

Church Fellowship

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Dear Brethren, the topic which you have asked me to discuss, Church Fellowship, is one of the most timely topics imaginable, not only because of the present situation within our own Wisconsin Synod (where unfortunately even the church fellowship amongst ourselves is being disturbed) but is most timely also because of the present situation in Christendom in general where developments on the ecumenical front are taking place which promise to have grave consequences in the future for any Lutheran church that wants to remain true to its confessions. We may yet feel in our own bodies and lives the results of decisions that are now being made by us and others concerning church fellowship. And the results for the spiritual lives of thousands of people is inestimable. The World Council of Churches through its Commission on Faith and Order is at present tackling this problem of church and communion fellowship between the various church bodies with all the energy which one of the biggest forces in modern church history, the ecumenical movement, supplies. The Lutheran churches in the Lutheran World Federation now under the prodding of ecumenically-minded Dr. Franklin Hark Fry, are discussing the problem of communion fellowship with other denominations and some have gone past the stage of discussing it. As for our own synod, and its discussions with the Missouri Synod is concerned, I, for one am convinced that the final results as to our future course with her depend on the view which we have of Church Fellowship more than on the present discussion of the issues themselves; for unless we are clear in our own midst on what we really mean with such phrases as “breaking, or suspending or even terminating relations” in connection with church fellowship, if we are not clear on the frame of reference in which we use such phrases nothing but confusion can result in our own midst and in our congregations all over from any resolutions we make or do not make. Let no one imagine that the day on which we rather definitely settle in our own midst whether or not we shall continue in “fellowship” with Missouri will be the day in which everything will become clear. Unless our principles of Church Fellowship are clear amongst ourselves, and that means that we lean on Scripture and not on traditionalistic theological opinions—and I, for one, am convinced—that much basic theological clarification must take place here—wide-spread and often disastrous confusion will result in our congregations no matter whether we “break” or “do not break with Missouri”. We cannot afford to imagine that these principles are clear in our midst or that everything is settled when it is not. It is then for the purpose of clarification of these underlying basic principles rather than that I am able to solve all the problems that can be raised in this area that I herewith present to you this discussion of Church Fellowship.

There are already and will ever increasingly be many problems and questions which we will be having to answer (and I might add: we’ll be giving answers even if we avoid explicit declarations, or, if, ostrich-like, we try to somehow get over the individual instances that arise in our own parishes as somewhat exceptions to the general picture.) The following are some of the basic questions we must face. Why can’t believers who were baptized in the name of the same Lord, who use the same Scriptures, who trust the same Lord, also worship together, and commune together, even if all differences have not been cleared up? If, for instance, it is the *Lord’s* Supper and not the *Church’s* Supper, why must the Church set up boundaries and restrictions and practice closed communion? And if we can’t have communion fellowship with non-Lutherans, why can’t Lutherans at least (who have the same Reformation origin, practically the same order of Service and church customs, and even the same catechism and confessional writings) commune together? What are the boundary lines of Church Fellowship? How do we look at *non-Lutheran* church bodies? How do we look at various *Lutheran* church bodies? If a break in real church-fellowship were to come among the present members of the Synodical Conference, just what would that mean? Would that include only the pulpit fellowship of the pastors? What would it include? These, you will have noticed, are problems and questions which not only the Church Union Committee, Seminary professors, but which each individual congregation, its pastor and members will have to face up to. To sum them all up: we must ask ourselves: what are the principles of Church Fellowship?

The Word “Fellowship” in the New Testament

To get clear on these questions we must go back to the Scriptures. What do they tell us about Church Fellowship? A great deal of what they say can be brought out by a study of this very word “fellowship” or, to use the actual Greek word which is also often used today, *Koinonia*. Not every use of that word is pertinent to our topic but its use in the sense of “participation”, “partaking of”, “sharing in” is the one we are interested in right now. The New Testament not only gives us a picture of Fellowship but also describes it, using the actual word as “Fellowship” in Acts 2:41ff., where we are told that after Peter’s Pentecost Sermon, “Then they that gladly received his **word** were **baptized**” and then very significantly we hear “and they continued in **the apostles’ doctrine** and **fellowship** (the original even has: “in the fellowship”) and in **breaking of bread**, and in **prayers**.” This fellowship, we note, came into existence by the preaching of the Apostolic Word and Baptism, and it continued as the Word and the Sacrament were prayerfully used. It was the means of grace (the Word and the Sacraments) that were the marks of this Church. Our Augsburg Confession describes the Church in a similar manner in its famous 7th article, saying, “The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. 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.” So according to both our Lutheran confessions and the Scripture Church Fellowship is participation in the means of grace. We don’t believe that Christ rules His Church through a hierarchical system with the Bishop of Rome at its head, as the Roman Catholic Church would have us believe, but that wherever the means of grace (Word and Sacraments) are used, there is the Church. So **Church Fellowship** is joint participation and use of the **means of grace**.

The New Testament describes the nature of that fellowship with a wealth of detail, some of which we should call attention to before we continue with our task of viewing that aspect of fellowship we call Church Fellowship, so that we realize what glorious things this fellowship includes. This fellowship is not mere external participation in the rituals of baptism, of hearing the word and of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, but it is participation in Christ and in all the individual phases of His life. In 1 Cor. 1:9 Paul tells us that God has called us Christians into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. We have become fellows of Christ, entering into fellowship with Him Who is the Exalted Lord. We are not only, as St. Paul so often says elsewhere, “in Christ”, but we are members of that one body which is Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:12), participating with Him in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). More than that, it is especially St. Paul who tells us that when we have fellowship with Christ we participate in all the individual phases of Christ’s life: in His humiliation as well as His exaltation. We who have been baptized into His body (1 Cor 12:13), who partake of His Body and Blood, who hear His Word—we *live* with Him (Rom 6:8; 2 Cor 7:3): we suffer with Him (Rev. 8:7); we are crucified together with Him (Rom 6:6; Gal .2:19); we die with Him (2 Cor 7:3); we are buried with Him (Rom 6:4; Col. 2:12); we are raised with Him (Col 2:12; 3:1; Eph 2:6); we are quickened, or made alive, with Him, participating in His resurrection (Col 2:13; Eph 2:5); we are glorified with Him (Rom 8:17); we are made God the Father’s heirs together with Him (Rom 8:17); we reign with Him (2 Tim 2,12). And St. Paul usually puts these individual phases in contrasting pairs to point out that our present participation and fellowship with Christ in His stage of humiliation and suffering gives the assurance that we will press through to the other phase of our fellowship with Him, the phase of exaltation. St. Paul speaks of his own “fellowship of suffering” with Christ but he is happy that by his participation in Christ’s humiliation he will also participate in His exaltation and glory. A key passage of this nature is Phil. 3, where Paul exults: “I count all things but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Phil 3:8ff). St. Peter has the same thought in his first epistle, chapter 5, saying that he who through his whole life and work—suffering himself—was a witness unto the suffering of Christ, has thereby already the present certainty that he will be a partaker of “the glory that shall be revealed.”

The New Testament also clearly teaches that we Christians who use the means of grace have fellowship not only with the Son but with the Father (1 John 1:3) and with the Holy Ghost as well. Also the fellowship of which we are speaking is not of human origin but is worked by the Holy Ghost. We all know the trinitarian benediction at the end of Second Corinthians which mentions the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God I and the **communion** (koinonia) of the Holy Ghost be with you.” It is possible to understand this phrase as either “your participation in the Spirit” or “the fellowship brought about by the Holy Spirit”; St. Paul numbers the “fellowship of the Spirit” along with love, consolation and mercy as one of the qualities present in the Philippian Christians (Phil 2:1). So much for a bit of the great and abundant content of the little word “fellowship”, as it is used in general in the New Testament. Now let us get back to our main topic of *Church Fellowship* and, as will soon be apparent, what is the same thing, *Communion Fellowship*.

Two Contrasting Views

I will begin my discussion of Communion Fellowship as Church Fellowship by contrasting Luther with a representative of widespread Protestant thinking, F. Schleiermacher, in their respective views of Church Fellowship, in order to point up the two contrasting views. **Luther** considered Church Fellowship participation in the Body of Christ through one’s partaking of the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood, whereas **Schleiermacher** considered Church Fellowship the close association of Christians with one another. **Luther** writes in his “Large Confession Concerning the Lord’s Supper” concerning the “Gemeinschaft” (fellowship) as it occurs in the key passage 1 Cor 10:16ff., as follows: “The word “Gemeinschaft” isn’t as genuinely German as I’d like to have it. For “Gemeinschaft” is generally understood to mean “associating with someone” But here it should mean...as much as if “many use, enjoy, partake of one common thing jointly.” That’s what I’ve had to translate with the word “Gemeinschaft” because I can’t find a better word.” So to Luther the basic idea here was “participation in Christ’s Body” (*wenn viel eines gemeinen dinges brauchen, geniessen, oder teilhaftig sind*); not just close association with one another, but partaking of Christ. Now listen by contrast, to Schleiermacher who derives his general conception of the Church from the word “Fellowship” or “Gemeinschaft” in the other sense of associating oneself with someone else.” He says, “The church is a fellowship which can only arise through free human action and can only continue to exist through such action.” Schleiermacher gives this concept the very meaning which Luther most clearly rejected maintaining that church fellowship arises from the action of free individuals who put themselves into relationship with one another. But regardless of what such modern Protestants think, as we shall see genuine church fellowship arises from our partaking of and union with Christ through the means of grace, and we shall see presently how realistically Luther understood this.

Communion Fellowship as Church Fellowship

The key passage is 1 Cor. 10:16ff., where we read: “The cup of blessing which we bless I is it not the communion (the koinonia, the partaking of, the participation in) the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion (the koinonia), the partaking of, the participation in the body of Christ? For we being many, are *one* bread and *one* body, for we are partakers of that *one* bread.” Here St. Paul states that in the Sacrament we receive Christ’s Body and Blood, even as Christ’s own words of institution clearly say, “This is my *body*” “This is my *Blood*”. How can this be that in Communion we can partake of the Body and Blood of Him who walked on earth almost 2,000 years ago. That is understood only by the person who believes in Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God who became flesh, who understands His death on the cross as the death of God’s sacrificial Lamb which taketh away the sin of the world, who knows that He has risen bodily from the dead as the very first to rise of all who sleep the sleep of death, who knows that He, exalted to His Father’s right hand participates in God’s omnipotence, who believes that His now-hidden glory must become visible to all men on the day of His coming in glory. It is only on the basis of these presuppositions of faith that the Lord’s Supper is to be understood. An unbeliever cannot understand it. Our participation in that Supper is therefore not only participation in a memorial such as the one which our Lord gave for His disciples before He left so that they might repeat it in remembrance of His *past* deeds; and it is not only an anticipatory kind of participation in a meal which points to the future when at the end of all time the believers will sit down with the Messiah at the

Heavenly Feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, but that supper is a participation in and a partaking of Him who at the supper is truly *present* under the bread and wine with His Real Presence, a presence which overspans all *time* to unite past, present and future in Him and overbridges all *space* to unite heaven and earth in Him. He, the eternal Son of God, who for us took on flesh and blood, the compassionate High Priest, who is at the same time The Lamb of God Which Taketh Away the Sins of the World, celebrated the Old Testament Passover with His disciples and is Himself the Passover Lamb. And even as God's ancient people Israel ate the Passover Lamb, so the disciples and so the Church eat the body of Him who was crucified, for the Passover Lamb must be eaten. It is surely an *incomprehensible* miracle that we in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper partake of the true body and the true blood of the Son of God who was sacrificed for us, the crucified body which is at the same time the glorified body, but this supper does bring this home to us very concretely that we who partake of it belong to Him body and soul and that as members of the Church, "baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13) and as partakers of the one consecrated bread and consecrated cup which are the communion of Christ's body and blood, we are *members of His body*.

And therewith we have already begun to speak of the Body of Christ, of the *Church*, of participation in the body and blood of the Lord, of Church Fellowship. For in 1 Cor 10:17 it is this participation in the body and blood of the Lord which the Apostle joins directly to the assertion that, even as the bread is one so *we*, though we are many, *are one body*, because we partake of the one bread. The great Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse (to whose Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors I am much indebted in all of the following) rightly says: "Therefore we can say that in the strictest sense of the New Testament the Church is there where the people of God come together in one place to celebrate the Lord's Supper." There the Lord's Body is reality in a double sense; if you will, sacramentally and mystically. From this New Testament teaching that communion-fellowship is church-fellowship and church fellowship communion fellowship it follows that their limitations or boundaries are identical. Where communion fellowship is permitted, there church fellowship is permitted. Where communion fellowship is not permitted, there church fellowship is not permitted.

The Boundaries of Communion and Church Fellowship

The next question follows naturally: *Where, then, are-the boundaries of Communion Fellowship in the New Testament?* Before we, however, look at the New Testament itself, we may gain a vantage point for such a view of the customs of that distant age if we first look at the various reports we have of the very earliest Christian Lord's Supper. It is remarkable that all the reports that have liturgical character do mention a boundary of communion fellowship. "The Doors, the doors" the deacon in the Greek church has called out from earliest times to the present day just before the Communion Liturgy begins, not only in remembrance of the First Sunday of the church, when the Lord came to His disciples behind locked doors, but in this case signifying that the coming celebration is holy and one from which the world is to be excluded. "Let none of the catechumens, none of the mere listeners, none of those who do not believe, none of the heterodox remain" was the liturgical call in the Church at Antioch before the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "*Ta hagia tois hagiois*" ("The Holy things for those who are holy") was and is the warning call before communion, and lest someone misunderstand, as if the church were a society of utterly holy, self-righteous Pharisees, the response of the people has been: "One only is holy, one only is the Lord, Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father", a phrase we sing every Sunday at the end of the Gloria in Excelsis. The fact that all the most ancient Greek liturgies had such calls which, so to say, put a fence or boundary around the Lord's Supper points to the fact that closed communion is something which goes back to the very earliest times of the church. The *Didache*, a Christian document of the age after the apostles, says in a rubric, an explanatory remark that explains the order of service, "Let no one eat or drink of your eucharist except those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, For it was of this that the Lord said, 'Give not that which is holy unto the gods.' (Did 9:5)"; and in the liturgy which this *Didache* reports we hear that at the beginning of their communion celebration the cry rang out, "Whoever is holy, let him approach; whoever is not, let him repent" (10:6). Confession of sin and reconciliation with one's brethren are prescribed before the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Supper just as other later liturgies also

prescribe it. One says, "When you come together on the Lord's Day, break bread and pronounce the eucharistic Blessing after you have confessed your sin, so that your offering may be pure; he that hath aught against his neighbor shall not take part in your gathering until he has been reconciled." From the vantage point of such reports concerning the closed communion practice in the earliest church, we can now look toward the New Testament and certain passages become immediately clear, passages in which the early Christian idea of closed communion" also appears. We perceive that the Lord's Supper was celebrated with the exclusion of those who did not belong there. And behind this historical fact a Biblical dogmatic truth appears.

The Kiss of Peace and the Anathema

We know that where in the New Testament the exhortation to the holy kiss is made (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14) it is the kiss of peace which preceded the Communion (later simply called the Pax) that is thought of. Remember that the situation at the end of each Pauline epistle was this that the epistle was read as an apostolic message before the assembled Church, and that then after it had been read, the church began its celebration of Holy Communion. For that reason these epistles end with the so-called "apostolic benedictions" either in the simple form "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you" or in the expanded Trinitarian form, as we find it in 2 Cor 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all" In the Greek and Syrian liturgies instead of the salutation we are accustomed to in our Lutheran Common Service, "The Lord be with you," we find this expanded Trinitarian form, just before the Proper Preface words "Lift up your hearts." We must also compare the ending of these Pauline epistles with the ending of the Revelation of St. John. And can we say that it is just coincidence that the words of 1 Cor 16:23 are repeated verbatim there in Rev 22:20, for in both places we have the identical formula: "Maran atha (Come, Lord). The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." The Book of Revelation was also intended to be read in the Divine Service (Rev 1:11; 22:18) just as the Pauline epistles. Even though it is not possible for us to trace all the individual parts of the liturgy back into the first century, nevertheless the Pauline epistles do show definite elements of the liturgy then in use: besides the Word of Institution (a part of the Communion Liturgy) we find the exhortation to the kiss of peace, and thereupon the warnings against schismatics and heretics (Romans 16:16f; 1 Cor 16: 20-22); also we find the ancient prayer for the Coming of the Lord still preserved in the Pauline congregations in its original Palestinian Aramaic form "Maran atha," meaning "Lord, come", and finally we have the apostolic benedictions which we have just referred to.

What interests us here is the close connection between the kiss of love and peace which expressed the unity and fellowship of the church and the irrevocable exclusion of separatists and heretics from the Lord's Supper and therewith from the church. At the end of 1 Corinthians which is aimed against the splits that were developing in the church at Corinth, the stiff-necked causers of divisions and offenses are the ones who receive the *Anathema* (the curse of excommunication or exclusion from the Lord's Supper) with these words, "If any man *love* not the Lord, let him be Anathema (accursed)!" For he who in self-pride splits the congregations, the body of the Lord, is lacking in love for the Lord. In the epistle to the Romans (and this is very relevant to the current discussion of Romans 16:17ff. in our midst) there follows (upon the summons to the kiss of love and the assurance that the church of Rome is included in this salutation of love with all the churches of Christ) in verse 16 (thus an initial expression of unity and fellowship) the express warning against those that cause divisions and offenses in a manner that was contrary to the doctrine that they had learned. (I am translating the original more accurately than the King James Version does, as I shall also do in the following:) After the exhortation to the kiss of peace we hear: "But I beseech you, brethren, mark those who are contrary to the doctrine that you have learned, causing the divisions and the offenses—and avoid them. For they that are such serve *not* our Lord Jesus Christ, *but* their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad on your behalf, but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen". The fellowship of the church, the deepest and closest

fellowship of the believers among one another and fellowship with the Triune God (1 John 1:3), presupposes the irrevocable separation from heresy (1 John 4:1-7; 2 John 9; 2 Cor 6:14ff.; Titus 3:10; Rev. 2:14ff.), and this separation finds its most characteristic expression in communion discipline, closed communion. The ancient principle that there can be no participation in holy things with heretics (*nulla communicatio in sacris cum haereticis*) is a principle that goes back to the very early church and is dogmatically founded in the New Testament.

Luther's Realistic View

It is Luther who explains this relation of Church Fellowship and Communion Fellowship and the meaning of 1 Cor 10:16ff. Better than anyone I know in that writing of his which is called "Concerning the Adoration of the Sacrament of the Holy Body of Jesus Christ", when he writes: "Therefore it is true that we Christians are the spiritual body of Christ and are together one bread, one drink, one Spirit. It is Christ who brings this all about, through His one body that we are one spiritual body: that we all are equally partakers of His body, and that we are amongst ourselves also equal and one. Likewise the fact that we partake of the same food and drink causes us to become one bread and drink. And as one member in such a common body serves the other member, so one nurtures and sustains the other (Luther is really more concrete than my translation shows: he actually says: *so isset und trinket einer den andern*, literally, "thus one eats and drinks the other"), that is, he partakes of him in all things, and each is the other person's food and drink, so that we are in the fullest measure common food and drink amongst ourselves, just as Christ is in the fullest sense food and drink for us. With these words St. Paul wanted to depict the riches and nature of Christian faith and love. Similarly natural bread and wine symbolize this: for from many grains of wheat that are ground together one bread results; and each individual grain of wheat loses its shape and becomes the other's flour; likewise many individual grapes become one wine, and each individual grape loses its own shape and form and becomes the other's liquid; similarly Christ is everything to us who are Christians; what one has belongs to the other; what one lacks concerns the other as much as if he lacked it himself ..." One must have such a realistic passage of Luther in mind, if one is to understand the unmistakable "No" with which he refused the hand of brotherhood and fellowship in the sacrament to the Swiss Reformed Theologian Zwingli. Also Luther's "anathema" against Zwingli and his Reformed followers (that is, his exclusion of Zwingli from communion fellowship) can only be understood on the background of the "Pax", the liturgical expression of genuine unity and fellowship which belonged to the celebration of the Sacrament for Luther as much as it does for us today. Because Christ's Body was such a reality to Luther in the Lord's Supper, for that reason Luther understood that the Fellowship of the Church is based on participation in this body. The Church is more than a fellowship of disembodied spirits or non-material spiritual beings, as the humanists Zwingli and Calvin wrongly imagined. The Church *is* the Body of Christ because the consecrated bread *is* the Body of Christ. Eph 4:4ff., describes the unity of the church in similar terms. "*One* body and *one* Spirit even as ye are called in *one* hope of your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all..." This fundamental passage concerning the unity of the Church (on which also, as we shall see, the famous Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession concerning the one, universal Holy Christian Church is based) says it in all clarity that the Church is not that which men call "a spiritual fellowship", a kind of association of like-minded progressive spirits who have higher goals than mere material ones. Even as according to 1 Cor 6:19 our *body* is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and even as our *body* is baptized so that on the last day it may be "like unto His glorious body" (Phil 3:21 cf. Rom 6:4), so the Church is one *body*. We don't understand how the Church *is* the Body of Christ, even as we don't understand *how* the consecrated bread *is* the Body of Christ. Later theologians tried to formulate the problem by calling one the sacramental body of Christ and the other the mystical Body of Christ, but that is no real explanation. The thing, however, which the Lutheran Church must guard against is this that in both bases the word "is" be changed into the Reformed "represents." Even as we reject every figurative explanation of the Words of Institution, even so we reject also every understanding of the Church as unbiblical which would see in the church only a fellowship of pious souls, a kind of society of believers who gather themselves together for common prayer and exercise of their faith in the classic Reformed meetinghouse manner. Certainly no one can make this precisely clear in

which manner the church is the body of Christ, just as little as human reason can ever understand the *manner* of the Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper. No one is able to understand or describe the connection between the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper and the Body of Christ in the Church, simply because the Scripture doesn't tell us anything about just that point. But what we do have to accept in faith is the simple Scriptural truth that the Church *is* the Body of Christ, as truly as she is God's people, no matter what the relationship of Christ's Body in the Church has to that true Body which we receive in the Sacrament.

If accordingly there is a profound connection between the Sacrament of the Altar and the Church, then the destruction of this Sacrament must necessarily lead to the destruction of the Church. This is the reason why Luther considered Zwingli and the other so-called "Sacramentarians" destroyers of the Church with whom he could have no fellowship. What those who denied the Incarnation (the coming of God into the flesh) were for the Apostle St. John, the deniers of the Real Presence were for Luther. Just as the Apostle John recognized only that spirit as the right Spirit which confessed: "Jesus Christ, is come in the *flesh*" (1 John 4:2) and considered the denial of His coming into the flesh a manifestation of Anti-Christ, so Luther found himself in a similar situation over against those who denied the flesh and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. For Luther the Incarnation and the Real Presence (God's becoming flesh and Christ's flesh really being present in the Sacrament) belonged so closely together that he did not find the Incarnation correctly taught there where the Real Presence was denied, In view of the controversies concerning the Person of Christ which always attached themselves to the question of the Lord's Supper in the Reformation Age, it can not be denied that the difference of teaching about the Lord's Supper reached deeply into the understanding of Christ's person. Luther considered the Reformed denial of the participation of Christ's divine nature in the characteristics of his human nature and vice versa a destruction of the Biblical Christ. When Zwingli called it an *Alloiosis* (an inaccurate figure of speech) when it is said that the Son of-God died for us since the rationalist Zwingli said, of course, the divine nature could not die), Luther called this pulling apart of Christ's person "the most abominable heresy that ever existed" and asked indignantly, "What Christian heart can still bear to hear this? By it the entire Christian creed and all the world's salvation is taken away and condemned. For he who is redeemed only by the humanity (of Christ) is really not redeemed." And Luther continued: "I want to state publicly for myself that I consider Zwingli with all of his doctrine a non-Christian for he doesn't retain any part of the Christian faith correctly and is seven times worse than he was when he was a Papist...This statement I make, in order than I may be excused before God and before all the world as one who for all eternity has not and will not have any part in Zwingli's doctrine." (Vom Abendmahl Christi 1528). Such holy vehemence on Luther's part can be understood only by the person who knows what a deep, dark Abyss Luther saw opening up behind Zwingli's and Buzer's (Calvin's teacher's) theology, the very theology which was unfortunately destined to capture modern Protestantism, a theology in which the Incarnation, the great doctrine that God became flesh is no more taken really seriously. For the Eternal Word's-becoming flesh becomes an empty phrase where that Eternal Word also remains outside of the flesh and where the God-man since His exaltation is no longer with His Church according to His human nature (According to classic Reformed theology the human nature is locally bound somewhere else, so that Christ can be present in the Sacrament only according to His divine nature). Under such a theology the sacraments lose their meaning, as has happened in modern Protestantism Baptism in which our whole person, body and soul, is buried with Christ into death (Rom 6:4), becomes but the symbol of an inner process of conversion or awakening that goes on within us (the thing that Baptist Billy Graham is really interested in!); and the Lord's 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 happens but what happens everywhere where two or three are gathered in Christ's name. But with the loss of the Lord's Supper the Church is lost. Even though it still perhaps may continue to stand as an outward organization, nevertheless it ceases to be the Church of the New Testament, the people of God, the Body of Christ, and remains only a religious society. For all of these reasons, then, for Luther and for the Lutheran Church of the past Communion Fellowship was Church Fellowship. And just because Church Fellowship is based on the fellowship of the

Body and Blood of Christ—a fellowship inaccessible to all reason, just for that reason Church Fellowship is a fellowship not made or controlled by us humans.

The Loss of Old Lutheran Understandings

If then Communion Fellowship and Church Fellowship are essentially one, then it is self-evident that every change in the practice of Communion fellowship shows a change in the concept of the Church and in the understanding of the Sacrament. There can be no doubt that the deepest reason why so many European Lutherans and, sad to say, some American Lutherans have given up the old boundaries against the Reformed churches and thus also the Lutheran principles of Church Fellowship is that they have really lost the old Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament. That happened in the 19th century when real Unions of Lutheran and Reformed churches were made (and we should never forget that it was to escape them that the most staunch of the forefathers of our Lutheran churches in the Middle West came to America); despite all their various forms, the one common denominator of all such German church-unions was this that they took over Zwingli's and Butzer's view in the point that Communion Fellowship and thus Church Fellowship is possible even though the teachings concerning the Lord's Supper differed. The Lord Christ, they piously and, to some, plausibly argued, instituted the Lord's Supper so that His disciples might celebrate it together in brotherly unity and fellowship and not fight about it. They knew that they couldn't unite in the basic understanding of the Lord's Supper, but they felt they could unite in the celebration of it and thus come closer together, the same principle of inter-communion which the Anglican Church has used and which plays such a great and seemingly successful role in the present ecumenical movement. At the World Conference for Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden in August 1952, only a minority of the Lutheran representatives still upheld the old Lutheran viewpoint on closed communion—one was from the Hanover Landeskirche, another from Saxony, and another from the ULC in America, while all the others were ready for open communion, or as they would prefer, some sort of inter-communion. We see what a terrible position the Lutheran church as a church is in; and the worst of the tragedy is that even those Lutheran churches which have held themselves farther away from any such overt unionism have been more deeply influenced than they themselves imagine. And lest we think only of "other Lutherans", we Wisconsin Synod people should realize that these things have not received the attention they deserve in our own circles; in fact, those who busy themselves soberly and soundly with the Doctrine and Practice of the Sacrament are often unjustly slandered and looked down upon as innovators who are treading on unfamiliar, and therefore dangerous ground, though actually they are pointing to something vital which would be a real source of true strength to our church in our fight against modern false ecumenicity and real unionism.

Our Lutheran Principle

We confessional Lutherans still hold to the old principle that Church Fellowship is Communion Fellowship and that the Supper of our Lord can only be jointly celebrated where there is agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments. That is the statement of that great compass by which the Lutheran church has been guided through many and great storms in the past and which should continue to serve as our compass in the future—we are in need of no new one--, the Seventh Article of our Augsburg Confession, which says: "Also our churches teach that one holy Christian Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. 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 to the true unity of the Christian Church that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by man, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says (Eph 4:45) "There is *one* Body, and *one* Spirit, even as ye are called in *one* hope of your calling, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism."

Three Clarifying Questions

To get at what our confessions mean by this, it will perhaps be helpful to ask three clarifying questions and then answer them—a kind of catechism which I'll carry on with myself,—in order to clarify the meaning of

this Article Seven. First, do we in Article 7 identify the Lutheran Church with the one holy universal Christian Church? The answer is, No, neither we nor our confessions claim that the Lutheran Church is the one holy, universal Christian church, as the Roman church claims of itself. Our Lutheran confessions rather acknowledge that wherever among men the Gospel is preached in such a way that men thereby come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and where the Sacraments are still celebrated according to Christ's institution there is the one holy church, the communion of saints, that means, of the sinners who believe and are justified by faith. This can happen inside or outside of a church that is true to the Lutheran confessions. Our Lutheran church has never abandoned the faith that the true church of Christ is everywhere in the whole world, hidden beneath the historic "churches" wherever the means of grace are still really used. 'This is the great genuine ecumenicity of our church which is expressed in what the Apology to the Augsburg Confession calls the "very comforting article concerning the Church" (Trigl 229): "It is true that the Church is that group or the men scattered here and there throughout the whole world from the rising to the setting of the sun who truly believe on Christ, who have the *one* Gospel, the *one* Christ, the *same* sacraments Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and are guided by the *same* Holy Spirit, whether they have the same or different human traditions" (My translation of the German text). This true ecumenicity which *believes* the one Church of Christ also beyond the boundaries of its own ecclesiastical group wherever the means of grace (Word and Sacraments) are still preserved is quite different than the false ecumenicity which tries to make visible what we humans cannot see or grasp, the Church as God's people as the Body of Christ, as the Temple of the Holy Ghost. This false ecumenicity changes the article of *faith* concerning the Church into an article of *sight*, and imagines that the unity of the Church which the Holy Ghost alone can create and sustain is something which we humans can set up. And it is trying to set up this unity; it is trying to bring into reality the one faith, the one baptism, the one sacrament by making a compromise out of many various understandings of the Lord's Supper, in keeping with its false so-called "branch theory" of the church, the unbiblical theory which claims that each denomination is a branch of the true Church and therefore has a unique contribution to make toward the general unity of the church, a contribution which must be considered. In doing this, however, this false ecumenicity overlooks the fact that these various understandings of the means of grace are not only various possibilities of understanding the truth, but that in them there often lie hidden also soul-destroying errors and church-splitting heresies. True genuine ecumenicity, on the other hand, sees that danger, and is therefore able to recognize the true unity of the church when it recognizes the one true faith, the one true baptism, and our Lord's one true Sacrament of the Altar. Genuine ecumenicity therefore doesn't first of all worry about *unity* but about *truth*, because it knows where the true church is, there and there alone will the *one* Church be.

A second clarifying question: Must a church, to be a true church, have an explicit historic confessional statement? Answer: No, an explicit common confession does not, according to Article Seven, belong to the unity of the church in this sense. The one common faith of the church will most certainly find expression and be expressed, since the true Church of Christ has always confessed its faith in all ages and will continue to do that until the end of time. So *confessing* of the truth belongs to the unity of the church even though it need not be in an explicit confessional statement; after all, how many churches don't have nice confession—statements which, however, are dead letters, a danger also in the Lutheran church, and, as we shall see, in our own midst.

A third clarifying question: If a church body doesn't need an explicit confessional statement to be a true church but only the actual confession of the truth, what about a Lutheran church, must not a Lutheran church have a definite specific confessional statement? Answer: Yes, a Lutheran church does have an essential mark: the historic confessions of our church, for we are that part of Christendom which accepts as Scriptural the great doctrinal decisions of the Lutheran Reformation as they were laid down in the various confessions that have been collected in the Book of Concord, and which are the constitutional basis of every Lutheran congregation, part of the ordination vow of every Lutheran minister, and, in the form of the Small-Catechism at least, the content of each Lutheran communicant's own confirmation vow. And now what is the nature of these Lutheran Confessions? They are not compromise formulae like many modern "ecumenical" confessions in which an attempt is made to bring the religious views of many individual groups down to one common denominator.

Rather the Reformation Age confessions themselves explicitly state in the beginning sentence of the Formula of Concord, for instance, that they do not want to “make a separate or new confession of our faith, but rather confess the public common writings which always and everywhere were held and used as such symbols or common confessions in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession.” As far as content then, our confession did not want to and did not in fact, bring anything *new* or novel. The Augsburg Confession doesn’t want to present anything new but what was implied in the ecumenical creeds and apply that to the new situation; the Formula of Concord is only a commentary on the Augsburg Confession on the points of difference that had arisen between the adherents of the Augsburg Confession.

The Unity of the Lutheran Church

We can summarize and say that the confessions by which a church body is recognized as Lutheran is the understanding of the Holy Scripture as it is unanimously testified to in all of the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the Large Catechism Luther called his Small Catechism, one of the confessional writings, “a compend and brief summary of all the Holy Scriptures”. Though, of course, our confessional writings are not in themselves inspired as are the Holy Scriptures, nevertheless where as the summary of the Scripture they faithfully reproduce the content of the Scripture there they share in the authority of the Scriptures, just as correct preaching of the Gospel in a sermon is Scriptural and therefore authoritative.

An erroneous idea of the unity of the Lutheran Church, and therefore also of church fellowship, has burst forth rather close to home in a most palpable form in the Orthodox Lutheran Church. It is not my purpose in mentioning this church body to express personal views as to their tragic history, and certainly not to sort of “hit a man when he is down”, but to point up what I consider a most dangerously misleading and disruptive, entirely un-Lutheran principle from their own public so-called “Confession of Faith” to which they append the gratuitous explanation “as Professed and Practiced by All True Lutherans”. If the idea of the unity of the Lutheran church which is demanded there is to spread, and, sad to say, the same idea has cropped up recently in several writings by members of our synod, it will threaten the unity of any Lutheran church which becomes infected with it as much as outright unionism. The agreement which they require is no longer the agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel and of the administration of the Sacraments of which our Confessions speak, but agreement in all so-called “doctrinal statements” that can directly or indirectly be drawn from the Holy Scripture; yea, from their confession it even seems that they demand uniformity in the interpretation of all passages in the Bible that have “doctrinal” import and that such uniformity be achieved by means of their system of theories and theological opinions about all connected questions. But that sort of agreement is not what the Lutheran confessions mean by “the doctrine of the Gospel”. When during doctrinal discussions of the 17th century the Jesuit theologian Tanner told our Lutheran theologians that it was an article of faith that Tobit took along a dog on his trip, the Lutheran Aegidius Hunnius answered, “What monstrous articles of faith you have!”; and one wants to say the same thing when one reviews many of the so-called “doctrines” or “doctrinal statements” in the “Confession of Faith as Professed and Practiced by All True Lutherans”: “What monstrous articles of faith you have!” In contrast, the articles of faith of our Lutheran confessions are articles in which the faith in Christ is implied, as it is in, for instance, the statements of the Apostles’ Creed. Also we should never forget that our faith in God the Creator, or in the Holy Ghost who spake by the Prophets is faith in Christ. By confessing my faith in the one Church, in the one Baptism, in the Real-Presence of Christ’s body and blood, in the resurrection of the dead, I confess my faith in Jesus Christ. To believe in the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God means to believe in Jesus Christ unto whom these Scriptures give witness from the very first to the very last sentence. In this way Luther understood the articles of faith to be a unity not as a system, a summary of all kinds of individual “doctrinal statements” taken from the Bible and brought into systematic order by some guiding principle or other; but our faith has a unity by virtue of the fact that in all articles of faith it is always *Christ* who is the real center of what we accept and believe. Over against such un-Lutheran conceptions of “doctrine”, it must be stated that the divine truth which we trust in every word of the Scripture is not in every case identical with the thought content which mere grammar and logic bring forth something which everyone

will grant, for instance, for such a Biblical book as The Song of Solomon. The clarity which we ascribe to the Scripture (about which the Orthodox Lutheran people and it seems, also some people in our own midst have such a rationalistic conception) is not the same thing as the clarity of a philosophical or mathematical book which one can “prove” by appeal to human reason. This clarity of Scripture does *not* guarantee that the full exhaustive meaning of a Bible passage must immediately be grasped by every well-meaning Christian reader. It doesn’t guarantee either that we will immediately find a harmonization of statements which outwardly simply don’t agree. If the clarity or perspicuity of the Holy Scriptures were to be understood in such a rationalistic manner, the history of the Church and of her doctrinal controversies-would simply be an incomprehensible riddle. For that history is not only the history of backsliding from once fully revealed truth and the battle to re-establish that truth, but the history of the wrestling by the true Church of Christ for an ever deeper understanding of the one, eternal unchangeable truth. Therefore not only do so-called exegetical difficulties, theological problems exist in our understanding of the Scripture (something which the Orthodox Lutheran Confession denies) but that has been the case from the days of the Apostles who didn’t all have identical interpretations, say, of Old Testament passages, and it will be the case until that great day comes of which it is written, “When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part will be done away.” (1 Cor 13:10).

The point I want to make is this: the agreement, of which our confessions speak is not a system of exegetical and dogmatic understandings in which we think we have “the doctrine” of the Scripture, which one then theoretically identifies with the Confessions of the Lutheran Church but which in practice we express in new confessions, which we elevate to a position higher than our historic confessions. Therefore we should be warned by this disruptive approach to ourselves not look at the Lutheran confessions as some self-evident possession which we cannot lose. By imagining that we can never lose them, we can lose them as much as by simply outright abandoning them. Much better than the call of these Orthodox Lutheran people to adopt and profess their Confession of Faith and their cry “Back to the Brief Statement” would be the cry “Back to the Lutheran Confessions” and to a penitent study of this great heritage which we are neglecting to our shame and hurt. We just can’t put the temporary consensus of such little theological schools and trends in thinking in place of that consensus of the Church which overspans the ages and which we have in our Lutheran Confessions. It is simply a false understanding of doctrinal unity to demand entire uniformity in the interpretation of all passages in the Bible and to that end to misuse the passage 1 Cor 1:10 where St. Paul exhorts us that “ye all speak the same things and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” This passage and the great passage about the unity of the Church, Eph. 4, the basis for our wonderful Article Seven of the Augsburg Confession, do not say anything else but what the Lutheran confessions found in them, namely the agreement in the teaching of the Gospel and in the administration of the sacraments. What is meant by the teaching of the Gospel in our Confessions is not a theological theory about the Gospel but the teaching of the Gospel itself as it proceeds from the pulpit and lecturn, in the instruction classes, the sick bed. What is understood by “the true teaching of the Gospel” is formulated in the Augsburg Confession where that understanding of the Scripture is laid down according to which the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in the Lutheran Church is to be guided. And it is to these Lutheran Confessions that reference is made when it is said that “to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree in the teaching of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments.” So where we always look for the unity of the One Holy Universal Church, the means of grace, there we must also look for the unity of the Lutheran Church; we look to see whether the Gospel is being preached aright and whether the sacraments rightly administered. If we ask, “How much does that include, how much must we include to have agreement as Lutherans?” then we answer as Lutherans: “It must include in detail what we find in our Lutheran Confessions which are a true summary of all the Holy Scriptures.” That is why these confessions are the only means of real unification for the Lutherans of the world. And any further confessions which may be necessary will have to be expositions of these great confessions and not a set of new “doctrinal statements.” When we say that we have come to the third, the practical part of this essay, our relations with other church bodies.

Our Relations with Other Church Bodies

We cannot, of course, put all church bodies with which we now have church-fellowship on the same level, simply labeling them all “heterodox”, making no effort to see what sort of teaching of the Gospel and what sort of administration of the Sacrament is going on in their midst, but perhaps having literally nothing to do with them as far as churches, as we continue in that kind of competitive warfare which especially present-day American society seems to force on us. But if we are loyal to our Confessions (especially to Article Seven of the Augsburg Confession) we must not only look at these other churches honestly and carefully to see whether they are preaching the Gospel rightly and administering the sacraments in accordance with Christ’s institution, we must also then make a distinction between non-Lutheran church bodies those which at least claim the name Lutheran.

Non-Lutherans Not Now in Church Fellowship with Us

Let us first discuss relations with non-Lutheran church bodies. Even in the case of such non-Lutheran church bodies as the church of Rome we are bound by our Lutheran confessions to always believe that wherever in their midst the Gospel is in some way still taught and the sacraments administered in accordance with Christ’s institution there, despite the false doctrine and heresy, the One Universal Holy Christian Church exists. The Preface to the Book of Concord expressly says: “The condemnations, censures and rejections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord’s Supper do not mean that it is in any way our design or purpose to condemn these 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...; nay, rather it has 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) because these errors conflict with the express Word of God and that, too in such a way that they cannot be reconciled with it.” (Trig, p. 18). Now it is clear that we cannot have church fellowship, altar and pulpit fellowship, with such church bodies; Romans 19:17 and its anathema (for that is what “avoid” means!) does apply to them. But that doesn’t mean that we therefore proselytize, try to win their members away from them; that does not mean that we dare invade the cities or countries where they are when there is no real mission field of unchurched people and no real call to go there. It does not even mean that we will have nothing to do with them as church bodies. In fact, there are legitimate ways in which our Lutheran church has in past times attempted to order its relationships to other confessions instead of carrying on an incessant warfare that often borders on the un-Christian. As an answer to continual Reformed pressures for church unions which considered differences in doctrine as unessential (the Reformed consider us Lutherans erring brethren, but not heretics), the Lutheran Church has in times past countered by setting up two means of communication: (1) it instituted serious doctrinal discussions (*Lehrgespraeche* or *Religionsgespraeche*) and (2) it did cooperate in external projects, in which no joint use of the means of grace was involved, even joining in organized federations to do so.

Serious doctrinal discussions always came first; thereby any possible misunderstandings and misconceptions of the opponents could be righted and serious discussions to attempt to clear away such misunderstandings could take place. The false modern idea that has unfortunately been gaining ground in the ecumenical movement in which the false ecumenicity of which we spoke tries to bring such meetings to more or less summarize and reduce to the lowest common denominator all the varying conceptions of the means of grace which the various churches have on the basis of the so-called branch theory of the church ---this idea had constantly to be rejected; the Lutheran Church always did and must always again and again call these people to order, and, if necessary, withdraw from discussions that have been made fruitless by such Reformed influence. But I do believe that we of the Wisconsin Synod should not close our minds to the possibility and often even advisability of such serious doctrinal discussions; after all, if we take Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession seriously in the present situation, we must find out, Do the present-day Reformed churches stand where Zwingli and Calvin stood when the decisions of our Confessions were made? Do they, for instance, accept Calvin’s terrible doctrine of predestination unto damnation? There is room for such serious discussions. And there is

even room for the second of the two means by which the Lutheran church has had relations I with non-Lutherans cooperation in externals. Two presuppositions must be, present: (a) absolute truthfulness on both sides and respect for the conscience of the other-party, and (b) there must be clarity as to the things in which there is agreement and things in which there is no agreement, If these presuppositions do not exist then such initial genuine ecumenical relationships become unionistic and do not serve the cause of truthfulness but of confusion. But if these presuppositions do exist there are areas in which we as Lutherans can join with other non-Lutherans; for example, we may join with non-Lutheran churches to protect the religious rights which we have under the constitution, or as a church body we may join non-Lutheran church bodies in opposing legislation which would discriminate against our parochial schools. I could imagine that much valuable work could be done by, let's say a bureau of church architecture which churches and synodical boards might consult in making new church plans; I could even imagine that we could cooperate in establishing institutes where people called to be foreign missionaries might learn native languages and customs without their enrollment in such a specialized mission school involving them at all in church fellowship. We must while carrying out such work, always be clear on this that such cooperation dare never involve pulpit and altar fellowship. It is not joint church work. The old expressions of our forefathers are worth repeating in answering the double question "What about cooperation in externals?" "Yes, there may be cooperation *in exteris*"; and "What, then, about fellowship in sacred things, in the means of grace?" Answer: "No, there can be no "*communicatio in sacris*" (no joint participation in the means of grace)."

Lutherans Not Now in Church Fellowship with Us

So far we have been talking about non-Lutherans with whom we are not in Church Fellowship. Now what about our relations to Lutherans with whom we are not now in fellowship? First of all, we should repeat the idea presented above that the fact that a church calls itself Lutheran, or that once in its history the Lutheran Confessions *were* its confessions does not make it genuinely Lutheran. Among Lutherans too there must be agreement in the teaching of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments; otherwise there can be no joint use of them amongst them; and in the case of Lutherans "agreement" means agreement in the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. We have to ask, Do all Lutherans take the Confessions seriously, or have some by word or deed broken these confessions? Sad to say some have; and others seem to be on the way to do that. Since that is the situation, we must, I think, distinguish between those who are in danger of breaking these confessions and those who have broken them. Among such Lutheran bodies as have broken the Lutheran confessions are those Lutheran *Landeskirchen* or Territorial Churches in Germany who have in one way or another by compromising the teaching of our Confessions on the Lord's Supper and allowing inter-communion with the Reformed or Crypto-Calvinistic deniers of the Real Presence. This certainly applies to the Lutheran churches living in the Union in Germany; we apply Romans 16:17ff. to such churches and cannot have church fellowship with them. We know that it is sometimes difficult to deal with people in such Lutheran churches who assure us that they have themselves kept the Lutheran position, even under great trials. But we should not be weary in pointing out that such inter-communion as they permit and practice with the Reformed is not a personal matter but a public act of confession; we should encourage them with our Lord's promise, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 10:32); and we should remind them of what our confessions say, "The controversies which have occurred are not, as some would regard them, mere misunderstandings or disputes concerning words...But here the subjects of controversy are important and great and of such a nature that the opinion of the party in error cannot be tolerated in the Church of God, much less be excused or defended (Formula of Concord, Thor. Declar. Pref 9). With such Lutheran churches we can and, if we are their neighbors, should have the type of serious doctrinal discussions as our Free Church brethren in Germany have also carried on with some Lutheran *Landeskirchen* to establish clarity and to encourage them in genuine Lutheran doctrine and practice. Cooperation in externals may be in place even though *communicatio in sacris* (participation in the use of the means of grace) is out. Next we must speak of those Lutherans who have not yet joined such unions, but who have allied themselves with the present ecumenical movement as it manifests itself in the World Council of Churches or in the Lutheran World

Federation, both of which are often claimed to be purely federations for the purpose of serious doctrinal discussions and cooperation in externals but both of which are more and more involving themselves in genuine *church* work and thus more and more assuming the nature of real unions. In the case of such church bodies we must also earnestly try to find out whether the Gospel is really being preached and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution. It is especially with them that we should carry on very serious doctrinal discussions, not with the purposes of union, but to eliminate possible misunderstandings and bring clarity. Certain doctrinal discussions on unsettled points of past controversies and practical problems like that of the lodge should be discussed. Until definitive clarification has been brought about and until the nature of their participation in the ecumenical movement is clarified, our boundaries of not-having fellowship with them are more temporary. Nevertheless one thing is certain: the way to bring about clarity and true unity is not first to encourage our pastors and congregations to practice a kind of selective fellowship when the church fellowship question itself has not yet been established. With such Lutheran bodies cooperation in externals in such projects as our synod carried on when it used the Lutheran World Relief organization to distribute clothing to war sufferers in Europe, is certainly possible without overstepping the bounds of permissible relations. To give another example, a joint publishing venture, such as that of getting Lutheran works out in English, in cooperation with these church bodies is permissible. Such projects and co-operation in externals may sometimes be unwise but they are permissible.

Relations with Missouri

Finally we come to the very timely question of our relation with those church bodies which are in fellowship with us at present. Conference Our fellowship in the Synodical is admittedly strained. I have no call to discuss this entire problem or its basic issues in this essay, but in so far as the principles of church fellowship are involved I must apply the important principles mentioned above also here. First of all, we ought to realize that if Missouri is in agreement with us in the doctrine of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments, then our fellowship with Missouri must be upheld; to separate when such agreement is present would be sinful and a violation of Romans 16:16f, 1 Cor 1:10 and many other Scriptural warnings against separatism. If, however, the Missouri Synod is not in agreement with us in the teaching of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments, then we must apply Romans 16:17f in all of its tremendous seriousness as an anathema against divisionists and heretics. If it were proved that the Missouri Synod is clinging to doctrine and practice that subvert the Gospel, that deny the Lutheran Confessions, or if it were proved that she is tolerating false doctrine and false practice in her midst, then we would have to separate from her and that right now and not later; and it should be clear from all we said above that in that case we can no longer use the means of grace with those from whom we "break", "separate", "split" - use whichever word or phrase you wish. A break in church fellowship with Missouri would mean that we could no longer have, altar and pulpit fellowship with Missourians. It would mean that we could not in the future transfer our members to congregations of the so-called heterodox Missouri Synod, nor could we accept Missouri Synod members into our congregations without first instructing them in our orthodox position and seeing to it that they agree to our own clearly-stated confession on the matters in question. It would mean that we could not any longer be sponsors at the baptisms of children who would be brought up in the so-called heterodox Missouri congregations, nor could we accept Missouri Synod members as sponsors for our children. It would mean that we could not any longer support the clearly spiritual work at such a home as Bethesda Lutheran Home. It would mean that we could no longer support joint parochial schools with Missouri Synod congregations. It would mean that we could no longer work together with the Missouri Synod in the Mission work among the colored. It would mean that we would have to forbid those of our people whose work calls them from our parishes to places where there is no Wisconsin Synod congregation to worship and commune with the local Missouri Synod congregation. Church Fellowship is fellowship in the means of grace, in the use of the Word and Sacraments, and if we apply Romans 16:17f to Missouri, then we will be bound by that selfsame Word of God to avoid all the above mentioned fellowship in the Means of Grace with Missourians. And to wink at some of these of these things, as for instance, at the matter of giving and receiving transfers, while avoiding only crass pulpit fellowship would not

only be inconsistent with human logic but contrary to the Word of God which we would be applying to Missouri, Romans 16, 17f I have spelled this out in such detail because I am convinced that there is a lot of loose thinking about it in our circles. To simply list a number of problems and charges and label them all “unionism” without defining either what unionism really is or defining the error clearly will only bring us into greater confusion; and here is the point where I think our synod has been very weak and negligent. When you examine one of the so-called “issues” as for instance “Chaplaincy” carefully, you will find that our writings and resolutions are not consistent nor clear in their charges nor have we answered Missouri’s last well-written answer to *our* Tract 11. That putting our whole synod “in the state of confession” without first having a clear-cut definite confession of our own pointing out exactly where Missouri has violated the Lutheran Confessions and the Word of God, has put us into a “state of confusion” which threatens our own church fellowship and unity. In any situation like the one in which we are there is bound to be confusion, any one will grant that; but the crying need of the hour is for clarification of the issues and that, I submit, will have to be the basis of a confession of our own, not one which will bring new “doctrinal statements” but an application of our historic Lutheran confessions to the present problems, Without such clarification we will not have peace and unity amongst ourselves, break or no break.

It is a very serious question, when dangerous teachings and practices break out in the midst of a communion like the Synodical Conference, how we deal with them. But only an irrevocable and permanent toleration of false doctrine without the earnest attempt at reclaiming the erring brethren or at putting them into church discipline could justify the charge of heresy and the use of Romans 16,17f. The very farthest that the Wisconsin Synod could possibly go at the present time would be to suspend the Synodical Conference, that is cease organizational working together with Missouri while breaking for until Missouri’s not breaking off Church fellowship with her, false doctrine is established and defined, we cannot halt the church fellowship and joint use of the means of grace that is going on among us at altar and pulpit, transfer of members baptism sponsorships, etc. But such a suspension of the Synodical Conference organization is not the solution either. I personally consider the Missouri Synod, despite individual aberrations in her midst and despite her own dangerous tendencies in some areas like Scouting and Chaplaincy, to be as a Synod an orthodox body. That goes for her leadership and for her congregations in general, Rather than prematurely breaking off fellowship, as some want, we should use every means to strengthen the existing fellowship, especially through the present negotiations. And we could well include in such negotiations our other brethren in the free churches of Germany, in Africa and in Australia who in a brotherly manner might help both synods to true god-pleasing unity. I sincerely regret that our Synod did not take part in the meeting of these loyal and faithful Lutherans, who have suffered much for the sake of their loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions—much more than we--, when they met in Contrast to the Lutheran World Federation in Uelzen, Germany in 1952. It is my fervent prayer that the fellowship which we enjoy with these true Lutherans may grow strong and more active, and that together with them we may again learn from our Lutheran Confessions in what the true unity of the Lutheran Church consists. We can do nothing better in the present crisis than to ourselves faithfully use the Word of God and the Sacraments, and especially that Sacrament which as no other of the means of grace expresses our fellowship, the Sacrament of the Altar. If we do this in sincere repentance over our past and present sins, our little church body may yet have a vital mission over against the rest of Lutheranism and the entire One Holy Christian Church wherever it is in the world! For what a terrible thing for all of Christendom it would be if Lutheranism were to end up on the course it now seems to be traveling, to become only a kind of theological trend inside of a Reformed, biblicistic, liberal, free-masonry all-inclusive general Protestantism (*Allerweltsprotestantismus*). What God gave us in the Reformation would be lost: the correct distinction between Law and Gospel, and the understanding of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as means of grace. Therefore we have a real mission as a confessional Lutheran church that knows the boundaries of church fellowship and has the courage and faith to live up to them. And that mission we shall by the grace of God be able to fulfill if we continue to work and pray in the spirit expressed in the hymn stanza:

In these last days of sore distress

Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.