrifice are, there also the sacrifice itself is present. But can it also be said that the action of the sacrifice [Handlung des Opfers] is present? This is what we read in Brunner: “the Supper is the finally fulfilled form of an action of signs

[Zeichenhandlung] in which Jesus's salvific deed is rendered present in the power of its eschatological freedom. That one-time final salvific happening which is concentrated in the cross of Jesus, becomes present in the Supper through effective representation." Again, there is a deep truth in what is here said. The cross of Christ does in fact have the eschatological meaning which is here ascribed to it. The cross of Christ is a one-time happening (Heb. 9:12,26,28) at the end of the world (Heb. 1:2) and yet it is a reality which existed already at the beginning of the world (Rev. 13:8), and the "Crucified One" (estauromenos, not only staurotheis in the New Testament) is a perfect present. But where does the concept of effective representation come from? It does not come from the New Testament, but out of Catholic dogmatics. With the help of this concept this dogmatics seeks to define the relationship of the one time sacrifice of Golgotha and the sacrifice offered in the mass in connection with the doctrine of the Council of Trent on the sacrifice of the mass as the re-presentation, remembrance, and application of the sacrifice of the cross (Trent, Session 22, ch. 1). The real presence which Peter Brunner teaches is the realization of the death of Jesus on the cross, acquired through effective representation and thereby the realization, re-presentation, [the] actual, sacramental presentation of Jesus Christ, His life, death, [and] victory. But it is indeed no accident, if I understand correctly, that with Brunner there is no mention in the context of Supper of the risen and glorified Lord. It is indeed also no accident that what is said in the brilliant lecture of this profound and honorable theological thinker on the eschatological nature of the celebration of the Supper has been most strongly influenced by Catholic writers such as Erik Peterson (*Das Buch von den Engeln*, 1935), but nothing is said of the fact that also for the Lutheran Church the Supper is heaven on earth. It is certainly no accident, rather intent, that Brunner does not mention the name Luther, nor the word "Lutheran." No one in Heidelberg can accuse him of "confessionalism", and

it also has a pedagogical significance if at a session such as that at Hannover, where the word “Lutheran” is on everyone’s lips, the point is made that in the Lutheran Church the concern is for the gospel and not for human or historical recollection. But if one borrows from Catholic theology, then why not borrow from the theology of Luther? And when one speaks before Lutherans of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper, should he not publicly state, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that he does not mean thereby what Luther meant and what the Lutheran Confessions teach? [Should he not state] that he does not mean the glorified body of the Lord, the true body, which participates in the attributes of the divine nature? Why is this distinction kept silent? It sounds indeed like a miraculous rebirth of Lutheranism when suddenly in places where this had hitherto not been the case – the old Heidelberger [theologians] would roll over in their graves if they heard it -that the words “This is my body” are again understood in the sense of the “est”. But there will be a lot more water over the dam before we again recognize what “corpus” means here. Perhaps we will also learn this from the Catholics if not from Luther. Much can be learned in this regard for instance from Scheeben’s “Mysterien des Christentums”. The Eastern Church also has something to say about this. Perhaps we will take from there what we no longer believe in father Luther. Everywhere modern Lutheranism vacillates back and forth between the doctrine of Trent and Calvin, seeking but not yet grasping, that which is taught in Luther’s catechisms. And thus it is absolutely clear that modern Lutheranism carelessly enters into the various unions and ecumenical conferences and is impressed with the views of altar-fellowship of every possible denomination, Protestant and Catholic, but does no longer, or does not yet again understand what the Lutheran Church teaches on church- and altar-fellowship.

If we confessional Lutherans firmly hold to the old principle that church-fellowship is altar-fellowship, and that there can only be a common celebration of the Lord's Supper where there is the "consensus on the doctrine of the gospel and on the administration of the sacraments" (the meaning of which for the present we have spoken in our Letter 25, "On the Unity of the Lutheran Churches"), then the question is immediately posed to us: "How do you then conceive of the relation of the churches to one another?" Should they exist as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, every one claiming absolutely to have the pure doctrine, every church hurling the anathema against every other church? Each seeking to damage the others? Before we answer this question, we should perhaps point out that the Lutheran Church never declared itself to be the only true church of Christ. This it expressly declared in the Preface to the Book of Concord. The condemnations, that is "the rejections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord's Supper" should in no way mean "that hereby those men who err from a certain simplicity of mind, but are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less, indeed, entire churches, which are either under the Roman Empire of the German nation or elsewhere; nay, rather has it been our intention and disposition in this manner openly to censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers, (which we judge, should in no way be tolerated in our dominions, churches, and schools)." (BS p. 11; Trig. p. 19) The orthodox fathers constantly made reference to this authoritative explication of the condemnations. The Lutheran Church has never declared that all other churches are sects and no longer churches of Christ. This misunderstanding of the condemnation-formulas was constantly held before the enlightened eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which no longer understood the deep seriousness of the question of truth. This view was taken over by those during the church-struggle [at the time of

Hitler] who attacked the Lutherans because the latter still took seriously the boundaries of the Supper. Hans Asmussen, for instance, wanted to inform us that according to the Reformation there can only be one church, either the church of Christ or Satan's church: "The word of God knows of no three-quarter church." (*Abendmahlsgemeinschaft? Beiheft 3 zur Ev. Theologie*, 1937, p. 19). Our Church has never denied that the church of Christ and thus true children of God are found also in other denominations where the means of grace are yet effective. Herein it followed the model of the ancient church which in the controversy over the validity of the baptism of heretics and in the Donatist controversy opposed Cyprian's understanding of the "Outside of the church there is no salvation." (Epist. 73, 21; the order in which the four words stand expresses "If the baptism of public confession and blood [i.e. martyrdom] cannot help the heretic himself for salvation because there is no salvation outside the church, how much less will it benefit him if he has allowed himself to be sprinkled and polluted with impure water in secret and in a den of thieves... Thus it is impossible for us to have baptism in common with heretics."). If one asks which of the confessional churches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in practice exercised the most tolerance, the answer must be the Lutheran Church. It was also the case with the Lutherans that a false teacher was not tolerated, and the "whose rule, his religion" applied also for Lutheran territories, in the same way it applied for the Puritans in America. But there is in Lutheran lands no parallel to the bloody persecutions of the Protestants by French Catholicism or to the equally horrible persecution of the Catholics by the Anglican and Puritan state in England. It is comprehensible from a psychological standpoint that in those lands of the west the fanaticism of religious persecution changed to its complete opposite; a tolerant indifference toward all dogma, whether of religious or enlightenment complexion. But to charge the Lutheran Church with intolerance because it

still took the question of truth seriously and thus rejected the union plans of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, means to fundamentally misunderstand the intention of the Lutheran Confessions. The problem of how the varying denominations should exist side by side and what their mutual relationship should be was not yet understood and thus could not yet be solved in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This is shown by the historical fact that for the first time only in the second half of the seventeenth century was there general conviction that the division of western Christianity was final. It was not until the time of Leibnitz that the hope of the reunion of the separated confessional churches in the west was finally shattered. The problem of how Christian churches of various confession can and shall exist side by side has only been defined as such since that time.

6.

It is very instructive to see how in the seventeenth century the denominations [Konfessionen] began to order their relationships along firmly fixed boundaries. Naturally the Reformed immediately advanced their union plans so as to at least bring together the Lutherans and the various types of the Reformed. But still several more generations were needed until Pietism and Rationalism had so displaced the confessional consciousness of the Lutherans that in wide areas of Germany the accomplishment of the union was possible. Confessionally conscious Lutheranism offered doctrinal discussion and cooperation in externals in response to the Reformed plan for union, which declared that the doctrinal differences had to do with unessential matters. It is moving to see how the Lutheran theologians, even after the failure of the religious colloquies of the seventeenth century, did not give up the hope that a union in doctrine on the basis of the correct understanding of the Holy Scriptures would be possible. Valentin Ernst Löscher, whose Peaceable Address and Admonition to the Reformed

Congregations in Germany (Appendix to part three of *Historia Motuum*, it is the most humanly stirring document of the voice of late orthodoxy for the unification of Christianity.) was the last representative of the “doctrinal discussion” method in the eighteenth century, which method then later was applied to the unification of Lutherans by Ferdinand Walther and the present Missouri Synod. Along with doctrinal discussion as a means toward unification there arose already in the seventeenth century the fixed and organized “cooperation in externals” between the denominations. The question whether and to what extent Luther would have approved of the denominations working together is falsely posed. In the first place he was convinced that he lived in the end times so that even something like calendar reform appeared completely unnecessary to him. Secondly, he did not yet know of denominations in the later sense, rather only of the one church of Christ, which stood in a struggle against the power of Satan and the Antichrist. It was the necessities of life of the seventeenth century which first led to a very remarkable form of cooperation among Lutherans and Catholics, and between Lutherans and Reformed. There were cathedral chapters and convents [Stifte] in which some of the canons were Catholic and some Lutheran, and nevertheless a fellowship obtained for external reasons which came just short of [bis zur] of “*communicatio in sacris*”. The demands of canon law on both sides were only reckoned with later. The most important institution of the this nature which the seventeenth century produced was the “*Corpus Evangelicorum*” at the permanent Imperial Diet at Regensburg since 1653. It stood until the elimination of the old constitution of the empire in the year 1806 and was the forerunner of all later alliances of larger German Protestantism. It was the first federation of Lutherans and Reformed. Indeed, churches were not allied – there were as yet no independent churches in the age of church government by the princes. Rather those sent by their rulers as Protestant imperial

representatives united to form a standing board. In regular sessions they dealt with problems of concern to all the evangelical churches (such as complaints regarding the violation of the legal rights of the minority) and they represented the interests of Protestantism at the Imperial Diet, the organ of Imperial governance. And so it was inevitable that not only questions of Imperial canon law would be dealt with, but even questions which cut deeply into the life of the church such as the reform of the Gregorian calendar. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the *Corpus Evangelicorum* was stormed with the demand from all over that it become the means to bring about the union of both Churches. So it was entirely unavoidable that occasionally doctrinal questions arose which the Lutherans did not believe belonged to the sphere of competence of the *Corpus*. None of the theologians of late orthodoxy had taken offence at the establishment of this board, though it was known that “theological matters are smuggled in which are disguised however one wishes” (Thus the Electoral Saxon delegate who thereby based his case that the board of directors should not be open to the Reformed Palatinate; cited by Ernst Sal. Cyprian, *Abgetrungenen Unterricht von kirchlicher Vereinigung der Protestanten*, 2 ed., 1726, p. 250.). Thus the problem of the relationship of the various denominations [Konfessionskirchen], which did not yet exist at the time of Luther, and which of necessity first emerged in Germany as a result of the splintering of territorial churches, found its first solution. The nineteenth century then further developed this solution: A Lutheran Church can never enter into a union with a church of another confession without surrendering its own confession. It may, however, enter into temporary or permanent federations, if the intent of such federations is only cooperation in externals and theological discussion.

7.

The ecclesiastical federation rests upon the acknowledgement that one can

believe that the church of Christ is still found in another church, even though it be heterodox in essential matters. The church of Christ is present if and in-so-far-as the means of grace, the Word of God and Holy Baptism, are present. The question whether or not in such a church the Sacrament of the Altar is still present was affirmed in the case of the Eastern Churches and the Roman Church by Luther and the Lutheran Church. With respect to the Reformed Churches this question cannot be definitely answered. Federation excludes any *communicatio in sacris*, as well as pulpit- and altar-fellowship. The question of when and under what circumstances joint prayer is possible is difficult to answer. But this much can be said: The ceremonial prayer of the church's liturgy as prayer of the body of Christ has since ancient times belonged to the *communicatio in sacris*, as is shown by the use of the ancient church in which this prayer as also the corresponding Eucharist was held behind closed doors (which practice was based upon Matthew 6:6). The goal of the federation is first *cooperatio in externis*; for instance, joint dealings with the state on questions of the free exercise of religion [Fragen der Glaubensfreiheit], the rights of Christian schools and the like. But also common churchly tasks may be accomplished through joint effort, such as the way the revision of the Luther Bible in Germany was always a common undertaking by churches, or as in America today the new wording of the Revised Standard Version has been the joint task of various churches. When in the church external matters and internal matters are not clearly distinct there naturally always remains a certain lack of surety regarding the competence of an ecclesiastical alliance or an otherwise joint organization such as a Bible society [to deal with the issues involved]. This uncertainty is to be tolerated as long as everyone is clear and unanimous on the principle that everything which is for one of the churches concerned a confessional question, can only be answered on the basis of its confession and must be answered by each of the churches on this basis alone. The mistake of the

“Barmen Theological Declaration” lies not in the fact that the evangelical churches spoke a common word against the threat of a totalitarian state, but rather that they said it in the form of a joint confession of doctrine. “No, they confessed at Barmen”, responded Karl Barth to a Lutheran territorial-bishop when the latter posed this question: “Is it not the case that Barmen was indeed only a theological declaration and not a confession?” A mixed synod, at which one party cannot acknowledge the other as orthodox, can never dogmatically answer questions of doctrine. This has always been the viewpoint of Lutheran canon-law. The Reformed have a different view on this matter because for them the Lutherans are erring brothers, but not heretics. So it was in Marburg 1529, so it is today. The tragedy of all modern attempts at union between Lutheran and Reformed Churches is explained by these varying understandings of the boundaries of the church by Lutherans and Reformed. For the Reformed the Lutheran church is a part (a sort of backward part) of the Reformed Church, which must be helped to complete the Reformation. Where the Lutherans have in view federation, the Reformed have in view union. This is the case with the EKID; this is the case with the new American church alliance, the NCCCUS; this is the case with the Ecumenical Council. At the fervent pleas of the Lutherans these organizations are called federations and it is denied that their intent is to be a sort of “super-church”. The constitutions are “improved” as it happened in America where the United Lutheran Church was downright boastful that they had achieved more than 40 changes in the constitution of the National Council of Churches. The most important of these changes was that the goal of the alliance was defined in this, that it should manifest “the common spirit” of the member churches, instead of “essential oneness” as the draft read. The word “devotional” was also dropped from the sentence “to encourage devotional fellowship”. Does anyone believe that the Reformed Churches and groups of America consequently changed their concept of

church and unity of the church and their understanding of the NCCC? Great ecclesiastical structures everywhere in Christendom are arising in this manner. They are called federations, but in reality they are churches. They grant each individual church its private confession, but this confession is relativized in that its claim to speak the truth, bindingly and for all, is taken away. And every one of these great organizations claims to teach and preach the gospel. But that is the function of the church, not of the alliance of churches. An alliance of churches cannot evangelize, just as it neither can administer the Sacraments. But that means it can have no joint celebration of the Supper. An alliance of churches can indeed concern itself with doctrine, but only as a forum for serious doctrinal discussion among member churches.

8.

These are the basic principles of the Lutheran Church concerning Altar-fellowship, church-fellowship, and ecclesiastical federation. They have universal validity because they are based on the Lutheran Confession. They also apply in the case of the relationships of Lutheran Churches to each other. That a church calls itself Lutheran (Churches such as that of Württemberg, Sweden, and Norway do not call themselves Lutheran; and indeed, this does not belong to the essence of the Lutheran Church.) or that the Lutheran Confession was once in history the real confession of this church, may be of great human and historical importance. But it has no theological meaning. These basic principles apply in the case of a federation of Lutheran Churches such as the Lutheran World Federation. It can only be acknowledged as a federation of Lutheran Churches if these churches are truly Lutheran in the sense that the doctrine of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the catechisms stand extra controversiam. If this is not the case then the Lutheran World Federation is in no way different from any other alliance of churches. One cannot say: "If we Lutherans can join a

federation with Reformed or United Churches with the understanding developed above, how much easier can we enter into an alliance with other Churches which call themselves Lutheran and also wish to be Lutheran!" In reality it is not easier, but more difficult. With the Reformed and Catholics I can operate together in external matters on the common basis of the ancient ecclesiastical confessions. I can also enter into a doctrinal discussion with them on the basis of the ancient confessions and the Holy Scriptures (e.g., on justification or the Supper). But if I speak with, or operate together with Lutherans then I have to be certain that we are at least unified on these questions.

If the Lutheran World Federation and its possibilities are viewed from this standpoint, the question must be asked: Is it in a position to call upon its member Churches to again take the Lutheran Confession seriously? If it can do this then it has a great task, and we will happily help it in this regard. If it is not in the position to do this, or if it will not do this, then the cooperation of any truly confessional churches is senseless. We trust that within world Lutheranism there are still strong forces which heartily affirm the Lutheran Confession. If they can be advanced in the Lutheran World Federation (hitherto this has not been possible) then they will have our assistance. The decision on this matter will be made in the context of the great crisis of the ecumenical movement which became evident at the session of the World Conference for Faith and Order in Lund when the Orthodox Churches of the east politely but unmistakably distanced themselves from the Ecumenical Council as it has developed in the last decade. It is understandable that the Churches behind the iron curtain did not take part. But the fact that anti-communist Churches closely tied to the west from Greece, Alexandria, and the Russian Church in exile were no longer present but allowed themselves to be represented by a small delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarch cannot be explained on merely political grounds. The true reasons

became evident when the London Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch delivered a declaration in which he stated that the Orthodox Church maintained the right to decide what is false in the religious sphere, and to make known that which agrees with their faith, and that which does not. They allow their theologians and representatives at conferences only to make positive and definite statements regarding Orthodox doctrine, but do not allow them to become involved in fruitless discussion or take part in voting on matters of faith, the liturgy, or church government. When this is compared with the address of the late Archbishop Germanos at the beginning of the World Conference of Lausanne in 1927, in which he pointed out the broad areas of doctrine which the Orthodox Churches could discuss because they had not been defined by any of the Ecumenical Councils, then the change the ecumenical movement has undergone within the past forty years becomes evident. The simplistic dreams of union have been exhausted. The Ecumenical Council has increasingly become an organization of Reformed and Union Churches together with a portion of Lutheranism which has forsaken the Confession of the fathers. Is it not time, instead of dealing further with the unattainable union of all church, to work toward that which truly is attainable: The up-building of the great confessional churches and the restoration of a Christian relationship between them? Is it not time to be done with ecumenical fanaticism and return to belief in the *Una Sancta*, which exists as a reality in, with and under the confessional churches, whose unity we cannot see, just as we cannot see the people of God, the body of Christ, with our earthly eyes? As one who has participated in the ecumenical movement for fifty years and worked within it to the extent that a Lutheran who strives to take the Confession of his Church seriously can do so, I see no other possibility for the future. Edmund Schlink in his great lecture in Lund spoke of the walls which separate the great confessional churches which have now become transparent in the

apocalyptic events of our century. This is certainly correct. But is the time of the church not always the end times? Was not the end of all things near when the Lord died on the cross? Did not God's new world already break forth on Easter morning? Was not the Reformation an eschatological event, and not only because Luther and his followers thought they lived in the end times? Are not the walls between the confessional churches always transparent for those who believe in the church of God and know that it is holy wherever this church is? Even there, exactly there where we must speak the "Anathema" over false teaching, there can still be the "Pax", the peace of God which truly passes all understanding, the peace between children of God, the saints of the entire world, even though they see their unity as little as they perceived their holiness itself!

For the new year I greet you, honoured brothers, with the wish that God bless your work in His church, wherever you may occupy the office. Let us be certain of this in faith, that no work which is done for God's church is done in vain, even if our eyes do not see the results. And also that grief which, as I know, many of you bear for the sake of the church, belongs to that which builds the church in a way that is unimaginable to us, though it mean for us, in Luther's words, "the dear, holy cross."

In the bond of the faith I remain,

Hermann Sasse.

*Via Sasse's Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 28.*