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CLOSE COMMUNION

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective
S-200

by

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November, 1970

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The term "close communion" seems to be used almost exclusively by writers of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. It is used to indicate a restrictive admission policy in terms of guests to the fellowship of the Lord's Supper. A typical popular understanding of the term is reflected in this definition given in an adult instruction manual of 1938: "[The Lutheran Church] practices Close Communion, admitting to her altars only such as are of the fellowship of faith, or fellow Lutherans in good standing."¹ Its antithesis is open communion, or the practice of admitting all who desire to come to the Lord's Supper. Missouri Synod writers have regarded the practice of admitting both non-Lutherans and Lutherans with whom the Missouri Synod is not in fellowship as violations of close communion or as open communion. Writers in other Lutheran bodies have preferred the term "closed communion." The General Council adopted the Galesburg Rule, which served as its definition for the practice of closed communion. Lutheran altars were for Lutheran communicants, but this practice of closed communion did allow for the privilege of others occasionally to be included as guests. In spite of these shades of difference, however, the two terms "close" and "closed" communion can be used synonymously. It could be argued that the Missouri Synod term is more evangelical since it sets forth the principle of the closeness or fellowship that must exist

¹George Luecke, Distinctive Doctrines and Customs of the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 43.

at the communion table, while the term closed communion sounds more legalistic and restricting. Whether this is the case, or whether the Missouri Synod applied its principle legalistically and the General Council applied its regulation more evangelically is open to debate.

The problem of admission to the Lord's Supper is not, however, peculiar to Lutherans. In fact, especially in terms of the emphasis on ecumenical activities today, the problem has been of specific concern to all Christians. The World Council of Churches has devoted several conferences to the problem of intercommunion. The 1952 Conference of Faith and Order at Lund developed what has become a standard set of terminology to describe the various practices of admission requirements for the participation of non-members in the Lord's Supper.

1. Full Communion (though the adjective need rarely be used): where churches in doctrinal agreement, or of the same confessional family, allow communicant members freely to communicate at the altars of each, and where there is freedom of ministers to officiate sacramentally in either church (i.e., intercelebration), e.g., the Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed (Presbyterian) "families" of churches respectively.
2. Intercommunion and Intercelebration: where two churches not of the same confessional family, by agreement allow communicant members freely to communicate at the altars of each, and where there is freedom of ministers to officiate sacramentally in either church, e.g., Lutheran and Reformed churches in France. N.B.--The relations at present existing between the Church of South India and the Church of England are a special case of this kind, involving certain specific limitations.
3. Intercommunion: where two churches, not of the same confessional family, by agreement allow ~~communicant members freely to communicate~~ at the altars of each, e.g., churches of the Anglican communion and Old Catholics, Protestant Episcopal Church and Polish National Catholic Church in U.S.A. Subject to differences of language, etc., intercommunion in most cases would also involve intercelebration.
4. Open Communion: where a church on principle invites members of other churches to receive communion when they are present at its communion services, e.g., the Methodist, Congregationalist, and most of the Reformed churches.
5. Mutual Open Communion: where two or more churches on principle invite each other's members and the members are free to accept the invitation. This does not necessarily involve intercelebration.

6. Limited Open Communion: (Communion by Economy or Dispensation); the admission of members of other churches not in full communion or intercommunion to the sacrament in cases of emergency or in other special circumstances.

7. Closed Communion: where a church limits participation in the Lord's Supper to its own members.²

A similar summary in a monograph entitled Can We Break Bread Together distinguishes five categories: open communion, full communion, intercommunion, closed communion, and special situations. The section of special situations raises the question as to whether intercommunion can exist in the special situation of discussions striving for Christian unity.³

The ecumenical considerations being discussed today open up several important theological questions. The issue of whether Holy Communion is an expression of or a means towards fellowship has myriad consequences for the admission requirements to the Lord's Supper in the various denominations. Likewise, the question of the minimum necessary prerequisites to participation in Holy Communion vary all the way from a concern for the episcopate and the necessity of valid orders, to a concern for doctrinal unity, to the discernment of actually no barriers. That these ecumenical concerns have implications for the Lutheran community is indisputable.

The scope of this study, however, will not allow for a treatment of these types of issues, although they certainly would have to be taken into consideration in any attempt to evaluate the validity of the practice of

²quoted in Vilmos Vajta, Church in Fellowship (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), pp. 225-226.

³Chauncey J. Varner, Can We Break Bread Together (New York: Friendship Press, 1965), pp. 13-14.

close communion as a continuing practice today. The scope of this study, rather, is to see where the Lutheran church has stood on the practice, as well as its reasons for standing where it has. Within these limits, furthermore, no claim is laid to the comprehensiveness of the treatment. The material presented is selective. The excursion into the practice of the early church was included for two reasons. First, the study Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries by Werner Elert indicates that the practice of closed communion was maintained in the early church for some of the same reasons it was practiced among Lutherans.⁴ Secondly, the Lutheran Church claims to be the rightful heir of the true apostolic church. As such, the practice of the early church would by definition be part of this study.

⁴translated by Norman E. Nagel. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY CHURCH

The early church was not the great monolithic structure that moderns envision. It was not the paragon of unity and harmony twentieth century churchmen imagine when they consider the early church and its formative influence on doctrine and practice. In fact already in the second century, Ignatius warned his congregations about heresies, tempting heresies in which "Jesus Christ is interwoven."¹ No, from the very beginning the Christian church has been divided, split apart, rent asunder. Likewise, the effects of these divisions on the celebration of the Lord's Supper has been a question that has plagued the divided church ever since the first hairline crack appeared in the body of Christ.² The limitations on participation in the Lord's Supper that developed in the early church reflect a struggle to preserve the sacrament as something holy and reverent. The policy for admission to communion in the early church was as a result more severe and rigid than even the strictest groups of today dare to propose.

In the early church on the local level participation in communion was restricted to full members of the congregation. Thus, closed communion in the strictest sense was practiced.³ On the local level,

¹ quoted in Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, (translated by Norman E. Nagel) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 44.

² Elert, p. 44.

³ Ibid., p. 76.

therefore, problems did not exist unless there were visitors or strangers present. Before a guest could be admitted to the closed communion of the local congregation he had to demonstrate two things to his hosts: First, he had to have on his person some proof that he belonged to a Christian church. In the second place, that church to which he belonged had to be recognized as orthodox.⁴ The Council of Carthage in the middle of the fourth century stated, "No person, lay or clerical, may commune in another congregation without a letter from his bishop."⁵ While at first informal systatica or letters of commendation sufficed for identification, in time formal Letters of Fellowship or literae communicatoriae were required to identify travellers outside of their home congregations.⁶

The purpose of this practice was to keep those who were ineligible from attending the sacrament. Those to be denied communion included (1) open and notorious sinners and those who refused to repent, (2) those who were guilty of apostasy or heresy, or (3) those who had withdrawn into schism.⁷ In the case of the first problem, personal reconciliation between the parties involved was a necessary prerequisite to reinstatement and admittance to the Lord's Supper. In the case of the latter two, the excluding or including of a person was an act of the congregation that confessed the whole congregation's acceptance or rejection of that

⁴Georges Florovsky, "Terms of Communion in the Undivided Church," Intercommunion, edited by Donald Baillie (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 49.

⁵Carthage I, Canon 7, quoted in Elert, p. 132.

⁶Elert, p. 130ff.

⁷Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, "Intercommunion: a Means toward Union," Theology, LXXI (May 1968), 197.

person's teaching.⁸ The purpose of the requirement of the identification of strangers served to keep these same types of unqualified people from the sacrament. Accordingly, the orthodoxy of the guest's church affiliation had to be ascertained before he could be admitted. Three factors were considered in determining this orthodoxy: (1) the church's relationship to an orthodox episcopacy, (2) the acceptance by that church of the canon, and (3) the church's adopted rule of faith.⁹ In practice, however, the first two did not work out. The episcopate turned out to be a poor basis for judging the qualifications of a person's admissibility. For within the apostolic succession bishops excommunicated each other, as in the Easter controversy, or as in the Donatist schism were severely divided.¹⁰ Likewise, the canon was not a secure basis for judgment either. For although the Scriptures were authoritative, the heretics also claimed to base their teaching on the Scriptures.¹¹ The use of a rule of faith or creed as a basis did turn out to function well. The acceptance of a particular formula became the basis for judging the orthodoxy of bishops. The acceptance of these statements of belief, then, became the criteria by which participation in the Lord's Supper became possible.¹²

⁸Eiert, p. 80.

⁹Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 53-54.

¹²Ibid., pp. 54-55.

The early church, accordingly, very cautiously guarded the fellowship at the altar. Its restrictive policy was not without theological foundation. In the first place, the practice stemmed from a recognition of the necessity of preserving the integrity of the sacrament. The fellowship given by the Lord in the sacrament was seen as full and complete fellowship. Cyril of Jerusalem stated that all who joined together in the Eucharist become one body with Christ.¹³ Cyril of Alexandria pointed out that those who participate in Christ are one body with one another.¹⁴ The primary fellowship in the sacrament was vertical, the fellowship created by Christ when He draws people to Himself. The horizontal fellowship in the sacrament was a mutual reception of the incorporation together in the one body of Christ.¹⁵ It was not comradeship or a group feeling. It was joint reception of the same gift and the creation of the body of Christ in that place. It was intimate and real.¹⁶ Because of this ecclesiastical significance of the Eucharist, participation in the sacrament had to be closely regulated. Elert sums up the situation.

There was universal recognition of the basic principle that inadmissible altar fellowship injures the integrity of church fellowship. . . . The modern theory that anybody may be admitted "as a guest" to the Sacrament in a church of a differing confession, that people may communicate to and fro in spite of the absence of full church fellowship is unknown in the early church, indeed unthinkable.¹⁷

¹³Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 36-37.

¹⁶Arthur Vöölbus, Meaning and Practice of the Lord's Supper, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 50-51.

¹⁷Elert, p. 175.

The theological basis of the early church's restrictive admission policy to the Lord's Supper is found secondly in its fight against all false doctrine and heresy. Justin stated in his Apology: "This food is called the Eucharist among us. Only those are permitted to partake of it who believe the truth of our doctrine."¹⁸ In every relation of one bishop to another it was dogma that established the possibility or impossibility of fellowship.¹⁹ Any practice of intercommunion in the early church presupposed an actual unity on the basis of a common confession of faith. Before one could be admitted to communion, his doctrinal position not only had to be determined, but also once determined had to be orthodox.²⁰ A suspicion of disagreement in essential doctrine justified a suspension of the possibility of joint communion.²¹ A person's orthodoxy or heterodoxy was determined by the confession of faith he made. His confession of faith was determined by the public confessions of the church with which he was in agreement or to which he belonged. His membership in a fellowship was determined on the basis of where he received the sacrament.²² On this basis, a man's participation in the sacrament of another church was a public statement of his agreement with the teachings of that church, as well as that church's recognition of its acceptance of the individual's beliefs. With the orthodoxy of the church thus at stake, it is no wonder

¹⁸i, 66. 14, quoted in Elert, pp. 114-115.

¹⁹Elert, p. 155.

²⁰Florovsky, p. 57.

²¹Florovsky, p. 49.

²²Elert, p. 182.

that strict measures were taken to assure the orthodoxy of the individual people seeking admission to the sacrament. "Heretics," accordingly, were excluded not so much for their own good, but so that the unity of the Lord's Supper might be preserved.²³ There could be no doctrinal separation or division among those participating, for this would deny the essential unity given in the sacrament. Doctrinal unity, as expressed in church fellowship, was a prerequisite of any joint reception of the Lord's Supper.²⁴

A third theological factor involved the liturgical consideration of participation in the sacrament. The liturgy itself was an expression of orthodoxy. One who was heterodox or heretical did not maintain the orthodox liturgy, but transformed it to reflect his particular emphases. Conversely, one who was not orthodox would not seek admission to an orthodox liturgy, since he was in disagreement with the doctrine presented in its liturgy.²⁵ The liturgy itself testified to the doctrinal unity of those participating. The kiss of peace functioned to indicate both the absence of personal grudges and doctrinal aberrations among those present.²⁶

The early church, accordingly, was not so different from the situation that obtained in the Christian church in other periods. To summarize, the early church was beset with various divisions and schisms, most of which had their basis in doctrinal differences. These divisions prevented

²³Ibid., p. 118.

²⁴Ibid., p. 164.

²⁵Ibid., p. 118, passim.

²⁶Ibid., p. 81.

intercommunion among the members of these various divisions. Local congregations, accordingly, practiced closed communion, restricting participation to members and guests who could prove their membership in orthodox churches. Any indiscriminate practice of altar fellowship that included those who were doctrinally separated was theologically and liturgically impossible.

CHAPTER III

THE REFORMATION

At the time of the Reformation participation in the services of the Lord's Supper with those with whom you disagreed was rejected by all parties involved. That Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church is obvious. Because Luther recognized the abomination into which the Roman Catholic Mass had degenerated, he in turn warned his followers not to participate.¹ The same situation obtained with the Reformed. They did not permit their members to receive communion at the Lutheran celebrations, and the Lutherans refused to join in the Reformed celebrations. For example, Zurich did not allow (even during union negotiations) for its students to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper at Strassburg. Likewise, the city of Bern refused to permit intercommunion with Calvin.² Luther said it was inappropriate for anyone who believed the real presence to participate in the same sacrament with someone who denied it. Conrad Porta in his 1604 compilation of Luther's practical advice states that Luther claimed that the celebration done by those who denied the real presence was no sacrament at all.

Mag man denn auch das Sacrament nehmen von einem Prediger, der oeffentlich lehret, dass der wahre Leib und Blut Christi nicht im Sacrament sey?

¹Ernst Bizer, "The Problem of Intercommunion in the Reformation," Intercommunion, edited by Donald Baillie (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 59.

²Ibid.

Antwort: . . . Aber D. Martin Luther sagt stracks Nein dazu, denn da hoeret auf nicht Wuerdigkeit der Person, sondern die Sache selbst, res ipsa, es ist kein Sacrament da.³

Under such circumstances, any participation on the part of the Lutherans was either in ignorance or in scorn of what they really believed concerning the sacrament. In 1533 Luther warned the Christians at Frankfurt am Main:

It terrifies me to hear that in one and the same church or at one and the same altar both parties are to find and to receive one and the same Sacrament and one party is to believe that it receives nothing but bread and wine, while the other is to believe that it receives the true body and blood of Christ. And I often wonder whether it is credible that a preacher or shepherd of souls can be so hardened and malicious as to say nothing about this and to let both parties go on in this way, receiving one and the same Sacrament, everyone according to his own faith, etc. If such a person exists, he must have a heart harder than any stone, steel, or adamant; he must, in fact, be an apostle of wrath. . . . Whoever, therefore, has such preachers or suspects them to be such, let him be warned against them as against the devil incarnate himself.⁴

Luther did not use the term "close communion." But a statement like that above indicates that Luther practiced what later came to be called close communion. His reasons for restricting participation were three-fold. The first reason, as seen above, was that Luther maintained that true believers should have nothing to do with those who denied the real presence, a doctrinal reason. Accordingly, Luther maintained vigorously that the Zwinglians should be totally avoided.

. . . I shall leave nothing undone, God willing, to place the truth clearly and plainly before their eyes and win away some of their disciples, or at least to strengthen the simple and weak

³Conrad Porta, Pastorale Lutheri (reprint of 1604 edition; Noerdlingen: C. H. Beck'schen, 1842), p. 431.

⁴Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), II, 813.

and protect them from the fanatics' poison. Even if I do not succeed in this (from which may God protect me), at any rate I will have made my testimony before God and all the world, and declared that I have nothing to do with these blasphemers of the sacrament and fanatics, nor have I ever had, nor will I ever have, God willing, and I shall wash my hands of all the blood of those souls whom they steal, murder, and seduce from Christ with their poison.⁵

Luther's second reason centers around the necessity of establishing the faith of the individual participant in the Lord's Supper. He maintains that the status or condition of the communicant be ascertained before an individual is admitted to Holy Communion. In a sermon of 1523 Luther said:

Christ addressed His sermon to all, as did the apostles later on. All heard it, believers and unbelievers. He who accepted it, accepted it. This we, too, must do. But we must not cast the Sacrament to crowds of people in this way. . . . When I preach the Gospel, I do not know upon whom it makes an impression; but in the case of the Sacrament I should hold that it has made an impression upon him who comes to it.⁶

Luther thus distinguishes between the spoken Word, which is given to all who will listen in the hope that the Holy Spirit will lead some to repentance and faith, and the Lord's Supper, which is given to those who have come to faith. For Luther sees the Lord's Supper as a gift of God's assurance to the individual Christian. Participation in the Lord's Supper is the means God uses to assure each and every Christian participating that Christ's work of atonement is for him personally. Thus Luther assumes that those who come to the Lord's Supper are Christians who understand what God is giving them in Holy Communion. In a sermon on

⁵"This is My Body," 1527, Luther's Works (American Edition; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), XXXVII, 20.

⁶Plass, II, 809.

John 4:47-54 Luther says:

This individualizing goes on also in the Lord's Supper. During its administration the body of Christ is given to you in particular with the bread and the blood with the wine, while you in particular are told that His body was given for you and that His blood was shed for you. This is done so that you do not doubt but appropriate this sacrifice as your very own because it is placed into your mouth and made your own, to eat and to drink for yourself only. In this act of communing, God is certainly not dealing and speaking with any person but you.⁷

To be as certain as possible that those who participate do come in true faith Luther advocates the practice of announcement or registration of one's intention to participate in the Sacrament. When Luther sent out his "visitors" to the various evangelical congregations, they were instructed to recommend the following procedure:

Nobody is to be admitted to the Sacrament unless he has previously informed his Pastor. He should investigate whether he is correctly instructed concerning the Sacrament, whether he needs advice in other matters, or whether he is such a person of whom it is known that he is well instructed in everything.⁸

In a writing of 1523 Luther advocates a procedure for testing the faith and the life of those who intend to commune. Luther states that the Pastor should admit to communion only those (1) who know the nature and meaning of the Lord's Supper, (2) who know the reasons for their own participation in the sacrament, and (3) whose lives witness to their putting their faith into practice.

Those who are about to commune are to announce to the bishop or the minister in charge that they want to partake of the Lord's Supper, so that he may know their names and their life. Then let him not admit the petitioners unless they give an account of

⁷Ibid.,

⁸St. Louis edition, X, 1655, quoted in Lutheran Witness, XVIII (February 21, 1900), 138.

their faith and reply to the question whether they know what the Lord's Supper is, what it stands for, and of what they desire to become partakers by its use; to wit, whether they are able to recite the words of consecration from memory and explain that they come because of the awareness of sin or the fear of death, or troubled by some other evil of the temptation of the flesh, hunger and thirst for the Word and sign of grace and salvation from the Lord through the minister. . . . Then, when the minister in charge sees that they understand all these things, he should also note whether they prove this faith and knowledge by their life and conduct (for even Satan understands all these things and is able to talk about them); that is, if he should see some gross sinner, let him absolutely exclude him from this Supper unless by some clear proof he has testified that his life has changed.⁹

The third reason Luther limits participation in the Lord's Supper arises from his recognition of the fellowship and unity that is professed by joint participation. In his 1519 treatise on the sacrament Luther recognizes that reception of the sacrament creates both a horizontal and vertical fellowship--fellowship with Christ and with each other. "To receive this Sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this incorporation with Christ and all the saints."¹⁰ Luther furthermore urges that every effort be made to maintain the unity, for the sacrament cannot tolerate discord. It rather creates unity and fellowship, for in the sacrament interchanges our sins and Christ's blessings, and in this way makes those of us who receive these blessings one loaf.¹¹ Yet, in this treatise Luther recognizes that there is a tension between the fellowship given in the sacrament and our duty as Christians to live that fellowship, and the realization that this unity is always

⁹"Formula of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," Plass, II, 809-810.

¹⁰"The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," Luther's Works (American Edition; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), XXXV, 51.

¹¹Ibid., p. 58.

something hidden so that men do not trust in human relationships, but in Christ.¹² The fact that this fellowship is hidden creates the problem of limiting the sacrament. For if the fellowship in the sacrament is something that holds together the people of God, then those who by their teaching separate and divide the people of God must not be admitted to the fellowship. In a sermon of 1524 on I Cor. 11:23-26 Luther talks about this very matter. He begins by stating that the unity of Christendom is something desirable. He maintains that Christ wants us all not only to hear the same Word in preaching, but to eat and drink at the same table with each other. One may hear a sermon, however, and even though he participates in hearing it with every one else present, he may disagree with it and react against it. But participation in the Lord's Supper is different. Here every one who participates publically confesses that he is united with every one else who participates.

Therefore although also the Gospel holds Christians together, the Lord's Supper does so still more. By attending it every Christian confesses publically and for himself what he believes. There those who have a different faith part ways, and those meet who have the same faith, whose hope and heart toward the Lord are one.¹³

Thus, Luther maintains that those who are not at one in their understanding should not participate in the sacrament together. For the sacrament is a communio, a fellowship.

Those who do not want to be of the same faith, doctrine, and life, as other Christians are, are called excommunicatis, people who are dissimilar in doctrine, words, understanding, and life. Therefore these should not be tolerated in the group that has the same understanding; they would divide it and split it up.¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 62.

¹³Plass, II, 812.

¹⁴Ibid.

As further reason for insisting on the unity of those who join together in the sacrament, Luther interprets the symbolism of the one loaf. He argues that the sacrament joins us together into one faith and confession. The sacrament is a means to maintain the unity of this fellowship. One dare not remain in this fellowship if he desires to hold some faith other than that created in the sacrament.

The teachers of old have had some fine thoughts about this matter. They have said that Christ purposely used bread and wine for His Supper. For every kernel of grain has its own body and form, but they are ground together and become one bread. Just so every human being is an individual and a creature apart from others. But in the Sacrament we are, as it were, baked into one cake; for there we have the same faith, the same confession, love, and hope. The same thing applies to the wine. There are many grapes and little berries, and each has its own body and form. But when they turn to wine, the inequality no longer exists; for the wine is one, fine, beautiful juice. Christians, too, should be like this. Thus the fathers have explained it, and to do so is not wrong. For the Sacrament is to serve as a means to hold the Christians together in the same understanding, doctrine, and faith, so that nobody should be an individual kernel apart from the rest and have his own doctrine and separate faith. For the devil takes no holiday. He loves to tear this unity and equality to shreds, because he well knows how much injury is done when all of us believe the same thing and cling to one head.¹⁵

The Lutheran Confessions, likewise, do not deal directly with the practice of close communion. For the Confessions themselves do not present an explicit practice. The statements of the Confessions are concerned primarily with the defense and proclamation of the correct understanding of the nature of the sacrament. They defend the Lutheran teaching against the abominations both of the Roman Mass and of the Reformed memorial. In regard to admission to the sacrament, many parts of the Confessions are more concerned about the people who needed to cultivate

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¹⁵Ibid., pp. 812-813.

more frequent participation and overcome their fear of the sacrament, than limiting the sacrament for doctrinal reasons.

While the Confessions, therefore, cannot be directly appealed to for guidance on the practice of close communion, they nevertheless make a number of statements that have implications for guarding the fellowship at the Lord's table. Melancthon picks up the idea of the necessity of an examination of communicants before their participation.

The people are accustomed to receive the sacrament together, in so far as they are fit to do so. This likewise increases the reverence and devotion of public worship, for none are admitted unless they are first heard and examined. The people are also admonished concerning the value and use of the sacrament and the great consolation it offers.¹⁶

This examination was not only a registration or even a time to test the faith of the communicant, but included the absolution being given to the penitent.

Confession has not been abolished in our churches, for it is not customary to administer the body of Christ except to those who have previously been examined and absolved.¹⁷

Melancthon further states:

In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved.¹⁸

This testing of the communicants prior to their admission had other implications, too. It involved a screening out and removal of the impenitent and open sinners from the eucharistic fellowship. "The openly wicked

¹⁶Augsburg Confession (Latin), XXIV, 5-6, The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 56.

¹⁷Augsburg Confession (Latin), XXV, 1, Tappert, p. 61.

¹⁸Apology, XXIV, 2, Tappert, p. 249.

and the despisers of the sacraments are excommunicated."¹⁹ The Smalcald Articles likewise state, "Excommunication excludes those who are manifest and impenitent sinners from the sacrament and other fellowship of the church until they mend their ways and avoid sin."²⁰ Furthermore, in the Large Catechism, Luther states, "Those who are shameless and unruly must be told to stay away, for they are not fit to receive the forgiveness of sins since they do not desire it and do not want to be good."²¹

Another group of citations from the Confessions indicate that faith is the necessary prerequisite to participation. The Epitome states:

We believe, teach, and confess that there is only one kind of unworthy guests, namely those who do not believe. . . . We believe, teach and confess that the entire worthiness of the guests at this heavenly feast is and consists solely and alone in the most holy obedience and complete merit of Christ, which we make our own through genuine faith and of which we are assured through the sacrament. Worthiness consists not at all in our own virtues or in our internal and external preparations.²²

While faith in general is made the prerequisite in the above citation, other citations indicate that faith includes belief in the words of institution, an acceptance and understanding of what is occurring in the sacrament.

So everyone who wishes to be a Christian and go to the sacrament should be familiar with them [words of institution]. For we do

¹⁹Apology, XI, 4, Tappert, p. 180.

²⁰Part III, Article IX, Tappert p. 314.

²¹v, 58, Tappert p. 453. It is interesting to note that this quote from the Large Catechism is used in a popular presentation of Lutheran doctrine by George Luecke, Distinctive Doctrines and Customs of the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 44, to prove that in close communion only those who agree with the Lutheran teaching should be admitted to the sacrament.

²²VII, 18 and 20, Tappert, p. 484.

not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come.²³

This faith is further defined as faith in the specific appropriation of the words "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins" in the Small Catechism.

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Answer: . . . He is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins." On the other hand, he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require truly believing hearts.²⁴

Two other quotations from the Confessions can be fruitful for inferences towards the idea of close communion. In both of these instances, the context indicates that the antithesis is the Zwinglian notion of the Lord's Supper as a memorial meal, in which the disciples of Christ find their identity in the remembrance of their Lord.

Some clever people imagine that the Lord's Supper was instituted for two reasons. First, it was supposed to be a mark and witness of profession, just as a certain type of hood is the mark of a particular monastic profession. . . . The sacraments are not only signs among men, but signs of God's will toward us.²⁵

It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians [The Latin text reads, "to be marks of profession among men."], but that they are signs and testimonies of God's will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening faith.²⁶

At first glance these quotations seem to indicate that the sacraments are not to be used in defining confessional relationships. It would

²³Large Catechism, V, 2, Tappert, p. 447.

²⁴VI, 10, Tappert, p. 352.

²⁵Apology, XXIV, 68-69, Tappert, pp. 261-262.

²⁶Augsburg Confession (German), XIII, 1, Tappert, p. 35.

seem that Melancthon is saying that the sacraments are not to be used to indicate divisions among men. Mitigating against this interpretation, however, are two considerations. First, this statement is being said against the Zwinglian perversion of the sacrament. Secondly, the words "not only" appear in both of these statements. Melancthon, accordingly, is stating that the horizontal fellowship among men is not the chief feature of the sacrament. But he is not denying that it is a feature.

In conclusion, it seems obvious that the practice of close communion was not a major issue at the time of the Reformation. In general, each fellowship existing practiced restrictive communion. Members of the church, it was assumed, would not participate in the sacrament outside their own fellowship. That there were some violations of this principle is evident from Luther's strong statement against Reformed and Lutherans communing at the same altar. But by and large, each group went their separate way. There was sufficient disunity on the nature of the sacrament that any sort of common celebration was virtually unthinkable.

CHAPTER IV

GERMANY AFTER THE REFORMATION

After the Reformation, the Lutheran churches in Germany practiced close communion. They refused to let members of the Reformed churches participate in their celebrations of the Lord's Supper as a constant witness against the errors of Zwingli and Calvin.¹ Although this was the general policy, there were exceptions. In spite of the fact, for instance, that Luther and Bucer did not agree on the precise means of the presence of Christ in the sacrament, intercommunion and joint communion was not broken.² Likewise, the fact that Melancthon never attested to the manducato oralis and produced the Variata of the Augsburg Confession never broke sacramental fellowship with Luther.³ Furthermore, various attempts were made to establish union arrangements between Lutherans and Reformed. The Wittenberg Concord was an attempt, but proved futile when the Swiss would not go along with Bucer.⁴ The Consensus of Sendomir in 1570 brought together Lutherans, Calvinists, and Bohemian Brethren of Poland and neighboring Slavic lands. It included mutual

¹Henry Eyster Jacobs, editor, The Lutheran Cyclopedia (New York: Scribner, 1899), p. 9.

²Ernst Bizer, "The Problem of Intercommunion in the Reformation," Intercommunion, edited by Donald Baillie (New York: Harper, 1952), pp. 68-73.

³Ibid., pp. 74-78.

⁴Ibid., pp. 72-73.

open communion.⁵ The Synod of Charenton in 1631 brought about union of the Lutherans and the Huguenots in France, although this union was never recognized by the German Lutherans.⁶ The 1817 Prussian Union was an attempt to merge completely the Lutheran and the Reformed churches in the realm of King Frederick William IV of Prussia.

On the other hand, all of these attempts at intercommunion among those who were doctrinally disunited were short-lived in their success. For most Lutherans continued to regard doctrinal unity as a prerequisite to intercommunion.⁷ In fact, Payne concludes:

In the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century the question of "intercommunion," or--better--"mutual open communion," appears rarely to have been directly examined and discussed on doctrinal grounds by the non-Roman churches. Where it presented itself, it was as a practical issue.⁸

In the nineteenth century the Prussian Union was forced on the German church by the emperor. The occasion for this union was the three hundredth anniversary celebration of the Reformation in 1817. With the issuance of a common agenda, Lutheran and Reformed Christians received the sacrament together. In addition, the resulting union church would not have been possible, had not rationalism eroded the distinctive Lutheran characteristics of many of the German churches. Accordingly, with the blurring of the distinctive Lutheran doctrine of the real

⁵Ernest A. Payne, "Intercommunion from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," Intercommunion, edited by Donald Ballie (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 86.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁸Ibid., p. 84.

presence in the sacrament the need to maintain close communion no longer existed. So effective was the two-pronged attack of imperial edict and rationalistic loss of the Lutheran doctrine that by the turn of the twentieth century the practice of close communion was no longer widely observed among the evangelical churches of Germany.

Almost everywhere is the admission of the Reformed as guests to the Lord's Supper in practice. And where it is refused, this is not because the congregation takes offense at it, but because it is against the conviction of the pastor.⁹

All was not lost, however, to the Prussian Union and to rationalism. Claus Harms' "Ninety-five Theses" fought against rationalism. Thesis 78 stated, "If the body and blood of Jesus Christ were present in the bread and wine at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, this is still true in 1817."¹⁰ The Prussian Union was successfully resisted by those who wanted to cling to Lutheran doctrine and practice. Loehe, Harnack, Kahnis, and Delitzsch were among the nineteenth century theologians in Germany who argued for the confessional Lutheran practice of rejecting communing at the same altar with Reformed and United Christians. They allowed no exceptions and insisted that in "mixed" parishes all communicants must truly believe the Lutheran teaching before a Lutheran pastor should administer Holy Communion.¹¹ For Loehe stated that

⁹Jacobs, p. 9.

¹⁰Carl S. Meyer, Moving Frontiers (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 68.

¹¹Walter Richard Bouman, The Unity of the Church in Nineteenth-Century Confessional Lutheranism (Albany: untyped doctoral dissertation for Ruprecht-Karl-Universität zu Heidelberg, 1962), p. 275.

administering the sacrament in double form to members of differing confessional groups was equal to serving two Lords. To have altar fellowship where there is not doctrinal consensus is sin.¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 269.

CHAPTER V

THE GENERAL SYNOD

The Muhlenberg branch of Lutheranism was the first to develop extensively in the United States. It was the Muhlenberg strain that was instrumental in the forming of the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1748. At the time the question of closed versus open communion was not an issue. The implications, however, of the liturgy adopted in 1748 clearly emphasized the close fellowship that exists in the Lord's Supper. The suggestions for the conducting of communion services indicates that the idea represented by the later concept of close communion was what was practiced. Before every communion, there was a two-week period for anyone to indicate his intention to participate. In this registration process the pastor was to ascertain that there was no sort of strife that would hinder the person's reception. Then, on the day preceding the communion service a confessional service was held for the communicants.¹ While this practice reflects many of the concerns of Luther, it does not indicate precisely whether only Lutherans were able to get to the altar after this elaborate procedure was followed. It is clear that the Pennsylvania Ministerium in its early stages did carefully guard the communion rail. Jacobs reports, however, that because of its fidelity to the Lutheran faith, the Ministerium welcomed the recognition of faith in

¹Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, in The American Church History Series (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1899), IV, 272ff., also Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 59.

others outside the Lutheran church.² Whether this welcoming came about due to their common German heritage in their new home; whether it came about due to frontier conditions and the absence of regular pastors; whether it regularly and as a matter of principle included altar fellowship--questions like these are very difficult to answer.

What is less difficult to ascertain, however, is the effect rationalism made on the Lutheran churches in the United States, their doctrine, and consequently their admission requirements to the Lord's Supper. Already by 1800 rationalism was eating away at the Lutheran identity in general and the sacramental emphasis in particular.³ With this gone, "there was no important obstacle to union and merger with other denominations."⁴ Frederick H. Quitmann produced a rationalistic catechism in 1814. For him and the New York Ministerium of which he was a member and a leader, the Lord's Supper became merely a pious memorial, a view hardly different from the Reformed view.⁵

Charles Porterfield Krauth described the process of rationalism on American Lutheranism from the vantage point of 1871. Rationalism proceeded first to ignore the doctrinal bases of practical truths. Then, once the doctrine had been conceded, unionistic efforts on the basis of general Protestant orthodoxy tried to assimilate the Lutheran church with

²Jacobs, A History, p. 277.

³Reginald W. Dietz, Meaning and Practice of the Lord's Supper, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 142.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

the Reformed doctrine and practice. This unionism tended to set aside doctrine completely as a basis for union, and finally submitted all doctrine to erosion through rational processes.⁶

In regard to communion practices, Krauth's theses can be demonstrated to be correct. That the doctrine was ignored can be seen from the catechism of Quitmann. The Reformed view of the Lord's Supper as a memorial was adopted. Accordingly, the discipline with which previous generations had guarded the sacrament from abuse broke down in the Lutheran church.⁷ Finally, doctrine was set aside completely, as the following formula used as an invitation to Holy Communion demonstrates:

In the name of Christ, our common and only master, I say to all who own Him as their Savior, and resolve to be His faithful subjects: ye are welcome to this feast of love.⁸

This formula was widely distributed and gained widespread use both in the New York and Pennsylvania Ministeriums between 1810 and 1820.⁹

This formula, which opened the Lutheran altars to anyone present in the service, appeared in the agendas of the General Synod until 1899.¹⁰

The General Synod put its principle into practice. At Hagerstown in 1837 a communion was celebrated with "the brethren, united with many followers of Christ, of our own as well as sister churches."¹¹

⁶The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871), p. 198.

⁷Dietz, p. 143.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., and Jacobs, A History, p. 341.

¹⁰G. Friedrich Bente, American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), II, 55.

¹¹Ibid., p. 54.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West was organized in 1833 and joined the General Synod in 1841. This group practiced open communion.

All who are in good standing in other fundamentally orthodox denominations are always invited to partake with us. This will be seen from the following invitation contained in our liturgy.¹²

The invitation then cited is the same as the one mentioned above as arising in the New York Ministerium in the 1810's. Likewise, the South Carolina Synod in its Discipline, Articles of Faith and Synodical Constitution said that the Lutheran idea of the Lord's Supper and the Protestant idea were one and the same. All could join together at the table of the Lord.

For however much individual churches may differ as regards minor and non-essential features in the Christian system, all agree in professing one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Around the table of their common Lord and Master they may meet in the hallowed exercise of Christian love. At the table of Christ they may forget their minor differences, and commune in sweet and endearing fellowship with each other and their love.¹³

The influence of Dr. S. S. Schmucker on the General Synod need not be demonstrated. This patriarch of the General Synod, however, as early as 1840 had given up the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. His Portraiture of Lutheranism published in that year states that "improved Lutheranism" should give up the strong language of the sixteenth century, as the Reformed had already done. He rejected the view of the bodily presence of Christ and accepted the view that the bread and wine in the sacrament were symbolic representations of Christ's

¹²Virgilius Ferm, The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology (New York: The Century Co., 1927), p. 103.

¹³Ibid., p. 152.

absent body.¹⁴ Likewise, in his catechism Dr. Schmucker accepts the Reformed statement that "worthy communicants, in this ordinance, by faith spiritually feed on the body and blood of the Redeemer, thus holding communion or fellowship with Him."¹⁵ Accordingly, it is no wonder that under the urging of Dr. Schmucker, the Philadelphia convention of the General Synod in 1845 approved "the practise which has hitherto prevailed in our churches, of inviting communicants in regular standing in either church [Lutheran or Reformed] to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the other."¹⁶ In 1848 Dr. Schmucker presented the "Apostolic Protestant Union" to the General Synod. It advocated "occasional free sacramental communion by all whose views of duty allowed it."¹⁷ This, too, was adopted. Finally, in 1855 the Definite Platform called upon all of American Lutheranism to give up the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence completely and to adopt the Reformed doctrine. While the Definite Platform itself was rejected by the General Synod, it nevertheless, at least on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, reflected what actually existed in much of the General Synod. The Reformed and the Lutherans participated together in the sacrament, because they both believed the Reformed doctrine.

In 1864 the General Synod somewhat revised its liturgy. After the words of institution the following invitation appeared:

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 137-138.

¹⁵Krauth, p. 639.

¹⁶Bente, II, 55.

¹⁷Ibid., 64-65.

Ye who have sincerely repented of your sins, and are earnestly desirous of the salvation of your souls, through our Lord Jesus Christ, draw near with faith, and partake of this holy sacrament, for the comfort and encouragement in the service of God, and the work of your salvation. In the name of Jesus Christ, I say to all who sincerely love him, ye are welcome to this feast of love.¹⁸

They were willing to make this invitation, because they openly claimed they shared a common understanding of the sacrament with other Protestants. Open communion was vigorously defended. The defensiveness of this period can be understood when it is remembered at this time the western synods in the United States, not in the General Synod, who were largely influenced by the confessional reawakening of the nineteenth century in Germany, were insisting on a more restrictive practice of communion among Lutherans. Accordingly, the General Synod challenged the stance of these newer bodies. In defense of their own position, they challenged others to show Biblical or Confessional ground for subordinating Christian to denominational fellowship.¹⁹ They were reacting against those groups who were to organize the General Council and adopt the Galesburg Rule, restricting Lutheran altars to Lutheran communicants. Yet, in spite of their desire for open communion, they did not want their altars open to everyone. Although they did not care from which historical fellowship communicants came, they did insist that these people be penitent and awakened sinners who believed in Jesus Christ.²⁰

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the General Synod was still maintaining its long held position of open

¹⁸Dietz, pp. 151-152.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

communion. Milton J. Valentine stated in 1893 that on the basis of the doctrine of the oneness of all believers in Articles VII and VIII of the Apology the General Synod maintains fraternal relationships with orthodox Protestants. No restrictive laws were to limit altar fellowship, but freedom of conscience was the principle that allowed maximum freedom to individual ministers and members.²¹ The Pittsburgh and Allegheny Pastoral Conference of the General Synod adopted this statement in 1894: "We have open communion, and invite to it all members of the Evangelical Protestant churches."²² In 1899 Milton Valentine helped to explain the General Synod's position on open communion in the article "Altar Fellowship" in Jacob's Lutheran Cyclopedia. Valentine states that the General Synod maintains the original practice of "opening the privilege of the Lord's Supper to members, in good, and regular standing, of other orthodox churches."²³ The rationale for this practice is four-fold. First, the General Synod felt that it could not narrow admission to the Lord's Supper any further than Christ did at the Last Supper. Secondly, it attempted to take seriously Christ's prayer for unity and Paul's warning against schism by not setting up any unnecessary barriers to participation in the sacrament. The General Synod felt that the unity of all believers had to be shown concretely by the denominational churches if the offense of schism was to be avoided. Thirdly, it maintained on the basis

²¹Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America," Church in Fellowship, edited by Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 26.

²²Bente, II, 55, and Lehre und Wehre, XLI (February 1895), 58.

²³Henry Eyster Jacobs (New York: Scribner, 1899), p. 9.

of the statement in the Augsburg Confession that sacraments were signs by which Christians (not denominations) were to be known, that all who demonstrated themselves to be Christians were to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Finally, those who used the sacrament to testify against the distinctive teachings of another denomination were considered to be abusing the sacrament. The General Synod rather claimed the Sacrament should be used to demonstrate the spiritual oneness of the denominations. "The narrowest denominational unity should not be made to obscure the particular church's living connection with the one holy Christian church."²⁴ The position of the General Synod was further solidified by its Richmond convention in 1909. The convention was reacting against the Wartburg Synod which had adopted the Galesburg Rule. It officially rejected the position that limited Lutheran altars to Lutheran communicants. "The General Synod, while allowing all congregations and individuals connected with it the fullest Christian liberty, does not approve of synodical enactments which in any way narrow its confessional basis or abridge intersynodical fellowship and transfers."²⁵

The General Synod united with most of the synods that had formed the General Council into the United Lutheran Church in America in 1918. The General Council was the group who had sought a more restrictive communion practice among Lutherans, and whose concern led to the development of the Galesburg Rule. The influence of the General Council on the United Lutheran Church in America, at least on paper was considerable. The

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Bente, II, 171.

Chicago Theses adopted by the National Lutheran Council in 1919 recognized the existence of Christians in other denominations, but advocated the following practice for member church bodies:

Our church, therefore, regards it as a matter of principle that its members . . . partake of the Holy Supper at their own altars, and that pulpit and altar fellowship with pastors and people of other confessions are to be avoided as contrary to a true and consistent Lutheranism.²⁶

Furthermore, the Washington Declaration, adopted in 1920 by the ULCA stated:

C. Concerning the Organic Union of Protestant Churches.

V. That until a more complete unity of confession than now exists, The United Lutheran Church in America is bound in duty and conscience to maintain its separate identity as a witness to the truth which it knows; and its members, ~~its ministers,~~ its pulpits, its fonts, and its altars must testify only to that truth.²⁷

At least in the Midwest, where the old General Council had been predominant, this was interpreted as closing altars to non-Lutherans. Eastern synods, however, where the General Synod had been more in prominence, continued to open up their altars more frequently to non-Lutherans.²⁸ At least on paper, however, the ULCA declared that its altars should testify to the separate identity of the Lutheran church. This is a big step back toward a Lutheran understanding from the rationalism of the mid-nineteenth century.

²⁶Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 133, p. 301.

²⁷Meuser, p. 33.

²⁸Ibid., p. 7.

In 1940 the Pittsburgh Agreement of the ULCA urged avoidance in altar fellowship indiscriminately with people from other denominations "whereby doctrinal differences are ignored or virtually made matters of indifference."²⁹ The trend back from indiscriminate fellowship continued with the publication of the Guide to Principles Governing Local Interdenominational Relationships of ULCA Congregations, their Auxiliaries, and Ministers in 1954. This document stated that interdenominational activities are not to deny convictions. Included in this category are "interdenominational or non-denominational services at which the Sacrament of the Altar is administered. . . . Interdenominational services in which the Sacrament of Holy Communion is included and even 'featured' . . . clearly deny Lutheran conviction and suppress our 'testimony to what we hold to be truth.'"³⁰

The 1960 convention of the ULCA dealt with the question of open and closed communion. The convention produced a document called The Sacrament of the Altar and Its Implications. This document indicates a return to some of the principles and emphases brought out in Luther and the Confessions, although it still is not the narrow, closed view that existed among other Lutherans. While it was not legalistic, it nevertheless came out against the practice of the general invitation as it had been practiced from the nineteenth century, and favored a more guarded admission policy to the Lord's Table.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper in the context of the community of faith indicates that strictly speaking there is no such thing as

²⁹Ibid., p. 35.

³⁰Ibid., p. 39.

an "open communion." The sacrament must not be distributed indiscriminately. The Order of Public Confession helpfully indicates the nature of the obedience which the sacrament itself carries with it:

- a. The sacrament is for those who humbly confess their sins and who hunger and thirst after righteousness.
 - b. They who come to the Lord's Table are diligently to examine themselves.
 - c. They who participate . . . are bidden to do so in remembrance of Christ, showing His death and "that He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification."
 - d. They . . . are bound to give the Lord hearty thanks for his saving death and resurrection.
 - e. They are bound to love one another even as He has loved them.
 - f. They are obliged to take up their cross and follow him.
- Therefore, the sacrament is open only to those baptized Christians who respond in faith and in willing, thankful obedience to the gospel, and this faith should not be obscured by the issuing of a general invitation.³¹

The successor to the ULCA was the Lutheran Church in America in 1962. This body states in Article V, Section 1 of its constitution: "This church lives . . . (d) To safeguard . . . the right administration of the Sacrament by all its ministers and in all its congregations in conformity with its Confession of Faith."³² Just what this means in regard to admission to the Lord's Supper is hard to ascertain. A 1963 statement says:

~~ULCA~~ altars, pulpits, and fonts must witness to its concept of the Gospel and Sacraments; indiscriminate pulpit and altar fellowship with other denominations, especially those not basically evangelical is disapproved No blanket judgment is made on celebration of the Lord's Supper in interdenominational assemblies, but indiscriminate participation is discouraged.³³

The practice of the LCA today varies. Those who follow the officially adopted service do not include a general invitation. It is common

³¹Ibid., p. 40.

³²Ibid., p. 42.

³³Ibid., p. 19.

knowledge, however, that some LCA churches still include the old general invitation from the rationalistic period. Mark Thomsen, a member of the LCA, stated in a 1962 periodical article that the Lutherans were wrong when they rejected altar fellowship with "recognized Christian brothers in other denominations."³⁴ He claims that this practice arose from a misunderstanding of fellowship. As the fellowship of reconciliation is shared by all, all should be at the same table together.³⁵ It would be fair to say that the LCA practices open communion today at least toward all other Lutherans, since they claim to be in fellowship with all other Lutherans. In addition, in some places at least, open communion with non-Lutherans is still the order of the day.

³⁴Mark Thomsen, "The Fellowship of the Reconciled and Intercommunion," Lutheran Quarterly, XIV (February 1962), 49-52.

³⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The General Council was formed in 1867 after the Pennsylvania Ministerium had left the General Synod. The Pennsylvania Ministerium had done an about face. Earlier in the nineteenth century it had left the General Synod to achieve a greater degree of cooperation with the Reformed in Pennsylvania. In 1853 it had rejoined. But in 1866 under pressure from the General Synod itself it left again. The Pennsylvania Ministerium then sought a closer union with other more conservative Lutheran bodies on the basis of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. The Western synods that joined with the Pennsylvania Ministerium were still a bit suspicious of the Ministerium because it had changed so drastically in such a short time. In 1867 the Ohio Synod raised four points that it felt needed clarification in the Council. The second of these was "Mixed Communion."¹ This topic, along with that of pulpit fellowship, secret societies, and chiliasm was to be a center of attention for the young General Council in its early years of history.

The General Council was not able to give the Ohio Synod a satisfactory answer. In its reply, the Council stated that there was nothing in its statements so far that would indicate an un-Lutheran practice in any of Ohio's concerns and trusted that when the Council would deliberate matters like these decisions would be made in conformity with the Scriptures and

¹Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 66, p. 157.

the Confessions.² The Ohio Synod was not satisfied with this statement and declined to join the General Council.

In 1867 the Iowa Synod also expressed its concern to the General Council about the practice of open communion. It asked specifically whether three statements were "virtually acknowledged in the 'Fundamental Principles . . . ' adopted by this body."³ The first of these concerned the policy of admitting ~~Reformed to Holy Communion.~~

I. That, according to the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church there must be, and is, condemned all church fellowship with such as are not Lutheran; for example, . . . the admittance of those of a different faith to the privilege of communion.⁴

The Council replied that it was not ready to accept Iowa's deductions. It referred the matter to the various District Synods and expressed the hope that the whole body could establish a uniform practice in the near future.⁵

By 1868 the General Council had expressed itself on the four points.⁶ The answer of the Council shows a desire on the one hand ~~to keep those who~~ are not one in faith with the Lutherans away from the altar. The statement called for maintaining "the principle of a discriminating as over against an indiscriminate Communion." Likewise, "heretics and fundamental errorists are to be excluded." The statement recognized the role of the

²Ibid., Document 67, p. 157.

³Ibid., Document 70, p. 160

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., Document 71, p. 161.

⁶Solomon E. Ochsenford, Documentary History of the General Council (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1912), pp. 330-331.

Pastor to examine those who are desiring to participate in the sacrament, because "the responsibility of an unworthy approach to the Lord's Table does not rest alone upon him who makes that approach, but also upon him who invites it." The Augsburg Confession's statement that only the "proved" are to be admitted is quoted. But on the other hand, the document also quotes from the "Preface to the Book of Concord," where it is maintained that Lutherans do not condemn those who err out of simplicity. The church's duty to approach and help these Christians is pointed out. The statement of the Apology that there are weak Christians who have built upon the stubble of human opinions, but who nevertheless are true Christians because they have the true foundation brings the document to a close. The impression is left that the Council was trying to exclude from its altars those who knowingly taught false doctrine, but was willing to retain a degree of charity towards the people in the churches of the false teachers. The General Council was trying to maintain two principles at the same time for the sake of unity. For on the one hand, the Western synods wanted the Council to eliminate the Reformed from the Lutheran altars by principle. On the other hand, the Pennsylvania Ministerium in the East thought it best to move its body slowly through the process of education, as it had done for the last several decades.⁷

The Wisconsin Synod found this same sort of vagueness in the statements of 1868 and withdrew from the General Council in 1869.⁸ The Minnesota Synod likewise requested clarification. In 1870 the reply to

⁷G. Friedrich Bente, American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), II, 200.

⁸Wolf, Document 74, pp. 166-167.

Minnesota confirms Minnesota's doubts as to the completeness of the rejection of the participation of those who held to false doctrine. The "fundamental errorists" were not all members of erring churches, but only those who destroy the "foundation" of the Christian faith.

Although the General Council holds the distinctive doctrines of our Evangelical Lutheran Church as in such sense fundamental, that those who err in them err in fundamental doctrines; nevertheless, in employing the terms "fundamental errorists," in the declarations made at Pittsburgh, it understands, not those who are the victims of involuntary mistake, but those who wilfully, wickedly, and persistently desert, in whole or in part, the Christian faith, especially as embodied in the Confessions of the Church Catholic, in the purest form in which it now exists on earth, to wit: the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and thus overturn or destroy the Foundation in them confessed; and who hold, defend, and extend these errors in the face of the admonitions of the Church, and to the leading away of men from the path of life.⁹

At the 1872 convention of the General Council in Akron, Ohio, the Iowa Synod again asked for clarification. It asked the Council to adopt the verbal statements made by Charles Porterfield Krauth, President of the Council, in 1870. The statement adopted maintained the principle of reserving Lutheran altars for Lutherans only, while allowing exceptions in individual cases.

I. THE RULE IS: Lutheran pulpits are for Lutheran ministers only. Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants only.

II. The Exceptions to the rule belong to the sphere of privilege, not of right.

III. The Determination of the exceptions is to be made in consonance with these principles, by the conscientious judgment of pastors, as the case arises.¹⁰

The 1875 convention at Galesburg, Illinois, considered the matter again. The convention recognized with gratitude the theses on the matter

⁹Ibid., Document 76, p. 169.

¹⁰Ibid., Document 77, p. 170.

presented at the Augustana Synod convention of the same year. These "Theses on Mixed Communion" urged a limiting of participation in the Lord's Supper.¹¹ In the first place, theses two and three pointed out that the congregation had to be sure each communicant had sufficient knowledge of the Word of God to examine himself. Secondly, the fourth thesis stated that the fellowship in the Lord's Supper was a means to fellowship among the communicants, as well as with Christ. Theses five and six concluded by stating the Augustana Synod's resulting practice:

5. Fellowship in the Supper with those who have and hold a doctrine differing from our Confession . . . is in a greater or less degree a denial of our own faith and confession, and is making little account of the Supper itself.
6. No others, therefore ought to be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper within the Church, than those who belong to the Church or have the same faith and confessions with our Church.¹²

The Galesburg convention also called the congregations and synods of the General Council to continue to strive for a greater conformity in practice on the subject of mixed communion, in harmony with the Council's previous "testimony on this subject, viz., the rule which accords with the word of God and with the confessions of our Church, . . . 'Lutheran Pulpits for Lutheran ministers only--Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only.'"¹³

The new phrase in the Galesburg resolution, "which accords with the word of God and with the confessions of our Church," was the source of debate on the practice of mixed communion in the periods following the

¹¹Ibid., Document 78, pp. 170-171.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., Document 79, p. 171.

Galesburg convention. The one side claimed that the Galesburg Declaration annulled the principle of exceptions in the Akron Resolution. It interpreted the word "rule" in a regulative, governmental sense. It claimed that since the rule was in accord with the Word and the Confessions, any exceptions would be unscriptural and unconfessional. The other side, however, maintained that the Galesburg Resolution did not annul the second and third parts of the Akron Resolution. It claimed that both the rule and the statement of exceptions were accepted as being in accord with the Word of God and the Confessions. It interpreted the resolution in an educational, rather than governmental manner.¹⁴ Prior to the 1876 convention, Dr. Krauth surveyed the various synods concerning their attitudes toward the Akron-Galesburg Resolutions. As a result, the 1876 convention asked Dr. Krauth to draw up a series of theses before the 1877 convention in the hope of settling the matter.¹⁵

Krauth drew up a lengthy set of one hundred and five "Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship."¹⁶ These theses interpreted the struggle of the General Council to arrive at a consensus on the practice of admitting only Lutherans to communion. These theses were the subject of debate at the 1877, 1879, and 1881 conventions, although only nine of the theses were actually discussed at these three meetings. Nevertheless, they were formative on the final view of the General Council on the subject.¹⁷

¹⁴Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, in The American Church History Series (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1899), IV, 482-483.

¹⁵Ochsenford, p. 344.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 345-376.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 345.

In the first two theses, Krauth takes up the phrase, "Rule, which accords with the Word of God and with the Confessions of our Church." These two theses were discussed at the 1877 convention. Krauth said, "In the Galesburg Declaration, the word 'Rule' is not used in the sense of 'prescriptive regulation,' but in the sense of 'general principle,' a principle of intrinsic validity and right."¹⁸ He regarded it as "what ought to be held as true" and considered its force as educational rather than legislative.¹⁹ He interpreted the phrase, "accords with the Word of God and with the Confessions of our Church," as meaning that the rule is "derived from the Word and Confessions."²⁰

Theses three to six were discussed at the Zanesville convention in 1879. Thesis three set forth the principle on which the Galesburg Rule was held to be valid. The Scriptures and the Confessions maintain that the altars of a congregation are "for those only who have been officially approved by it as communicants, by the tests in each case provided or accepted by this communion, and who are subject to its discipline if they prove unworthy of its privileges."²¹ The sixth thesis defines what was meant by a Lutheran altar. "By 'Lutheran altars' are meant places, whether public or private, for the administration of the Holy Supper, for the use of which the Lutheran Church is responsible."²² Since Lutheran altars

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 346.

were such, it was only natural, then, that those admitted to them should be admitted by Lutheran standards.

The admission to the Communion, for which the Lutheran Church makes herself responsible, should be that of Lutheran communicants, prepared, tested, and approved as such, in accordance with Lutheran principles and usages, and subject to Lutheran discipline.²³

The other theses pertinent to the subject of mixed communion were not discussed by the conventions of the General Council. But they do contain a number of points which clarify the rationale behind the actions of the General Council. Krauth interprets the word "only" in the Galesburg Rule as absolute. Exceptions, therefore, are to be understood as "exceptions" or as extraordinary cases that may arise.²⁴ Any so-called exceptions to this absolute rule must be carefully guarded according to three basic principles. First, the church itself, not any outside body or other denomination, must determine the validity of an exception. No one may demand entrance to the Lord's Supper. Secondly, the conditions under which an exception may be granted must be those which "arise," and are not "normal and constant." Thirdly, exceptions must be made in "consonance with the principles," by which is meant that an exception cannot imply "that the Rule is not in accord with the Word and Confessions, or is only a human rule of order, or that a claim of right to our pulpits and altars can be made in any case whatever by those not Lutheran."²⁵

Furthermore, Krauth points out that the movement in the General Council had been from a communion practice that at first had advocated a

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 346-347.

general invitation, toward a practice which admitted the Reformed as guests with some reservations and with some examination, and finally toward a practice which barred the Reformed from Lutheran altars and Lutherans from joint communion services with Protestants in general. The former practice of a general invitation is categorically ruled out as even a possible exception to the Rule in thesis sixteen.

They [exceptions] are not cases reached by "general invitation" to the Altar, as of "all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity;" or, "all who are in good standing in Evangelical Denominations," or "in sister churches," or on the ground that "we are all one."²⁶

Krauth recognizes that there was also a shift in thinking from the Akron Resolution to the Galesburg Rule. At Akron, most of the delegates considered the occasional admission of orthodox Protestants to be the exceptions allowed in the resolution. By the time of the Galesburg convention, however, these Reformed persons were those whom the majority wished to exclude.²⁷ With this change in position, it is no wonder that the battle was waged so hard. Actual practice within the General Council was illustrated by thesis twenty-five.

In spite of this clear and unanimous judgment of the General Council, some ministers within its bounds have treated the declaration as a dead letter, and continued the old and unguarded invitation (Thesis 16); others have thought that with the proper precaution of a previous interview, it allows of the occasional communion with us of persons in permanent connection with other churches. A third class holds that a consistent application of it precludes the admission of members in permanent connection with communions whose doctrine is in conflict with ours, whose existence is due to a rejection of our faith, and is in itself a tacit charge that the Lutheran Church is not entirely a pure Church.²⁸

²⁶Ibid., p. 348.

²⁷Ibid., p. 347.

²⁸Ibid., p. 350.

The question of those that "err from simplicity" that was a source of ambiguity in the 1860's was also considered by Krauth. He pointed out that the General Council was divided on this question, also. One side maintained that these could be admitted to communion without pointing out their errors or requiring them to renounce them. The other side maintained that these people should be instructed about the errors of their church so that they could decide in which of the two fellowships they should remain. This latter group maintained, therefore, that they should not be admitted to the Lord's Supper.²⁹

Krauth sums up the entire problem with this question:

Do the principles acknowledged by us all, preclude . . . the occasional admission to our altars of members of those "denominations" who purpose to remain in them, provided that such . . . members hold, not the confessed faith of their own denominations, but hold the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?³⁰

Krauth sums up the answer by showing how the two groups that answered "Yes" and "No" to that question, respectively, changed in relative strength through the years.

But the general spirit of the body tended to a growth in the stricter construction of inference, and in the parts of the General Council which had once been under influences most adverse to Lutheran practice, a solicitous care in regard to pulpit and altar became increasingly manifest.³¹

The 1889 convention of the General Council settled the matter with the adoption of a statement that declared the identity of the Akron statement with the Galesburg statement and maintained that both were in force.

²⁹Ibid., p. 351.

³⁰Ibid., p. 353.

³¹Ibid.

Inasmuch as the General Council has never annulled, rescinded or reconsidered the declarations made at Akron, Ohio, in the year 1872, they still remain, in all their parts and provisions, the action and rule of the General Council.

.....
 The true purport and effect of the action at Galesburg was to add to the declaration at Akron a statement of the source of the rule, and that, in all respects, that declaration in all its parts was left unchanged. . . . The present position of the General Council is to be understood and interpreted in such manner that neither the amendment and further explanation at Galesburg, nor the original action at Akron, be overlooked or ignored; both of which remain in full force and mutually interpret and supplement one another.³²

Henry Eyster Jacob's volume on Lutheran church history lists five reasons the General Council was against a "general invitation" to the Lord's Supper.³³ In the first place, it did away with the Lutheran practice of the confessional service. Secondly, it made those who desired to attend Holy Communion the sole judge of their personal fitness or of the evangelical character of their denomination. Thirdly, it removed entirely the church's right to judge who should approach her altar. Fourthly, it undermined church authority and discipline. Finally, it proclaimed an indifference on the part of the pastor and the congregation to doctrinal differences in the sacrament.

In the 1899 Lutheran Cyclopedia the article on the General Council's view of "Altar Fellowship" claimed there could be no joint celebration of the Lord's Supper any place where disunity existed.³⁴ It argued on the basis of I Corinthians 11:20, where the ouk estin was understood as meaning "it cannot be." The reason given was that the Lord's Supper was

³²Wolf, Document 81, pp. 178-179.

³³A History, p. 480.

³⁴edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs (New York: Scribner, 1899), pp. 8-9.

a confessional act. "When a Lutheran congregation on principle admits those of different faith, it thereby actually expresses its recognition of their false faith, and denies its own."³⁵ The article claimed that as long as both the Lutherans and the Reformed adhered to their confessions, no problem would exist at the altar. It is only when the spirit of unionism takes over, when confessional principles are ignored, that mixed altar fellowship becomes a question. The reason, therefore, that the General Council maintained its strong position on the Galesburg principle was because of its intention to take seriously its confessions.

In 1911 Theodore Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze published The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.³⁶ These authors stated that the reason Lutherans refused to participate in the same sacrament with members of other confessions was the Lutherans' realization that the sacrament was "a solemn reality in which we receive the body and blood of Christ."³⁷ The primary fellowship in the sacrament was that of the Christian and Christ. This fellowship could not possibly be shared with one who did not believe that in the sacrament Christ was really present. It is impossible, accordingly, to share a fellowship that is not there.³⁸ By admitting non-Lutherans to the Lutheran sacrament, Lutherans stood to lose everything they claimed on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions to be the case about the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶(Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911).

³⁷Ibid., p. 904.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 905-906.

If they [unionists] should [want to participate in the Lutheran sacrament], they are giving up nothing except respect for our convictions; and they are willing that we should be placed in the position of seeming to give up all that is most precious to us. If we should desire to participate with them in their sacrament, we are willing--in order to celebrate the mystery with them--to seem to be robbing it of the chief significance with which, in our conviction, it has been invested by our Lord.³⁹

Schmauk claims that the Lutheran practice of excluding those who are not Lutheran from the Lutheran sacrament is "taking religion seriously, as the most practical business of life."⁴⁰ For Lutherans cannot ask someone to do something which testifies against his own principles and beliefs. The Lutherans are not being uncharitable, but realistic. They are not attempting to exclude anyone from the Christian church, but simply identifying people as not Lutheran.⁴¹ Schmauk compares taking communion to voting. One cannot vote in a country of which he is not a citizen. There are no guest privileges of voting. Likewise, one cannot partake of the sacrament in a church of which he is not a member.⁴²

There never, however, was complete uniformity in the General Council. The principle of exceptions that was so jealously maintained in the Galesburg controversy remained. The educational process that the Galesburg Rule intended to become was never completely successful. As late as 1915 Jacob Fry's The Pastor's Guide, published by the General Council's publishing house itself, allowed for the admission of guests, albeit in a pastoral and evangelical way:

³⁹Ibid., p. 906.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 34.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 35.

It is not considered proper to give a general invitation to persons belonging to other congregations to participate in the Communion at the time when it is administered. If any public invitation is given, it should be at the time when the Communion and Preparatory services are announced, and such persons be requested to make personal application to the Pastor, so he may know who they are and judge their fitness to join in the Communion. The door should not be opened wider to strangers than to children of the household.⁴³

In 1918 the General Council joined together with the General Synod in forming the United Lutheran Church in America. The influence of the General Council with its previous emphasis on the Galesburg Rule upon the position of the ULCA on mixed and open communion has already been treated.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note, however, that the two bodies that had started the discussions relative to mixed communion, namely, the Ohio and Iowa Synods, had long since left the ranks of the General Council. The Ohio Synod had never joined the Council, since it never had received answers satisfactory to its members. The Iowa Synod, likewise, never joined the Council, although it did maintain loose ties with it. These two synods, together with the Buffalo Synod formed the American Lutheran Church in 1930.

The Constitution of the American Lutheran Church upholds the principle of the Galesburg Rule. Under the article "Confession and Faith," Section three reads:

The Synod regards unity in doctrine and practice the necessary prerequisite for church fellowship, and therefore adheres to the rule, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only," and rejects unionism in all its forms.⁴⁵

⁴³(Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1915), p. 54.

⁴⁴Supra, pp. 34-35.

⁴⁵Wolf, Document 145, p. 336.

Likewise, the Minneapolis Theses of 1925 uphold the Galesburg Rule as a necessary principle on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions.

They agree that the rule, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only" is not only in full accord with, but necessarily implied in, the teachings of the divine Word and the confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church. This rule, implying the rejection of all unionism and syncretism, must be observed as setting forth a principle elementary to sound and conservative Lutheranism.⁴⁶

These theses were adopted by the churches in the American Lutheran Conference. By 1952 these churches were seeking merger. In this process they produced a document called "United Testimony on Faith and Life." This document stated that the churches involved recognized the validity of the article in which the above quotation from the Minneapolis Theses is found. But the "United Testimony on Faith and Life" went on to say:

It is recognized that, in the application of these principles, situations calling for exceptions will arise. The individual Christian, the conscientious pastor, the local congregation, and the church bodies, in determining their attitudes in such situations, must earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the instruction of the inspired Word.⁴⁷

The church, whose synods in the 1860's and the 1870's found the General Council's principle of exceptions too vague, less than a hundred years later adopted that same principle as its own.

In 1954, however, Alf M. Kraabel, published out of Augsburg Publishing House a popular work titled Ten Studies on the Sacrament.⁴⁸ This work upheld the position of closed communion. For closed communion indicates loyalty to the "Scriptural confessions because they are

⁴⁶Ibid., Document 146, p. 341.

⁴⁷Ibid., Document 214, p. 511.

⁴⁸(Minneapolis).

scriptural.⁴⁹ On the one hand, Kraabel discouraged Lutherans from participating in any other church's communion, because to do so would compromise Lutheran teaching.

Devout Lutherans . . . will not accept the Sacrament unless it is administered in accordance with the accepted Lutheran order of service for the holy communion. To do so would be to approve by association false and unscriptural teachings concerning the Supper. If the devout Lutheran has no opportunity to commune in his own Church, he will not commune in any other Church. . . . The devout Lutheran will abstain from the Sacrament in any other than a Lutheran Church, even if to do so would cause offense to friends or relatives. Far worse would it be to offend the Lord by compromising the Faith, and by accepting as the Sacrament that which for him could not be the Sacrament.⁵⁰

But on the other hand, Kraabel maintained that it was consistent with the policy of closed communion to admit to the Lutheran celebration those who believed in the Lutheran doctrine, even though they had not completely joined the Lutheran church, especially in emergency conditions.

There are those who have not yet fully identified themselves with the Lutheran Church and who may never do so, but who do believe in the Real Presence, and who do believe that the Sacrament is a Means of Grace, who do believe that in it they do receive Christ in a personal and unique way. When the Pastor is fully satisfied in each individual instance, or when an emergency arises, it is well within the prerogatives, if not within the very duty of the Pastor to commune such a one. The Scriptural principle, however, of closed Communion must be adhered to at all times.⁵¹

In summary, the importance of the Galesburg Rule, both in its formulation and in its effect, cannot be minimized. The debate in the nineteenth century helped to steer the Lutheran practice of admission to the Lord's Supper away from its rationalistically established pattern of

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 109-110.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 108-109.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 110.

compatibility with the Reformed to a position that attempted to reflect a concern for the Lutheran doctrine as set forth in the Confessions. It led to a more conservative movement within what became the United Lutheran Church in America, as well as formed the basis for the constitutional policy of the American Lutheran Church. It returned twentieth century Lutheranism by and large back to the principle of a guarded altar to which people were not indiscriminately admitted.

CHAPTER VII

THE MISSOURI SYNOD

Unlike the American Lutheran Church, the Missouri Synod has not incorporated the Galesburg Rule into its constitution or handbook. In fact, the Handbook, as such, says nothing about the practice of close communion. It renounces as unionism the possibility of a Lutheran participating "in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession."¹ Likewise, its By-laws allow a Missouri Synod pastor to fill a non-Lutheran pulpit, but "under such circumstances a pastor will not publically celebrate the Lord's Supper in that congregation."² There is nothing official that explicitly limits the altars of Missouri Synod churches to Missouri Synod communicants.

Having said this, however, there is no doubt that the Missouri Synod has practiced the Galesburg Rule and in most cases limited it even more specifically to mean that Missouri Synod altars are for Missouri Synod Lutherans and others with whom the Missouri Synod is in fellowship only. In 1858 the following assessment of the Missourians was given by Philipp Schaff:

The pastors of the Old Lutheran group are for the most well indoctrinated, faithful, conscientious, and self-sacrificing, but at the same time, if a fortunate consequence does not hinder them, they are extremely exclusive and narrow minded people (so much so) that they could hardly consider the most pious Reformed as a Christian and would not at any price partake of

¹Missouri Synod, Handbook, 1969, p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 94.

the Lord's Holy Supper with him. Luther is for them the highest human authority, and especially that Luther who in the discussion at Marburg, with tears in his eyes, denied the brotherly handshake of Zwingli.³

In a 1953 article in the Lutheran Witness C. Thomas Spitz, Sr., sums up the Missouri Synod's practice by stating that the Galesburg Rule does not go far enough. For the Missouri Synod it should read, "Synodical Conference altars for Synodical Conference Lutherans only."⁴

While the Missouri Synod never went on record in its constitution as practicing close communion, the textbooks written by its Concordia Seminary professors do. Because of their impact on the clergy of the Missouri Synod, the writings of three of these professors will reveal the general attitude in the Missouri Synod. First, the opinion of Dr. Carl F. W. Walther, the father of the Missouri Synod, will be analyzed. Then, the statements of Dr. Francis Pieper in his Christian Dogmatics will be presented. Finally, the practical advice of Dr. John C. Fritz in his Pastoral Theology will demonstrate how the principle was encouraged to be applied in the Missouri Synod.

Walther maintained that it was not proper for Lutherans to celebrate the Lord's Supper with those who deny the Real Presence. It was natural for Reformed, Methodists, United Evangelicals, and other Protestants to celebrate together, because they had the same doctrine of the Lord's Supper. But on the basis of I Timothy 5:22 Walther stated that Lutherans

³Amerika, die politischen, sozialen und kirchlich-religioesen Zustände der Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika (Berlin, 1858), translated by August R. Suelflow in Moving Frontiers, edited by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 184.

⁴"Thoughts on Close Communion," LXXII (August 4, 1953), 264.

should not participate in the impurity of those who deny the Real Presence. The principle is "dass nicht zugleich Wuerdige und Unwuerdige zum Tisch der Herrn laufen."⁵ Likewise, in his Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Walther maintains unequivocally that common worship with the heterodox was prohibited to the point that the two should not even hold services in the same building.⁶

In his book on pastoral theology, Walther treats the subject under two headings: the examination of communicants and the necessity of believing the Real Presence. Under the former, he laments the practice of letting people participate in the Lord's Supper without any examination, a practice he associates with Methodism.⁷ The true Lutheran pastor will be as certain of the faith of the communicants as he can be. Walther observes the same distinction that Luther made between the preaching of the Word, which is open to all, and the Lord's Supper, which is open only to those who believe.⁸ Under the latter, Walther maintains that Lutherans cannot celebrate together with the Zwinglians because they have a different definition of what is happening in the sacrament than Lutherans. He compares the Lutheran practice to that of its rejecting the validity of non-Trinitarian Baptism. The Sacramentarians do not have the sacrament. They have only bread and wine. Accordingly, the Lutherans cannot join them.⁹

⁵"Etwas ueber die Sitte," der Lutheraner, IV (June 13, 1848), 161-165.

⁶translated by John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 136-142.

⁷Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1890), pp. 143 ff.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., pp. 181-182.

In 1870 Walther presented a set of thirteen theses to the Western District of the Missouri Synod titled "Theses on Communion Fellowship with the Heterodox."¹⁰ Thesis one stated that the true visible church is where God's Word is truly preached and the sacraments are observed according to Christ's institution. In the second thesis Walther asserted that a fellowship in which God's Word is falsified or in which it can be falsified is ~~not~~ a true church but a sect. The third thesis stated that everyone is obligated to seek out and to hold to a true church. Likewise, the fourth thesis pointed out that one is obligated to leave a church when it becomes false. However, in the fifth thesis Walther allowed that in heterodox churches there are true Christians who remain in these heterodox churches by weakness. But, Walther claimed in the sixth thesis, those who knowingly remain in false churches are not to be considered among the weak, but are to be regarded as despisers of the truth. The seventh thesis stated that participation in the sacrament is church fellowship and cannot exist when there are different confessions involved. The eighth thesis went on to say that the purpose of the Lord's Supper is not to create faith, but to strengthen faith. The ninth thesis developed the principle that one who denies the Real Presence cannot without sin be admitted to the sacrament. The tenth thesis concluded that since the sacrament is a sign of the confession of faith, false communions cannot participate in the Lutheran rite. To do so would violate the institution of Christ, the unity of the church, the principle of love for the erring, the principle of love for the weak (For it would give them the idea that their belief

¹⁰Missouri Synod, Western District, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 21-73.

is right, when in reality it is not.), and the command of the Scriptures to be separate from sinners. Furthermore, thesis eleven develops the idea that keeping the erring from participating keeps them from being damned until such time as they can partake of the true sacrament. The twelfth thesis states that true Reformed teachers also warn their people against participating in the Lutheran sacrament. The final thesis concludes that it is unionism to participate in a joint celebration without true union.

Francis Pieper also advocates the practice of close communion. In the third volume of his Christian Dogmatics, he maintains that the correct doctrinal position and practice steers a path that avoids both extremes of open communion and withholding the sacrament from those for whom Christ instituted it.¹¹ He rejects open communion because the sacrament was intended by Christ for Christians only. He points to the example of Christ's preaching, which was intended for all who would listen, while the Lord's Supper Christ reserved for the disciples only. He therefore advocates that pastors should be as sure as they can be that the recipients of the sacrament have true faith.¹² Pieper lists five prerequisites for participation in the Sacrament of the Altar. First, a person must have been baptized. Second, he must be able to examine himself. Third, he must believe the words of institution. Fourth, all public offense must have been previously removed. Fifth, a person must declare his acceptance of true doctrine and reject all heterodoxy. On this point Pieper further states:

¹¹translated by Walter W. F. Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), III, 381.

¹²Ibid.

Furthermore, since Christians are forbidden to adhere to teachers who deviate from the Apostolic doctrine (Romans 16:17 . . .), it is self-evident that members of heterodox churches must have severed their connection with the heterodox body and have declared their acceptance of the true doctrine before they may commune with the congregation.¹³

Pieper points out that Holy Communion is private absolution. Absolution is not to be given to the impenitent. Accordingly, open communion indicates a willingness to be careless with the forgiveness of sins.¹⁴ Furthermore, an appeal to love and charity is not a justification for the practice of open communion, for to do so would ignore the Scriptural way of administering communion and would lead the neighbor to sin by his participation. The same principle holds also for the occasional admission of Reformed to Lutheran altars as guests.¹⁵

John H. C. Fritz published his Pastoral Theology in 1932.¹⁶ He maintains the same practice of close communion, quoting heavily from Walther. Fritz condemns the practice of issuing a general invitation to members of other denominations and to unknown people.¹⁷ He goes on to say that Lutherans practice close communion, which he defines as "insisting that only members of the Lutheran Church in good standing be permitted to partake of the Sacrament and that those who wish to commune must previously register their names with the Pastor."¹⁸ He, like Pieper and Walther,

¹³Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 385-386.

¹⁶(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932).

¹⁷Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁸Ibid.

points to the distinction between preaching to all, but limiting the participation in the Lord's Supper to the regenerate who have examined themselves. For the purpose of preaching is to create faith, but the purpose of the sacrament is to strengthen faith.¹⁹ He urges Lutherans not to participate in the Lord's Supper of any other church, because to do so implies that he is agreeing with the false teachings of that church.

When a person communes at the altar of any church, he thereby, by a public act, confesses the faith of that church and at once enters into fellowship with those with whom he communes.²⁰

Fritz goes on to say:

If he [a Christian] communes at the altar of any church and thus by such a public outstanding act, presupposing a deliberate determination on his part, lines himself up with the worshipers of that particular church at their own altar, he thereby at once gives to all present sufficient reason to believe that he is not protesting any of the wrong doctrines of that church, but is rather confessing them and has entered into fellowship with the members of that church.²¹

Fritz also maintains that Lutherans have a right to demand that only those who profess the Lutheran faith be admitted to Lutheran altars.

It must be remembered that he who communes at the altar of a church thereby confesses the faith of that church (Abendmahlsgemeinschaft ist Glaubensgemeinschaft.) We have a right to assume that those who commune at our Lutheran altars confess the faith of the Lutheran Church. The Lord Himself demands that every Christian should believe all the Word of God and not only some of it, Matthew 28:20.²²

In so doing, Fritz lays down two conditions that must be met before one can be admitted to a Lutheran altar. The first requirement demands that a person totally believe the Lutheran doctrine concerning the sacrament.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 130-131.

²⁰Ibid., p. 131.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 134.

He who does not believe that Christ gives us His true body and His true blood in the Sacrament and that these are received by the mouth of the communicant, whether he be worthy or unworthy, does not discern the body of Christ, I Corinthians 11:29, and shall under no circumstances be admitted to the Sacrament.²³

The second requirement necessitates the person's readiness to submit himself to membership in the Lutheran church.

But even he who confesses the true presence of Christ's body and blood shall not have the Sacrament administered to him if he is not, and will not be, a member of the true Evangelical Lutheran Church, but desires to remain a Roman Catholic, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, or a member of any one of the other Reformed churches, unless it be that he is at the point of death.²⁴

The Missouri Synod has indicated its practice of close communion also in many other ways besides the statements of these three teachers. In the 1870's and 1880's a pamphlet appeared published both by the Ohio Synod and the Missouri Synod called "The Worthy Communicant."²⁵ This pamphlet pointed out five requirements of a communicant. First, he must "know and unreservedly believe and confess that the Bible is truly God's Word."²⁶ Secondly, he must know Christian doctrine, especially that which is necessary for salvation, and be able on its basis to examine himself in terms of law and gospel. Thirdly, he must examine himself for evil against his neighbor. Fourthly, he must know what the sacrament is, namely, the true body and blood of Christ. He must understand its benefits, chiefly the forgiveness of sins. He must know for what purpose he will use it, namely, the

²³Ibid., p. 153.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Evangelical Lutheran English Augustana Conference of Stark and Other Counties of Ohio (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio Synodical Printing House, 1880), and (St. Louis: Printing House of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1878), identical except for pagination.

²⁶Ibid., Ohio Synod edition, p. 4.

strengthening of faith. This requirement, the pamphlet states, eliminates the Reformed, for one who denies the Real Presence does not discern the Lord's body. Finally, to receive the Sacrament at a Lutheran altar, he must accept the Lutheran church as the true Christian church, since altar fellowship is equated with church fellowship.

In 1890 the Synodical Conference, of which the Missouri Synod was a member, commended the constitution of the English Synod when that body was received into membership. The minutes of the Synodical Conference state, "This body rejects all ecclesiastical union and co-operation that is not based upon the pure Lutheran faith, such as having mixed congregations, exchange of pulpits with non-Lutherans, open communion."²⁷

In 1891 an article in the Lutheran Witness reports on a service in another Lutheran body in which non-Lutherans participated.²⁸ This article questioned the practice, because it regarded the pastor as the steward of the mysteries, not their owner. Accordingly, a pastor was obligated to follow a Scriptural admissions procedure to the sacrament, not act according to expediency. Furthermore, the article argued, one's refusal to allow non-Lutherans to participate keeps them from eating and drinking to their damnation. The article went on to condemn "liberal Lutherans" who practice this type of open communion. These people sin both against God's Word and against the welfare of the neighbor. For true faith in the words of institution is claimed as necessary for participation. The policy of open communion violates these words.

²⁷Meyer, p. 267.

²⁸"The Horrible Sin," Lutheran Witness, X (December 7, 1891), 100.

Several more articles appeared in periodicals of the Missouri Synod. In 1895 an article in Lehre und Wehre rebuked the arrogance of the General Synod when it claimed to speak for American Lutheranism in advocating open communion.²⁹ In 1900 an article in the Lutheran Witness showed how proponents both of open and closed communion claimed Luther agreed with them.³⁰ Those who advocated open communion argued from a 1521 statement of Luther that people should continue to receive the sacrament in Roman churches. The author, however, shows that open communion cannot be deduced from this early statement of Luther and proceeds to list several citations from Luther that favor the position of close communion. A 1903 article in the Lutheran Witness concluded that the practice of close communion follows from a consideration of Romans 16:17.³¹ Those who offer a doctrine of the Lord's Supper contrary to the true doctrine should be marked and avoided. The article asked if this is what happened when Lutherans and Reformed go to the Lord's Supper together. Finally, an article in 1907 answered a charge made by a pastor of the General Synod in the Lutheran World that Missouri Synod pastors were "driving the heirs of heaven from the heavenly altar."³² This article quoted Romans 16:17 as the rationale for the Missouri Synod practice. The article admitted that close communion was not logical, but was an attempt to base practice on the Word of God.

²⁹"Lehre und Praxis der Generalsynode," Lehre und Wehre, XLI (February 1895), 58.

³⁰"Was Luther in Favor of Open Communion," Lutheran Witness, XVIII (February 21, 1900), 138

³¹"Editorial," Lutheran Witness, XXII (March 26, 1903), 50.

³²"Close Communion," Lutheran Witness, XXVI (August 8, 1907), 121.

Why Must Lutherans Practice Close Communion by Frederick Kuegele was published about 1912.³³ Kuegele begins by emphasizing that the church is the steward of the means of grace. It must use these means as Christ desires. To administer the Sacrament of the Altar in this way requires not admitting seven categories of people to its celebration: the unbaptized, Baptized children who cannot yet examine themselves, the insane and unconscious, those who do not know what the Lord's Supper is (both in terms of the necessity of instruction and the exclusion of those who practice open communion, since they don't know what the Lord's Supper is, either), manifest and impenitent sinners, those who are unreconciled, and those differing in faith.³⁴ Kuegele admits there are true Christians in other denominations, but if they deny the body and blood of Christ, then they do not discern the body properly. To participate in a mixed communion with such people involves deceit at the altar.³⁵ Furthermore, a pastor who allows Reformed to participate in communion at his altar is giving grounds for suspecting his own Lutheran character.

The preacher, therefore, who calls himself a Lutheran and yet invites Calvinists to the communion, justly becomes subject to the suspicion that he himself does not believe the Lutheran doctrine, that he is at heart a Calvinist, and falsely calls himself a Lutheran.³⁶

Furthermore, Kuegele maintains that Lutherans go to communion for an entirely different purpose than do the Reformed. The Lutherans go to receive the

³³(Pittsburgh: American Lutheran Publication Board, n.d.).

³⁴Ibid., pp. 7 ff.

³⁵Ibid., p. 16.

³⁶Ibid., p. 19.

body and blood of Christ as a pledge of forgiveness, while the Calvinists go to hold a memorial of Christ.³⁷ While Kuegele would hope that the Calvinists might see the truth about the sacrament, he states that the Lutherans cannot compromise the truth for the sake of false union.³⁸ Furthermore, Kuegele argues that even among those who accept the Real Presence of Christ, differences in other articles of faith should also prohibit joint communion.

That even those who indeed believe the Real Presence, but differ on other important points of doctrine and practice should not commune together is sufficiently evident from I Cor. 10:17, "We being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." As the members of the human body are not at variance with each other, so there should be no divisions among those communing together.³⁹

Kuegele offers counter arguments for the positions of those who advocate open communion. Against the argument that the Lord's table must be open to all because it is the Lord's, Kuegele maintains that as faithful stewards the church must close the table to those whom the Word of the Lord excludes.⁴⁰ Some argue that since no believing Christian should be excluded from the sacrament, altar fellowship should be practiced with all denominations among which there are true Christians. To counter this argument, Kuegele states its plausibility seems high at first, until one considers that using this argument one would have to admit Roman Catholics.⁴¹

³⁷Ibid., p. 21.

³⁸Ibid., p. 22.

³⁹Ibid..

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 23.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 23-24.

Furthermore, since the church cannot judge the heart, it has to base its admission of a person on the confession he makes with his mouth.⁴² A third argument offered in the defense of open communion claims that charity demands that all commune. Against this argument Kuegele states that the Lord's Supper is not a work of charity, but a legacy of forgiveness.⁴³ Finally, the argument is used that if the Lutheran church is to enjoy friendship with other denominations it must practice open communion. Kuegele counters by stating that this argument is true. But popularity is not the issue. The question the Lutheran church has to answer is whether its practice is right before God.⁴⁴ Kuegele concludes this pamphlet by stating that the Lutheran church must preserve its emphasis on the truth by not allowing Calvinists at its altar. He states that the Lord did not invite everyone to the Last Supper, and neither should we.⁴⁵

A 1925 article in the Lutheran Witness titled "Why Register for Communion" stated that the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod does not practice open communion for three reasons.⁴⁶ First, because if it were practiced, manifest and impenitent sinners would receive it to their damnation. The church's duty is rather to warn such people and urge them to repent. Secondly, the Missouri Synod does not practice open communion because it believes that all differences, both doctrinal and personal, should be healed

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁴⁶XLIV (April 21, 1925), 122.

before joint participation in the sacrament. Thirdly, it practices it so that children and irrational people who cannot examine themselves may be kept from the sacrament.

George Luecke in his popular presentation of the Lutheran faith, Distinctive Doctrines and Customs of the Lutheran Church, argues for close communion.⁴⁷ He does this on the basis of the Scriptural idea that partaking of communion is a confessional act: in the wider sense a confession of faith in Christ, but in the narrower sense also a confession of the faith of a particular church.

To commune with those of another Church therefore implies that we recognize their faith to be the same as ours, that our differences amount to nothing and may be safely ignored, which for a confessional Lutheran is tantamount to saying that the teachings of the Word of God may be set aside.⁴⁸

He points out that the Lutheran interpretation of I Corinthians 11:29 leads to the Lutheran practice of excluding the heterodox. But he recognizes that those who practice open communion argue from this same passage that the Lord's table should be open to all, since it is the Lord's table.⁴⁹

Edward W. A. Koehler published A Summary of Christian Doctrine in 1939.⁵⁰ This book was used extensively as a textbook at the teachers' colleges of the Missouri Synod. Koehler argues from I Corinthians 11:26 that going to the Lord's table is a confession of faith. This confession,

⁴⁷(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938).

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁰(No place, no publisher).

on the basis of Acts 2:42, involves believing the doctrines of the church where one communes as the true teachings of the apostles. He also cites I Corinthians 10:18, where Paul speaks of eating the food offered to idols as participating in the worship of the idol.⁵¹ Accordingly, if one communes in the Lutheran church, he confesses the doctrine of the Lutheran church. Therefore, the Lutheran church does not admit unbelievers or those who disagree with the Lutheran teaching.⁵² Nor should a Lutheran commune at other altars, for the Catholics and the Reformed do not really have the sacrament, and by so doing the Lutheran confesses the false doctrines of those churches.⁵³ He also points out that in the New Testament Christ gave the Lord's Supper not to the public in general, but to the disciples.⁵⁴ His definition of close communion closely identifies the practice with that of examination.

"Close communion" as practised in our church, is that we admit to the Lord's Table only, of whom we feel reasonably certain that they are able and willing to examine themselves.⁵⁵

The 1940's brought a number of significant statements about the practice of close communion in the Missouri Synod. A 1942 article in the Lutheran Witness by Paul C. Neipp titled "Close Communion" sounded pretty much like what had been written before.⁵⁶ Neipp maintained, in the first place, that communion dare not be given to open sinners. Secondly, he

⁵¹Ibid., p. 228.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 228-229.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 230.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶LXI (March 31, 1942), 118.

stated that entrance to Holy Communion on the basis of I Corinthians 11 requires an examination. To examine presupposes a knowledge of Christianity in general and the Lord's Supper in particular. He maintained that this must be done to prevent people from eating and drinking damnation, for Lutherans desire the Lord's Supper to be a blessing, not a curse to people. Finally, he stated that the requirement of one's confession of the Lutheran teaching concerning the Lord's Supper was a necessary prerequisite.

The next year, however, an article appeared in the Lutheran Witness by Theodore Graebner titled "Holy Communion and Synodical Membership."⁵⁷ In this article Graebner, claiming to be faithful to the principles of C. F. W. Walther and claiming not be charting any sort of new course for the Missouri Synod, advocated that synodical fellowship is not an absolute prerequisite for communion participation. Graebner claimed that in harmony with the idea of close communion, the personal worthiness of the communicant was an overriding consideration to synodical fellowship. Graebner cited a faculty opinion by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This opinion stated that in dealing with Lutherans with whom the Missouri Synod is not in fellowship, individual cases must be dealt with individually. The pastor should not simply accept letters of transfer on people like these, but should ascertain whether they qualify and intend to join our congregations. If they do so, they should then be accepted into the congregational and communion fellowship. Graebner also cited the regulations of the Army-Navy Commission of the Missouri Synod.

⁵⁷LXII (June 22, 1943), 210.

The chaplain or pastor may commune such men in the armed forces as are conscious of the need of repentance and hold the essence of faith, including doctrines of the Real Presence and of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, and profess acceptance thereof.⁵⁸

Concern for providing the sacrament for members of the armed services was also reflected in a 1946 opinion of the faculty of the St. Louis Seminary presented in a document called "Church Fellowship."⁵⁹ The faculty advised that chaplains working in the armed forces could give the sacrament if they used the ordinary means of establishing the spiritual worthiness of the communicant, and if they were assured that the person seeking communion did not drift around from altar to altar. This opinion also stated that the members of Lutheran bodies with whom the Missouri Synod was not in fellowship were not barred from Missouri Synod altars simply because of their synodical affiliation, nor were they automatically to be admitted because of it.

A 1948 adult instruction manual by H. Paul Boehne stated two reasons why the Missouri Synod practiced close communion.⁶⁰ For Boehne the anti-thesis to close communion is the practice of distributing the sacrament in the pews, a general practice among Methodists. In commenting on I Corinthians 11:28-29, Boehne says the following:

This verse has two reasons why we practice "close communion" and do not distribute the Sacrament in the pews to all present.
 a. "LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF" is what the Bible asks. The Church must be reasonably sure that its communicants have been instructed, so that each communicant can examine himself and know why he is going to communion.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America," Church in Fellowship, edited by Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 61.

⁶⁰Fundamental Facts of Faith (No place, no publisher, 1948)..

b. "NOT DISCERNING THE LORD'S BODY" means that ALL, worthy and unworthy, receive the Lord's body and blood. Those who receive it unworthily condemn themselves.⁶¹

In 1952 as pastor of the Lutheran student ministry at Berkeley, Don Deffner published a tract called "Why Close Communion."⁶² Deffner stated that the practice of close communion not only keeps modernists and impenitent sinners from communion, but also testifies to penitent, believing non-Lutherans that the Lutheran church considers the unscriptural teachings of these people's churches of great importance.⁶³ Although it may seem an extreme practice, Deffner advocates the understanding of the Lutheran church's position. For the end (spiritual union of all believers) does not justify the means of open communion. For open communion does not witness to the presence of error.⁶⁴ Furthermore, as in the case of medicine, there is a question of ethics involved. For ethical reasons, like a doctor, a pastor does not normally commune a Christian who is under the care of another pastor and congregation.⁶⁵ Deffner also argues that the practice of close communion involves an acceptance of the idea of the Office of the Keys. Within the Office of the Keys, the church does have to make decisions concerning the forgiving and the retaining of sins. Being a proper steward of this power forces the church to practice close communion

⁶¹Ibid., p. 62.

⁶²(Berkeley: No publisher, 1952).

⁶³Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 7.

by limiting the Lord's Supper.⁶⁶ Deffner points to Christ's intolerant attitude toward the willfully erring. This attitude was prompted by love. It is the same love that prompts the church to establish church discipline. Love will not allow the willfully erring to participate in the Lord's Supper.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the practice of close communion preserves the confessional idea of not communing those who have not been examined and absolved.⁶⁸ By practicing close communion, Deffner argues, the church is practicing a form of evangelism in reverse. By this he means that the practice is intended to bring impenitent sinners to repentance and forgiveness.⁶⁹ Deffner takes great pains to demonstrate that the practice does not stem from any harsh, legalistic, unloving attitude. The practice arises from the great concern for the true, evangelical spirit of Christ.

So it is not that a Lutheran congregation wants to bar fellow-saints from the blessings of the Eucharist when they practice Close Communion. It is not that they want to be separatistic, or set themselves up as judges of other men. The practice of Close Communion is prompted by love and is born of the heart felt conviction, on the basis of Scripture alone, that we must follow Christ's command. This means refusing the Lord's Supper to those whose belief is not known to us. It is not showing love to allow a person to do something harmful even though he may think it is for his own good.⁷⁰

This same concern for the spiritual welfare of the person who is not allowed to come to communion is expressed in a 1953 article in the Lutheran

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 14.

Witness.⁷¹ Although this is the article quoted above the redefines the Galesburg Rule in terms of "Synodical Conference altars for Synodical Conference Lutherans only,"⁷² the spirit of the article is not unevangelical. It advocates the practice of close communion to prevent harm to those who commune. It states that the principle should not be applied legalistically, for Lutherans do not want to keep people away from the altar. Using this same line of reasoning, Ernest B. Koenker states in his book Worship in Word and Sacrament:

It was because of the concern for the unity of faith that the early church closed its Communion service to unbelievers and insisted on "holy things for holy people." And the Lutheran church today, in maintaining the practice of close Communion, witnesses to the corporate character of Christ's body and to the requirement that the member examine his life. It sees a danger in precipitately conferring the privileges of fellowship upon those who are as yet unaware of the responsibilities of that fellowship.⁷³

In recent years, however, the Missouri Synod, or rather, some members of the Missouri Synod are departing from Missouri's traditional position. "Eucharist and Christian Unity," an unsigned article in the Christmas, 1967, issue of Una Sancta called for the Missouri Synod to regularize the practice of intra-communion between various historical aspects of the one church on earth.⁷⁴ The article claims that such intra-communion (a term the writer prefers to intercommunion) is happening anyway and therefore might as well

⁷¹C. Thomas Spitz, Sr., "Thoughts on Close Communion;" Lutheran Witness, LXXII (August 4, 1953), 264.

⁷²Supra, p. 57.

⁷³(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 42.

⁷⁴XXIV (Christmas, 1967), 90-94.

be incorporated into the policy of the church. If this does not happen, eucharistic fellowship will be forced into the underground church.

To further illustrate the problem, the 1967 convention of the Missouri Synod was petitioned to clarify the synod's position on communing Lutherans with whom it was not in fellowship.⁷⁵ The New York convention then passed the following resolution:

To Take a Position with Reference to Communing Lutherans of Other Synods, Resolution 2-19

WHEREAS, Clarification regarding the administration and reception of Holy Communion has been requested, with particular reference to Lutherans of other synods not now in fellowship with us; and
 WHEREAS, The principle of "close Communion" requires that only those who are in altar fellowship celebrate and partake of the Lord's Supper with each other; and
 WHEREAS, The celebration and reception of Holy Communion not only implies but is a confession of the unity of faith; therefore be it Resolved, That pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, except in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care, commune individuals of only those Lutheran synods which are now in fellowship with us.⁷⁶

The Atlantic District of the Missouri Synod offered a resolution to the next convention of the Missouri Synod in 1969 proposing to rescind the 1967 resolution stated above, because "it is theologically unsound."⁷⁷

The reason for its being regarded as unsound was given in the resolution.

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions clearly state that "He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'"⁷⁸

The resolution resulting from this overture "Resolved, That the concerns

⁷⁵Missouri Synod, Convention Workbook, 1967, pp. 79-80.

⁷⁶Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1967, p. 93.

⁷⁷Missouri Synod, Convention Workbook, 1969, p. 88.

⁷⁸Ibid.

voiced . . . be referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations for study and report to the Synod."⁷⁹ The convention referred this resolution to the President for action. Furthermore, the minutes state that in the first session of this convention President Harms counseled the convention as follows:

He also stated that the matter of Holy Communion was very serious. The Lutheran Church has always adhered to the Galesburg Rule: "Lutheran altars for Lutherans only." He read the statement of the Lutheran Action Committee which invited other Christians to share in open Communion for the rest of the convention. He asked the celebrants to observe the practice of the church.⁸⁰

The fact that recent conventions of the Missouri Synod have had to consider the matter of close communion is an indication that some members of the Missouri Synod are reconsidering its position. Some within its circles are suggesting a practice other than close communion.

In summary, the Missouri Synod has been the most strict adherent to close communion. Exceptions were seldom, if ever, allowed. The practice existed without official sanction until 1967, but has been upheld throughout the synod's history. The Missouri Synod does not consider the practice a legalistic restriction, but an evangelical expression of the will of Christ. In upholding the practice it claims to be acting from love. The synod has maintained that its purpose is to point out false doctrine with the hope for repentance and acceptance of the true doctrine. Like other churches today, however, the Missouri Synod has been challenged by the ecumenical movement. At least some within her circles have responded to this challenge by proposing a departure from the practice.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1969, p. 20.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The practice of close communion is certainly not universally accepted today. Its disfavor today stems not so much from the practice itself, as from a re-examination of the principles underlying the practice. Basic to the topic are the questions of the definition of the church, the concern of the church for dogmatic and doctrinal unity and integrity, and the current ecumenical view of the sacrament as a means toward unity, rather than an expression of unity. A set of German Lutheran theses adopted in 1958 presents the problem.

6. Viewed historically, practically all Christian churches started out with the practice of close Communion. . . .
7. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that enlightenment (Aufklaerung) and dogmatic indifference, as well as the desire for a more ecumenical unity have resulted in a battle of opinions in almost all churches whether close Communion should still be maintained. . . .
11. If it is true that Christian denominations of all shades are, without any difference, "branches" of the true church and therefore the "true" church of Jesus Christ, then . . . every close Communion practice is an easy-going traditionalism and a separation involving guilt.¹

On the doctrine of the church, some Lutherans are calling for a broad definition. Vilmos Vajta states that the Lutheran concept of the church, derived from Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, is based on recognition of the right preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.² He claims that this is a broad definition that is

¹Friedrich Huebener, "Theses on Altar Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIX (August, 1958), 607-609.

²Church in Fellowship (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 256.

inclusive rather than exclusive. Accordingly, he states that the Galesburg Rule must not be legally enforced, but the word "Lutheran" in it must be understood as including more than a narrow denominational fellowship.³ Similarly, Vajta calls on Lutherans to determine if the essential marks of the church are present before they commune in a non-Lutheran church.⁴ On the other extreme is the Missouri Synod's resolution quoted above, in which altar fellowship is not to be extended even to others who claim to be Lutheran, if they are not in fellowship with the Missouri Synod.⁵

The question of doctrine is closely related. As long as Lutherans understand that they have the correct understanding of Christian doctrine in general and of the Lord's Supper in particular, they will attempt to retain their integrity by all means possible. Sacramental fellowship still indicates acceptance of the other Christian and his beliefs. In this light, it is interesting to note a parallel in the Baptist church around the turn of the twentieth century. The Baptists maintained that admission to communion necessitated three prerequisites: first, regeneration; second, Baptism by immersion; and third, what they called an orderly walk in the Baptist church. They wished they could admit others to communion as other Protestants did, but they declined. "There is no other course open to us, unless we are prepared to violate our solemn convictions of truth and duty."⁶ If the Lutherans have particular emphases of doctrine,

³Ibid., pp. 256-257.

⁴Ibid., p. 258.

⁵Supra, p. 76.

⁶James W. Willmarth, "Restricted Communion," Bibliotheca Sacra, LII (April, 1895), 309.

both in general and of the Lord's Supper in particular, communion where doctrine is no longer a concern reflects a compromise of doctrinal integrity.

But in the twentieth century ecumenical spirit even that presupposition is being challenged. In the ecumenical situation many regard that eucharistic fellowship may result from

agreement in a common general standpoint, not in precise formulations of its implications. Thus, for instance, a common faith that in the Lord's Supper Christ does indeed encounter his people in judgment, mercy, and grace is a necessary prerequisite for communion fellowship; agreement about the way in which doctrines of eucharistic presence and sacrifice should be stated is not.⁷

Lampe also distinguishes between a view of the Eucharist as "offering," an activity of the church that presupposes unity and under which no intercommunion may occur; and a view of the Eucharist as "receiving," in which the Eucharist is used to receive unity and in which intercommunion must occur.⁸ Edmund Schlink makes this same distinction and encourages the Lutheran church radically to re-examine its procedure.

The more certainly we recognize members of the body of Christ in other denominations and the more strongly we are united with them by the love of Christ, the more radically we have to change our modes of questioning about our divisions at the Lord's Supper. Where hitherto we [the Lutheran church] took it for granted that we ourselves had preserved the unity of the body of Christ but that the members of other denominations had departed from it, we now **feel** ourselves increasingly questioned by God whether it is not we who have profaned or even blasphemed the unity of the body of Christ. Whereas hitherto we had thought that only others had given up the unity of true doctrine and order, we now recognize that we are questioned whether we have not done so ourselves.⁹

⁷Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, "Intercommunion: a Means toward Union," Theology, LXXI (May, 1968), 198-199.

⁸Ibid., p. 200.

⁹"Lord's Supper or Church's Supper," Intercommunion, edited by Donald Baillie (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 299.

Schlink also goes on to examine the plea for doctrinal unity as a prerequisite to intercommunion.

The refusal of intercommunion because of differences in the doctrine of Holy Communion can be a sign that men have taken over the Sacrament themselves. There is undoubtedly such a thing as an excessive dogmatism which is without foundation in the institution of the Lord's Supper. Undoubtedly there are dangerous deviations from the attitude of faith: whereas faith receives the mystery with longing expectancy, doctrine assumes sovereignty over the mystery. Undoubtedly there also exists a wrong conception of doctrinal unity which fails to recognize that the peculiar unity of the New Testament comes out of the diversity of its witnesses and their final testimony.¹⁰

On the other hand, however, the Report of the World Conference on Faith and Order on intercommunion states that Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglo-Catholics generally are opposed to open services of communion at ecumenical activities and regard these as a "shallow pretense."¹¹ The report states that these groups regard the divergence of sacramental doctrine as a barrier to joint communion.

The "open" communion services which have been held . . . at certain ecumenical gatherings . . . , while deeply inspiring to some people, have made a very different impression on others, because they seemed to present the distressing spectacle of a diverse crowd, from varied churches and traditions, gathering together at the Lord's Table without any sufficient unity of belief about what they were doing there.¹²

What happens to the practice of close communion depends largely on how prior questions like these get answered by the people of God today. The matter is far from settled.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 301.

¹¹"Intercommunion," Intercommunion, edited by Donald Baillie (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 27.

¹²Ibid.

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