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THE VALIDITY OF SEPARATING ALTAR
FROM PULPIT FELLOWSHIP

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

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and a Proposed Solution

"That they may all be one."¹ These words of Jesus in his high priestly prayer express a profound truth. Indeed, they are a summation of the entire prayer which the Savior prayed for all his disciples of all times. Jesus' whole task on earth had been to unite men divided by sin to Himself so that they might be re-united with God and each other. He was preparing to complete this task, which God the Father had given him, by means of his Passion. Jesus prayed that, through this final obedience to his Father's will, men would truly become one in him.² In the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, the Father verified that this unification had taken place.³

These words of the Lord also indicate an intense desire. As he had gathered his disciples together through the proclamation of the words his Father had given him, so he prayed that these followers would remain united in those words after he had returned to the Father. He knew that it would be a struggle to maintain that unity in a divided world, and so he prayed that their unity be preserved through God's word of truth.⁴ Jesus wanted their unity in his name to remain as a witness to the world⁵ so that the whole world might become one through his name.

The Christian Church has ever since longed to be the unity for which Jesus worked and prayed. The entire content of the Christian's witness to the world is that Jesus Christ has removed the divisions between God and mankind and that, through faith in that news, God makes all believers one. The

implications of this Gospel are obvious. If believers are one with God, then they are one with each other also. They should love each other, accept each other, and care for each other even as Jesus did for them. United in Christ, their resources would be gathered for getting the message of the Gospel to all nations in conformance with Jesus' Great Commission.

The problem is that there seems to be no such unity in the Christian Church today. It is a glaring fact that Christianity is divided into a large array of denominations which are divided within themselves. Thus one needs to talk not only of Orthodox Christians, Episcopalian Christians, Methodist Christians, Lutheran Christians, and so on but also Russian Orthodox Christians and Eastern Orthodox Christians, United Methodist Christians and Free Methodist Christians, Lutheran Christians of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Lutheran Christians of the Augsburg Confession, and churches of yet still lesser differences. Sometimes these divisions are caused by historical or cultural factors. More often, they have risen from disagreements over many different things. They all have resulted in misunderstanding, opposition, and outright hatred.

These divisions have always bothered many Christians deeply, but at no time has the disapproval of the splits in Christendom been so pronounced as in this present century. Christians today see clearly that they are supposed to be united. They all believe Jesus' word that his Church of believers is to be one. They can see many sincere and devout Christians in churches other than their own. The faith which the Holy Spirit works in them yearns to join together with other believers. The work of the Great Commission is hampered by dispersion of resources and reduplication of effort. Many feel the great need to heal the divisions so that Christians can share fully with each other.

The reunification of the churches--that is, the drive to establish church fellowship--has always been present in the Church as something for which to strive. But the amount of interest it has captured among Christians of the twentieth century exceeds all which has gone before. There is mounting pressure in individual churches to overcome the differences which separate them. Though this modern desire for unity at all costs has taken many forms, its most recognizable one is what is called the Ecumenical Movement.

Nowhere is the problem of divisions between churches and the desire to overcome them more evident than in American Lutheranism. In terms of most American denominations, the Lutherans have a fairly uniform cultural heritage and a strong confessional background in common. Despite this, these churches which all consider themselves the heirs of Martin Luther's Reformation find themselves split into several church bodies. The desire to recognize all other Lutherans as brothers is strong today. Church fellowship has become the goal of American Lutheranism too. This fellowship has been recognized as pulpit and altar fellowship between Lutheran congregations and pastors.

Modern Lutherans have discovered that some of their past differences were more imagined than real, and many have found that all their differences can be overcome. They have declared pulpit and altar fellowship with each other. Other Lutherans have seen some of these declarations of fellowship ignoring important doctrinal differences instead of addressing them head on. They feel that true unity has been sacrificed for an outward show of unity which compromises the witness of the Lutheran Church.

This is exactly the situation in the relationship which exists between the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS) today. Even though the two Lutheran church bodies have practiced pulpit and altar fellowship for twelve years now, some deep differences exist .

between them in both doctrine and practice. The differences are especially evident on the church body level and the failure to resolve these differences at all over a number of years has prompted the LCMS to consider breaking church fellowship with the ALC.

Thus the problem of divisions in the Church Jesus called his one Church arises for Lutherans of both church bodies in a special way. It is particularly evident in the local congregations of both churches where the differences often disappear.⁶ Both pastors and laymen recognize the doctrinal differences between the two church bodies and are certain that the best way to witness to the other church of the seriousness of the differences and to work for their resolution through discussion is to withhold full church fellowship. But, they argue, it seems especially loveless and unevangelical to deny someone who is a Lutheran, who has the same basic confession of Christian doctrine, any kind of Christian fellowship simply because he is a member of a Lutheran body with whom one disagrees.

Simply put, the problem for many in the ALC and the LCMS is that a compromise is needed. Some way must be found to witness to the conviction that the other church is wrong in the doctrinal direction it is taking while allowing individuals to recognize and enjoy the great amount of unity which already exists between segments of the two bodies.

A solution which effects this compromise readily presents itself to many people.⁷ If, due to some doctrinal differences, we cannot in good conscience declare full fellowship with another Lutheran Church body with whom there exists much doctrinal agreement, particularly among individuals, then we should declare a lower level of fellowship which acknowledges the unity we do have. Namely, altar fellowship should be separated from pulpit fellowship. These seem to be man-made distinctions which Scripture never mentions,

and there is no more distinctively Lutheran doctrine, one on which all Lutherans agree, than the teaching of the Lord's Supper. What should be done, it is suggested, is that altar fellowship should be declared with the other church body while denying pulpit fellowship to it.

What such a distinction between the two forms of fellowship means is that the way could be opened for uniting the two Lutheran churches in something they agree about--namely, the Sacrament which builds up the faith of believers--while working to correct the doctrinal errors which keep the churches from agreeing completely. Altar fellowship would mean that members of ALC and LCMS congregations could commune at each other's altars. Denying pulpit fellowship would mean that the pastors of each church body could not preach in churches of the other denomination.⁸ This would also mean that the clergy of the one Lutheran church body could not be on the clergy roster of the other Lutheran body.

Several positive, practical reasons for allowing such a separation of altar from pulpit fellowship suggest themselves. First, as already stated, it demonstrates a unity of Lutheran Christians in the basic confession of Lutheranism while witnessing to others that doctrinal truth will not be sacrificed. Second, it allows pastors to minister to the wide-ranging needs of the laymen of both churches and permits individuals of both bodies to realize in worship the unity they recognize in the sound Christian faith of fellow Lutherans. Third, the increased contacts between members of the two church bodies would accent the differences which do exist and provide a witness to people to be more concerned about what is taught in their church. It will cause laymen to question their pastor more about the doctrinal problems. They will start asking, "Why is it I can go to Communion at the LCMS church across town but you can't preach there?" The issues will have to be faced

by the clergy and the church bodies for the people will judge what they hear with the teachings of Scripture.

This solution to the problem of church fellowship between the ALC and the LCMS deserves some attention. It offers a simple but practical compromise which seems to go a long way towards seeking out Christian fellowship among Lutheran church bodies which are very close while protecting their concern for the truth of God's Word. But, no matter how practical it may be, the primary question we must ask of it is, "Is this in accordance with God's Word?" The purpose of this paper is to determine whether the separation of altar from pulpit fellowship is valid in the light of Scripture's teaching and the practice of the Church.

Questions Raised by this Solution

The separation of altar from pulpit fellowship raises a number of questions which must be answered by the Lutheran churches considering it. The major question is suggested by the purpose of this paper. Is there any teaching in Scripture and how the Church has understood Scripture in its doctrine and practice to validate the separation of altar from pulpit fellowship? In this one question, however, are a number of subsidiary ones.

Part of the problem of discussing church fellowship among fellow Lutherans today is that there is a wide range of opinion as to what church fellowship really is. This diversity in the understanding of fellowship springs from a great deal of confusion as to what the Scriptural view is of fellowship. It has made for a great deal of uncertainty in trying to deal with the question of establishing fellowship. As the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) reported to the LCMS 1979 convention,

The discussions held at the conferences made it clear that considerable confusion exists within the Synod on the question of fellowship. This may be due in part to the fact that in recent years serious attention has not been given to a thorough study of the Biblical and confessional principles that underlie the practice of

fellowship. Many pastors appear to have a general grasp of the Synod's historical fellowship practice but are not able to set forth clearly the fundamental principles that lie behind this practice.⁹

This confusion as to what church fellowship is is not confined to the Lutheran Church. It is evident throughout modern western Christianity. Werner Elert first mentions Schleiermacher's definition of the church--that it is a fellowship created by the voluntary actions of men which also keep the church in existence--and then points out,

The concept of fellowship which is here said to characterize the church does not derive from the nature of the church, but the nature of the church is derived from the concept of fellowship...

...This permits him to regard the church as a special instance of the general category of fellowship. Behind this procedure lies the idealist conception of man and a view of the church which already has a long history with the English Independants and in the German Enlightenment....His understanding of the church holds sway as far as does his concept of fellowship, and this still seems to grow rather than to decline in popularity in many parts of the world. It is nourished by democratic ideologies, as may be seen in North America and elsewhere. Social ideas and experiences slip imperceptibly into theological guise, and vice versa...

In European theology, at least, only a few stragglers still seriously cling to Schleiermacher's understanding of the church. His concept of fellowship is also in decline. This does not mean, however, that there is unanimity about what is to replace it, nor that Schleiermacher no longer has any influence in what goes on in church affairs.¹⁰

This observation of confusion over fellowship is made by Hermann Sasse also.¹¹

Thus the first question to be answered is: What is church fellowship? To do this we must ask: What are the Scriptural and confessional teachings behind it? Where does it come from? What is its relationship to the Church? How is it related to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments? The Scriptural answers to these questions will clear up the meaning of fellowship and lay the foundation for answering the primary question of validity already posed.

The second main area of questions must be historical ones. Has the Church's view of fellowship remained constant or has it changed with time?

Certainly one cannot base the answer to the question of separating altar from pulpit fellowship solely on the basis of tradition. But we can learn how the Church of other ages has understood the Scriptural truth's application to fellowship and how it has expressed that understanding. Did the Church have Scriptural reasons for practicing fellowship? How did the Early Church view altar fellowship and its relation to church fellowship? What was the Reformation Church's view? The view of nineteenth century American Lutheranism? What is the view of the modern Church? When did the expression "pulpit and altar fellowship" appear and what did it mean?

After discussing these questions, the primary question of the validity of separating altar and pulpit fellowship can be addressed. The answers to the questions above will clarify the issue in the light of Christian doctrine. They will outline how the Church has dealt with the issue in the past. Thus this paper's procedure will be to examine the Scripture's teachings which deal with fellowship and then to see what the Lutheran Confessions teach about this fellowship. It will then review Church history at points where concern arose over the questions of church fellowship. Finally, it will take up the question of separating altar fellowship from pulpit fellowship and discuss its specific application in the proposed solution for ALC -- LCMS fellowship.

Notes to Chapter I

¹ John 17:21. All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

² John 17:1-11

³ 1 Cor. 15

⁴ John 17:13-19

⁵ John 17:20-23

⁶ Many pastors and laymen in both the ALC and the LCMS claim that their situation is "unique". In some places, the doctrinal differences which exist

between the national church bodies are said to be non-existent at the local level. Others state that the highly mobile society of today often brings people of either church body into an area where only the other has a congregation or where relatives go to the other church. The denial of fellowship thus creates problems in pastoral care and in splitting families.

⁷This solution, as far as I am aware, has been brought up only in Missouri Synod circles. There is reason to believe, as will be seen in the last parts of this paper, that the solution would be unacceptable to the AIC in view of its position on fellowship. Nevertheless, it is worth study because it has evoked a wide response in the LCMS, as one letter to the editor in the Lutheran Witness, May 1981 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) p. 19, shows.

⁸Here the solution offers a very difficult question. Would the pastors from one church body be allowed to participate in the liturgy and, specifically, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper? At first glance, it would seem to be allowable, but it must be remembered that the liturgy is also the service of the Word. There appears to be a definite conflict with the Lutheran understanding of the Public Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Though an important question, it is outside the scope of this paper.

⁹The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Convention Workbook: Fifty-Third Regular Convention (St. Louis, Mo.:n.p., 1979) p. 73.

¹⁰Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, trans. N. E. Nagel, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966) pp. 2-3.

¹¹Hermann Sasse, This is My Body, revised edition, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977) pp. 351-352.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

The Scriptural Teaching of Fellowship

The words "fellowship", "church fellowship", and "pulpit and altar fellowship" are practically interchangeable terms in modern Lutheranism. Any one of these terms is most likely to be used to describe the formal declaration of agreement between two church bodies who consider themselves to be one. Of course, people today use the word "fellowship" in other ways too. Much of the confusion in speaking about fellowship among Christians and Christian churches is that different people use fellowship to mean different things. This fuzziness of the term "fellowship", particularly among Lutherans, is due to a lack of clarity about what the Church is. Dr. Robert Preus states,

For generations now Lutherans all over the world have acted and lived without apparent awareness of the necessary implications of our historic confessional Lutheran ecclesiology on the life and practice of the church. This fact is nowhere more apparent today than in Lutheran discussions and activities relative to the formula for concord in contemporary Lutheranism and in Lutheran ecumenical involvement as a whole. Such activity has often been carried on as though there were no Lutheran doctrine of the church, as though there were no clear and infallible marks of the true church, or as though the church were no more than some sort of external societas comparable to a club or lodge or nation.¹

This problem is not restricted to Lutheranism, and Elert concludes that it is the result of Schleiermacher's view of the church.

Much of what has been written on this theme suggests that altar and church fellowship are matters about which men are free to make their own arrangements....In harmony with such thinking we find altar fellowship arranged and practiced without full church agreement acknowledged by both sides. This can only be understood as a product of the view that Eucharistic koinonia is a "fellowship created by the vol-

untary actions of men, and only through these does it continue to exist."²

On the one hand, care must be taken not to impose our understanding and usage of the term "fellowship" onto what the New Testament says about it. On the other hand, a Scriptural understanding of fellowship and the truths behind it will go a long way in clarifying how the term should be used today.

The New Testament writers never use the phrases "church fellowship" or "pulpit and altar fellowship". These are later terms of the church. But they do use the Greek word for fellowship -- ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ -- and its cognates (ΚΟΙΝΩΝΟΣ, ΚΟΙΝΩΝΕΩ, ΣΥΝΚΟΙΝΩΝΟΣ, and ΣΥΝΚΟΙΝΩΝΕΩ). The ΚΟΙΝΩΝ- words are used to describe a variety of relationships. In Luke 5:10 Peter, James, and John are partners (ΚΟΙΝΩΝΟΙ) in business. The offering collected by the European churches for the Jerusalem Christians is called a ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Rom. 15:26). The special relationship between Paul and the Philippian Christians is described as an ongoing partnership--ΚΟΙΝΩΝΗΣΑΙ-- (Phil. 4:15). Fellowship--ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ-- describes the partnership Christians have in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5) and the sharing they experience in sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Most often, however, it is a description of the spiritual unity which believers have through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3).

All of the various uses of the term ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ indicate that fellowship had just as wide a range of application for the New Testament writers as today. Yet in this diverse usage there is a fundamental meaning of ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ-- "to share in some common thing/person".³ Thus, the common thing which Peter, James and John enjoyed was fishing for a living. The gift to the Jerusalem Christians was a common thing in that the Gentile Christians both shared the gift with themselves (they all had a share in giving it) and with the Jewish

Christians, that is, they shared their material blessings with the original church from which the spiritual blessings had gone out to be shared with the whole world. This same type of κοινωνία is what Paul calls the mutual support he and the Phillipians gave to each other. The common thing which all believers share is Jesus Christ Himself.

It is this last usage of κοινωνία which bears directly upon the Christian's basic relationship to another Christian. To understand what κοινωνία means for the church today means that this use of κοινωνία in the New Testament must be unraveled. This is more than just studying the word because, even in this use of κοινωνία to describe the relationship between Christians, Scripture makes a distinction.

Important in this discussion on the nature of fellowship in the context of inter-Christian relationships is the fact that koinonia most frequently appears in connection with that spiritual unity which exists in the body of Christ (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3), but it is also used at times to refer to the attempts of Christians to manifest this unity externally (e.g. Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:9). It dare not be overlooked, however, that the Scriptures also have much to say about each of these two distinct (but not separate) relationships without making specific use of the term koinonia at all.⁴

It is exactly this duality of the external and internal implications of Christian fellowship, Elert reports, which caused Martin Luther to hesitate to translate κοινωνία (communio in the Apostles' Creed) with Gemeinschaft--the German word for fellowship.⁵ For Luther, Gemeinschaft denoted the Lord's Supper while the Church, all who have faith in Jesus Christ, was Gemeine--congregation, and it was this latter term which Luther saw being used in the Creed. According to Elert,

Unlike Schleiermacher, Luther did not get an idea of fellowship from somewhere or other and then derive the nature of the church from the nature of fellowship. He first asked what is the church, and what is the Sacrament, and then sought to determine in what way each might be called a communio.⁶

This is precisely the direction this chapter will take in determining what

fellowship means.

The primary attribute of the New Testament church is its unity. As was noted at the beginning of the first chapter, the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 declares that Jesus' whole mission was to establish the unity of God's people. Jesus describes His purpose clearly in John 10:16, "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd." It is precisely this unity which distinguishes the Christian ἐκκλησία from any human assembly or gathering.⁷

This unity of the Church derives from the fact that all of its members are one with Christ. It is the assembly of all who believe in Jesus Christ who "is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). St. Paul constantly uses this image to show the oneness of the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27; Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:19). Christians are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22), a description St. Peter echoes (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Nowhere is the unity of the Church better described than in Eph. 4:4-6,

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

This unity of the Church is first and foremost a vertical unity because each Christian is one with Christ. A horizontal unity between Christians is the direct result of this, "so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5; cf. John 15:5).

The unity of the Church is not a man-made unity. It is a gift from God. Since man is not able and will not come back to God because of sin

(Gen. 3; Rom. 1:18f), God must create the unity Himself. It is God who always calls the Church into existence (Is. 43:1; Gen. 12:1-3; Deut. 7:6; 1 Cor. 3:9b). God resolved before the beginning of the world to save His people and keep them in that salvation through His plan of redemption (Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 8:28-30). And in His own time God fulfilled His plan and established the unity of the Church through His own Son (John 3:16; Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7). Finally, it is God who brings men into this unity (John 3:3, 5-7; Eph. 2:10).

God brings people into the unity of the Church in a special way. The Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:5). It is through this saving faith (or faith in the heart) that men partake of the righteousness of God by grace for the sake of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:17), and thus through this faith are made one with Jesus Christ and each other,

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

The Holy Spirit uses the proclamation of the powerful Gospel of forgiveness of sins for the sake of Jesus Christ to create this saving faith which unites the Church (Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Thess. 2:14). Since this Gospel of forgiveness is also proclaimed through both Word and Object in Baptism (1 Pet. 3:21; Gal. 3:27-28; John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5-7) and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24), these also unite believers in Christ by creating faith in the heart. The entire book of Acts shows God in action through His Gospel, adding believers to His one Church, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b; cf. Acts 4:4; 5:14; 17:12; and 11:17-18).

The one Church is independent of space and time. One can be sure

that it exists wherever the Gospel and the Sacraments are used because God's Word always accomplishes its purpose--namely, to create saving faith (Is. 55: 10-11). These things are thus marks of the Church. Yet the Church is more than just the locality where these marks are used, for through the Gospel and the Sacraments God unites believers who are separated by space (1 Cor. 1:2) and time (Eph. 2:19-20). This unity is a spiritual reality and is free from all physical barriers. And though we can know where the Church is, we are not able to tell who belongs to it because men cannot see into each others hearts (Jer. 17:10; 1 Chron. 28:9; Rom. 10:10; Matt. 5:8; Rev. 2:23).

It is this unity of the Church, a gift from God, which is the basis for all Christian fellowship. It is possible only because God has brought Christians together through faith in Christ by the Gospel. It is a full fellowship because its unity is a divinely-wrought, spiritual unity,

The hymn of unity of the church in Ephesians gives the other side of the picture (4:4-6). It does not speak of divisions. Does it, however, express what is believed or what is a discernable statistical fact, or both? Without doubt it is the former, for the church spoken of here is the church which has Christ as its head and "which is His body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all" (1:22f). This church whose fulness is beyond every dimension (1:21) is certainly not a statistical thing. It has its origin in God's choice before the foundation of the world (1:4), and its riches will first be revealed in the ages to come (2:7). This church in Ephesians is the church as seen by God.⁸

And yet this fellowship is earthly too, for it expresses itself in the marks of the church--the Gospel and the Sacraments. These are essential to Christian fellowship because they create and sustain the faith in Christ which makes the one Church. For the Church today this essential Gospel of forgiveness is found only in the Scriptures--the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-16). It is the Scriptures which determine the content of the Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

If the Scriptures teach that there is one Church in which all believers in Christ are united in saving faith, it is equally true that they speak of many churches also. There is a church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), in Antioch (Acts 11:26), in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), in Galatia (Gal. 1:2), and in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1). There are many churches (Rom. 16:16), and each of these churches are different (Rev. 1-3). All of these churches are referred to as "the church" at a certain place. By this the New Testament writers indicate that at each of these places there existed the one Church.

These churches came into being because the Church is not a physical reality. Though God can see into the heart and tell who belongs to the Church, men cannot judge which ones have saving faith. Since Christians are in the world but not of the world (John 17:14-18) and still struggle with sin themselves (Rom. 7:14-25), they will not realize the perfection of the spiritual Church until this world passes away.

Yet believers are to strive for perfection in themselves while on earth even as they have it in Christ in heaven (Phil. 3:12-16; Col. 3:12-15). The faith they enjoy as members of the one Church is not static. The Holy Spirit uses the power of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2-3) to lead the believer's faith to act in response to the Gospel (1 John 4:7-12). The very faith which unites members of the body of Christ together-- that is, justification--seeks to show that unity outwardly to the world by joining in fellowship with all other Christians--sanctification. This is why St. Paul writes in Eph. 4:1-3,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (italics mine.)

Though they possess the unity of the Spirit as a gift from God, Christians are to work to maintain that unity outwardly in order to witness to each other and the world of the unity of the Church (1 Cor. 1:10; John 17:21).

Christians gather with each other publicly in local congregations, or churches, as a result of their faith. Since they are not able to tell who has faith, they need some external sign to indicate with whom they are to join in fellowship. Since it is their faith in Jesus Christ through which they have fellowship in the one Church, Christians therefore confess that faith (Rom. 10:10). It is through this outward confession of faith in Jesus Christ that believers make themselves known. The content of this outward confession is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which the Apostles taught (Rom. 1:1-6). This confession was used to witness to the faith (Acts 1:8; Eph. 3:7-10), to instruct in the faith (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 20:27-28; 2 Tim. 3:14-17), and to care for fellow Christians with the faith (Gal. 6:1-5; 1 Cor. 14:12; Rom. 15:1-3; Eph. 4:15-16).

Despite all the efforts of sincere Christians to maintain the unity of the Spirit, the individual churches are divided. Unbelievers are among the believers in these churches as hypocrites (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-40). They are split by quarrels (Phil. 4:2), disputes (2 Tim. 2:14), and factions (1 Cor. 1:10-11; 11:18-19), or by sinful living (Phil. 3:17-19) which indicate that their members are not living the faith they have in their hearts (1 Cor. 3:3). By far the greatest danger of division is from false prophets who change the Word of God (Deut. 13:1-5; Jer. 9:13-15; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim 6:3-5).

For this reason the churches are to guard their fellowship and defend it from all error. They are to avoid all who create divisions in doctrine (Rom. 16:17) and in life (1 Cor. 5:1-2). This is why elders and overseers are appointed to care for the churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 3:1-7). These men are to protect the fellowship by keeping the confession of the Gospel pure. This is done by remaining in the doctrine and teaching of the Apostles (2 Tim. 4:1-4; Gal. 1:11-12; Titus 1:9-16).

The fellowship which Christians share outwardly both among individuals and among individual churches is based solely on the unity of the Church. This fellowship is recognized by the outward confession of faith.

Confession is, therefore, a direct consequence of the unity of the Church. For this reason it cannot be any confession, but has to be the confession of the Church. Concord in confession is not a free choice of the Christian, but a result of the ecumenicity and unity of the Church. The basis of the concord in confession has to be the means which created and which sustains the saving faith through the means of God's Word and the Sacraments, then [sic] these have to be the source and basis of all ecumenical concord.⁹

Thus Koinonia is not only a gift from God which unites all believers to Christ through faith and so also to each other. It is also a fellowship which exists by men's efforts as they are prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit. This fellowship therefore is also a gift from God, but it is never perfectly realized in this present world. The fellowship depends upon the confession of the Gospel and must be determined by conformity to the doctrines of God's Word.

In Acts 2:42 Koinonia is specifically mentioned as a part of Christian worship, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." The worship of Christians is the highest expression of their unity in Christ for it is in the worship service that the members of the local church all gather together to confess the faith which makes them members of the one Church. Since they gather to show forth this faith of the heart externally, they gather around the marks of the Church by which the Holy Spirit created that faith--the Word and the Sacraments. This gathering together is Koinonia --fellowship.

In Christian worship believers enjoy Christian fellowship in its fullest sense. Yet this fellowship is not a spirit of human community or comradeship,

In Ac. 2:42 ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ does not denote the concrete community or society of Christians, which, while it had not yet separated itself legally and cultically from the Jewish community, already represented a circle of the closest fellowship. Nor can it signify the community of goods (cf. v. 44: ΕΙΛΥΟΝ ἅπαντα κοινά). It is rather an abstract and spiritual term for the fellowship of brotherly concord established and expressed in the life of the community.¹⁰

These Christians had established a "brotherly concord"--an agreement--in the thing which had brought them together, namely, the Gospel. This Gospel was proclaimed to them in the Apostles' doctrine (Word) and in the breaking of bread (Sacrament).¹¹ Since both Word and Sacrament, as well as the faith they shared, were gifts from God, the agreement on these things was not a matter of "pick and choose." The whole counsel of God had to be considered in order to have a true fellowship.

St. Paul establishes that this fellowship is maintained in a very special way. In 1 Cor. 10:16-17 he connects ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ to the Lord's Supper. In 1 Cor. 11:27-29 he shows the implications of this fellowship of the Sacrament of the Altar. He describes the Lord's Supper as a ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ, a ΜΕΤΑΛΗΨΙΣ, and a ΟΥΝΑΨΙΣ. He then explains how this meaning of the Lord's Supper affects those who wish to join in its fellowship.

The Lord's Supper is first a fellowship. 1 Cor. 10:16 reads, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation (ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ) in the body of Christ?" Paul is stating the obvious here. The Lord's Supper is where Christians gather together to share bread and wine. More than this, however, is that the cup they share is a fellowship with the blood of Christ and the bread they eat is a fellowship with his body. The question arises, "Is this fellowship a fellowship with someone or something?" Some would understand it as a fellowship with someone.¹² But if Paul understands the Lord's Supper in terms of the Real Presence¹³ then it is obvious that the

Christians who gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper have a fellowship with the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on in verse seventeen to explain that this is what he means. "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake (μετέχου) of the same loaf." The Lord's Supper is a μετάληψις. μετέχου means "to have a share in" and in this verse Paul tells Christians that they have fellowship with each other not because they gather together to celebrate the Sacrament but because they share in the bread which is the one true body of Christ. μετάληψις means "a receiving" and can be a synonym for μετέχου when the thing one has a share in is received from another.

This is what Paul understands the Lord's Supper to be. He describes the gathering of the Corinthian Christians for worship as a συνάξις. In 1 Cor. 11:17,20 he uses the verb for this--συνέρχομαι. If this gathering of the Christians is equated with the Lord's Supper, then Paul would be saying that the fellowship of the Lord's Supper is the undertaking of men and that the sharing in the Lord's Supper is among themselves.¹⁴ But this is not what the Apostle means. In 11:20 he says that the Corinthian συνάξις is not the Lord's Supper. The fellowship is not dependent upon the actions of men. It is the action of God whereby Christians receive and are made one with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Those who participate in eating the same bread are together the body of Christ. They do not produce this body. The body of Christ is there before they are and before what they do. They are rather drawn into it so they become its members.¹⁵

The Lord's Supper can be understood as a συνάξις as long as it is understood that it is the Lord who is gathering His people together in the Sacrament. Indeed, this is quite consistent with the Scripture's teaching that it is God who creates the Church.

Paul ties all of this together in 1 Cor. 11:27-29. It is certain that

he understands the Lord's Supper in terms of the Real Presence. Jesus' body and blood are truly with the bread and the wine. Those who do not discern this body and blood, that is, do not understand who the Jesus Christ offered in the Sacrament is nor understand what His Gospel is, eat and drink judgement upon themselves when they participate in the Sacrament. In addition, those who openly confess contrary to this Gospel proclaimed in the Lord's Supper destroy the fellowship of the Supper when they participate in it because they are partaking of a body to which they do not truly belong (1 Cor. 10:18-22).

Thus this understanding of the Lord's Supper as a fellowship is very important. It reveals that the proper understanding of the Sacrament and how it is used is just as important as a proper understanding of the Gospel and how it should be confessed. Sasse writes,

'This Sacrament is the Gospel.' Nowhere does the meaning of this statement of Luther become so clear as when we try to understand the words of Jesus: 'Given for you...shed for you...shed for many...for the remission of sins'. For the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins, nothing else. It is not a theory about the possibility of forgiveness, not a vague religious message that there is a merciful God.¹⁶

Just as it is the purity of the Word proclaimed and not the gathering of believers together to hear that Word which is the basis for and maintains Christian fellowship, so it is with the Sacrament of the Altar,

Christ is the host of the Sacrament not only because He instituted it, but also because He is active at every reception of it. In the foreground we see the coming together of the communicants, but behind it all is the Lord, who is like the man who arranges a great feast and calls together his guests (Luke 14:16 f.) or who knocks at the door that He may come in and sup with him who opens the door. (Rev. 3:20)¹⁷

"This Sacrament is the Gospel." To change one is to change the other. Thus a change in the doctrine of the Gospel necessarily entails a change in the understanding of the Lord's Supper.

The KOLUVWIDA between Christians does not only describe the spiritual

unity Christians have through saving faith. It also describes the outward unity Christians show each other and the world by confessing their faith. Yet these are not two different unities but rather different facets of the same God-given ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ. The unity of the Church is the basis for the outward unity of Christians while the outward unity of the churches, shown through their proclamation of the Gospel, allows the Holy Spirit to foster and build up the unity of the Church by creating and strengthening the saving faith of the believers.

Holy Scripture brings these two facets of ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ together in Christian worship. It is in worship that believers gather together around the Word and the Sacraments. This worship is based upon two things. These are: (1) the assembly is in agreement as to what the Word and the Sacraments are--that is, their confession of the content proclaimed in Word and Sacrament is the same; and (2) the assembly is united into one body through the Word and Sacraments--that is, the Gospel proclaimed in the Word and the Sacraments creates the faith in the heart which makes one a member of the Church, which is the body of Christ. It may be helpful to indicate the distinction between the two facets of ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ by using "fellowship" to denote the first facet and "unity" to denote the second.

The Lutheran Confessions' Teaching of Fellowship

Fellowship is used in many ways in Scripture. In order to understand what it means by Christian fellowship, the Scriptural understanding of the Church, its outward manifestations, and the special fellowship of the Lord's Supper had to be examined. The same procedure is applicable in a study of the Lutheran Confessions concerning this topic. There are no outright verbal statements defining what church fellowship is in the Book of Concord. Yet it

talks of fellowship. Indeed, its whole purpose (as is the purpose of each of its parts) is fellowship. The subscribers to the Book of Concord state,

It is further apparent to us that many good-hearted Christian persons, of high station and low, are sighing anxiously for this salutary work of Christian concord and have a particular longing for it.¹⁸

However, just as in Scripture, terms for fellowship and unity are used in various ways. An understanding of the Confessions view of fellowship must then be made from how they use these terms in context. Since the various confessions make clear statements about the church and the Lord's Supper, and since these articles form the basis for understanding fellowship, this paper will focus on these articles in its determination of the Lutheran Confessions' understanding of fellowship.

The Augsburg Confession teaches that there is one church. It calls this church the una sancta ecclesiae (AC, VII,1) after the usage of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. This term is usually shortened to the Una Sancta. The Confession then defines what this Una Sancta is, "This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (AC, VII, 1; cf. VIII, 1). This definition states that the Una Sancta is undivided, holy, and that only those who have saving faith belong to it.

The Augustana then says that the "true unity" of the church is dependant only upon the preaching of the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" (Latin: "it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel") and when the sacraments are administered "in accordance with the divine Word" (AC, VII, 2). Article XX, 3 states that any doctrine of man which seeks to replace this Gospel is rejected. This is because saving faith is provided by the Gospel and the Sacraments for the Holy Spirit uses these as means to create faith (AC, V, 1-2; IX, 1-2; XIII, 1). Thus the Una Sancta is solely

the gift and creation of God.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession picks up on the definitions of Augustana VII and VIII (Ap, 7, 1,8,28). Melancthon then expands upon this definition,

The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts. To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ. (Ap, VII, 5)

This Una Sancta is a holy assembly of saints (Ap VII, 8,16) which is separated from the world (Ap, 14) and unbelievers (Ap, VII, 16-19,22,29). It is the one body of Christ (Ap, VII, 7,29) made so by the righteousness of Christ received through faith (Ap, VII, 31). This faith comes into being through the Gospel, not human traditions (Ap. VII, 7,36). And so its unity is shown outwardly when there is agreement in the apostolic teaching of that Gospel (Ap, VII, 38-39). It is a work of God (Ap, XII, 48). It really exists, though independent of space and time (Ap, VII, 10,20). It possesses outward marks--the pure teaching of the Gospel and right administration of the Sacraments--by which men can recognize it (Ap, VII, 5,20).

The Large Catechism deals with the Una Sancta in its explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. Here again, the Una Sancta is one, "without sect or schism" (LC,II,51) and "a holy flock" assembled under one head, Jesus Christ (LC, II, 52-59; cf. SC, II, 6; IV, 1-14). Thus it is a work of God in which He creates unity by creating faith in the heart.

The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord is very similar to Article VII of the Augustana in Article X, 31 in which it is stated concerning adiaphora,

In line with the above, churches will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses

fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and all its articles and are also agreed concerning the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known axiom, "Disagreement in fasting should not destroy agreement in faith."

The major difference between the two articles is that the phrase "Gospel... in conformity with a pure understanding of it" (AC VII, 2) is replaced by "doctrine and all its articles" (FC SD, X, 31).

The confessions also speak of what can be called "empirical churches." The Augsburg Confession talks of "churches" (AC, I, 1,5; II, 1,5; etc.) which existed throughout the Empire. The Una Sancta exists in these churches though the members of the Una Sancta are mixed with unbelievers and sinners (AC VIII, 1). Melancthon explains this in greater detail in the Apology. He speaks of the church in the "proper sense" (propa dicta) which is all believers namely, the Una Sancta (Ap, VII, 28) and the church in the "broad sense" (late dicta) as the local congregation where both believers and unbelievers are present.

If the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it necessarily follows that since the wicked belong to the kingdom of the devil, they are not the church. In this life, nevertheless, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they are mingled with the church and hold office in the church. (Ap, VII, 17)

Thus while all participate in the outward marks of the church (Ap, VII, 28), believers are members of the church in fact as well as in name while unbelievers are members of the church only in name. This church in the broad sense is how we usually talk of the church; it can be seen, measured, and analyzed. It is the empirical church.

Disputes and dissensions also appear in the empirical churches (FC SD, XI, 94; Rule and Norm, 19). These divisions are due chiefly to false doctrines and teachers which arise in the empirical church (BC, pref., p. 4; Ap XII, 90). These must be confronted in order to preserve the Word of God

and the truth (BC, pref., p.5; FC SD, Rule and Norm 14-16). Moreover these divisions impede the progress of the Gospel (BC, pref., pp.3-4), cause offense and anguish (FC SD, pref., pp.7-8; Ap, XII, 127-128) but most of all threaten the faith of the Una Sancta (FC SD, 6-9) and thereby the fellowship of the empirical churches. Thus all Christians should seek to maintain outwardly the unity of the Una Sancta (BC, pref., p.4, pp.,13-14; AC, pref. 4,13; Ap, pref. 6; FC SD Rule and Norm, 14). The way this is done is by the confession of the Gospel (Ap, pref. 15,17; XX, 6-8; FC SD, Rule and Norm, 14f.) which is determined by the Word of God (LC, V, 31-32; Ap, IV, 81; XV, 17, SA II, ii, 15).

The Lutheran Confessions' exposition of the doctrine of the church has some definite implications for fellowship. However, these implications are not readily obvious. The terms used are not used with precision. Thus Melancthon uses unitas (unity) and Einigkeit der Kirche (unity of the church) consistently in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.¹⁹ The writers of the Formula of Concord, on the other hand, make a clear distinction between unitas (which is taken to mean the unity of faith of the Una Sancta) and concordia or Einigkeit in der Kirche (unity in the church) which both refer to the unity or fellowship of the empirical churches.²⁰

The questions arise when the statements of the Formula concerning the Gospel are taken alongside what the Augustana says in Article VII. AC VII, 2 says that the true unity of the church is dependent upon the "Gospel...in conformity with a pure understanding of it." The Formula of Concord takes this to mean "doctrine and all its articles" throughout, that is, the Gospel in the broad sense. But is this what meant by the Augsburg Confession? Many Lutherans feel that the writers of the Formula, faced with a different historical context, made the formulation of the Augustana more restrictive.²¹

They feel that since AC VII, 2 is definitely talking about the marks of the church in the proper sense (cf. Ap, VII, 5) and that the unity it is speaking of is the unitas of the Una Sancta. Therefore the Gospel reference is to the Gospel in the narrow sense. If it was the Gospel in the broad sense then that would mean that a mark of the Una Sancta is the Gospel in the broad sense. This would seem to contradict the statement of AC VII, 1 that the Gospel in the narrow sense creates the Una Sancta—which would definitely not be Lutheran.

Though the historical difference between the Augustana and the Formula must be taken into account, it is not that important.²² What needs to be pointed out is that Melancthon makes a distinction between what he means by the Gospel in AC VII, 1 and AC VII, 2. The first reference is to the Gospel in the narrow sense, the second to the Gospel in the broad sense. The article is stating that the Una Sancta comes about through the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. But then in the second part, it changes terms and now speaks of the preaching of the Gospel (Latin: doctrina ēvangeliī—the doctrine of the Gospel). This is the Gospel in the broad sense. Doesn't this make the Gospel in the broad sense a mark of the church? Indeed it does. That is why Lutheran theologians in less compromising times have called the Lutheran church "the one true visible Christian church on earth." Why?—They have the doctrina evangelīi.

This means that AC, VII, 2 makes the Gospel in the broad sense--doctrine in all its articles--the sufficient condition for the unity of the church. This does not mean that the Gospel in the broad sense creates that unity. That would be a necessary condition and is filled only by the Gospel in the narrow sense. Gospel in the large sense is sufficient for the unity of the church in that only by proclaiming the doctrine of the Gospel in all its articles is the Gospel in the narrow sense--the necessary condition for

saving faith and the unity of the Una Sancta--preserved pure.

The Gospel in the narrow sense is central in the Gospel in the broad sense, and all aspects of the Gospel in the broad sense have a direct or indirect bearing on the Gospel in the narrow sense. Because of this relationship, the preaching of the Gospel according to a pure understanding of it becomes an impossibility whenever any article of faith is either falsified or denied. In this sense, the pure and recte of AC VII have also quantitative significance because the Gospel that creates and builds the church ultimately embraces all articles of faith revealed in Holy Scripture. For the confessions, it is self-evident that the norm for determining what is "pure" preaching of the Gospel and "right" administration of the sacraments is the Word of God, Holy Scripture. Whatever is faithful to Holy Scripture serves the Gospel, and whatever opposes Holy Scripture threatens the Gospel.²³

There are two major points which are affirmed about the Lord's Supper in the Confessions. The first is the fact of the Real Presence (AC X,1). This fact means that when Christians celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar they partake of Christ's body and are combined into His body thus becoming one body (Ap, X,3). Though it is a mark of the Una Sancta, it is also a means of grace (AC, V; AC. XIII; Ap, XIII, 20) which creates saving faith (Ap, XIII, 21). The second point affirmed concerning the Lord's Supper is that the sacrifice of the Mass is rejected (SA, II,ii,1).

Finally, the confessions use as fellowship documents points to one basic fact. A Lutheran fellowship is based upon the truth of God's Word. Issues are not side-stepped. The ultimate desire of the Lutheran Confessions was achieving a God-pleasing fellowship in which there was a true outward unity.²⁴ The preface of the Book of Concord indicates how extensively and carefully the controverted doctrines were examined, how all sides and their arguments were taken into account, and how all was judged strictly by Holy Scripture.

This brief survey of the Confession's approach to fellowship indicates that: (1) the unity of the Una Sancta is the basis for all attempts at fellowship, (2) the outward marks of the Una Sancta--the Gospel conforming to

a pure understanding of it and the Sacraments rightly administered--which foster its unity are also exactly the things which need to be agreed upon for fellowship to be declared, (3) the sphere of seeking confessional fellowship is the empirical churches, (4) confessional fellowship is doctrinal fellowship, and (5) confessional fellowship is realized in practice.²⁵

Conclusions

Two overarching conclusions which bear on the topic of this paper can be drawn from this study of the Scriptural and Confessional concepts of fellowship. The first is that the basis for church fellowship is a common confession of the Gospel. All the churches of the New Testament were exhorted to protect their faith and unity by confessing that faith outwardly. This confession was to be conformed to and with the doctrine passed on by the Apostles. When there was agreement in that confession, there was fellowship. The same is true of the confessional fellowship of the Book of Concord. The churches which subscribed to it were proclaiming an agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel as it was taught in Scripture. In both cases, fellowship was not a human decision. It was a divine mandate.

The second conclusion which applies to this study of the separation of altar from pulpit fellowship is that church fellowship is altar fellowship. This is indicated most clearly in the New Testament churches. St. Paul teaches these that the Lord's Supper is by its very nature a divine gathering together of all believers into fellowship with Jesus Christ and each other. All who did not conform to the common apostolic confession of the Gospel in both faith and life were excluded from the fellowship. This meant that they were barred from the Lord's Supper. The Lutheran Confessions do not formally define of what the fellowship of the Lord's Supper consists. This is because the understanding of the Lord's Supper as fellowship was not in controversy then. It

should be noted that in keeping with its teaching of the Real Presence, those who were not in confessional agreement with the Lutherans were not allowed to join in the fellowship of the Lord's Supper.

Notes to Chapter II

¹Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," Theologians' Convocation: Formula for Concord Essays (Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1977) p. 11.

²Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966) p. 3.

³Friedrich Hauck discusses the New Testament usage of κοινωνία and its cognates as: (1) "to share with someone in something"; (2) "to give someone a share in something"; and (3) "fellowship". Friedrich Hauck, "Koinon- in the New Testament," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 804-809.

⁴"The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Missouri Synod, April 1981, p. 9.

⁵Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, p. 5.

⁶Ibid, p. 5

⁷This is one of the main considerations of Karl Ludwig Schmidt's article on ἐκκλησία. Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "Ekklesia," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 3, pp. 504-517.

⁸Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, p. 44.

⁹Martin C. Warth, "The Way to Concord," Theologians' Convocation: Formula for Concord Essays, p. 33.

¹⁰Friedrich Hauck, "Koinon- in the New Testament," TDNT, Vol. 3, p. 809.

¹¹Prayer could be added here, although there is a problem in that it is not a means of grace as the others.

¹²Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, p. 16.

¹³Ibid., p. 17

¹⁴This is nothing more than what Schleiermacher said. Cf. Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, pp. 24-25.

¹⁵Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, p. 28.

¹⁶Hermann Sasse, This is My Body, rev. ed. (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 310.

¹⁷Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, pp. 35-36.

¹⁸Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), Preface to the Book of Concord p.13. All references to the Confessions are from this edition.

¹⁹Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," Formula for Concord, p. 30.

²⁰"A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, November 1974, p. 16. Note citing A. C. Piepkorn, "What the Symbols have to Say about the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (October, 1955), p. 750.

²¹Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," Formula for Concord, p. 28.

²²Ibid., p. 27.

²³Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Confessional Ecumenism," Evangelical directions for the Lutheran Church, Erich Kiehl and Waldo J. Werning eds. (Lutheran Congress, 1970), p. 84.

²⁴Robert Preus quotes the Preface to the Book of Concord at length to indicate the careful program followed by the writers of the Formula and others to achieve a true unity. Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," Formula for Concord, pp. 23-26.

²⁵Cf. Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Confessional Ecumenism," Evangelical Directions, pp. 85-90.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF FELLOWSHIP THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The Understanding of the Early Church

The problem of overcoming divisions between Christians has existed throughout the entire history of the church. Fellowship has never been an abstract theological contention. Rather it has been a real factor of the Christian life which has touched God's people intimately through all the ages. As long as there has been a church, it has been divided. For just as long, Christians have sought to heal those divisions. Accounts of the New Testament such as Acts 15 and Paul's letters to the Galatians and Corinthians are examples of how the church from its beginnings had to deal with false doctrine and the factions it causes.

So it is with every age. The church's mission requires it to witness to its Lord and teach His words (Matt. 28:18-20). To change that witness is to forget and deny the Lord that gave it. It must therefore be kept pure. But how is this to be put into practice? How does the church maintain a balance between the fact that it must not judge men whose faith it cannot see and the fact that it is to keep its witness to the Gospel free from compromise? The question of who belongs to the fellowship of the church is a continual one.

For this reason a historical view of how the church understands fellowship and practices it through the centuries is essential to a clear understanding of fellowship today. It gives valuable insights into what is behind

the different positions of contemporary Christians concerning fellowship as well as how the church has sought to conform to Paul's directive to "maintain the unity of the Spirit." The practice of the early church will be examined in detail to see how the age of the church closest to the Apostles applied the Apostolic directives for fellowship to real life. Following this study, the fellowship theology and practice of the Reformation churches and the churches of nineteenth century American Lutheranism will be briefly reviewed in order to note any changes or departures from the fellowship practice of the early church. Finally, a few of the factors of the modern church which determine positions of fellowship will be described.

The early church was a church centered in worship. In a pagan world it would only be in worship that individual Christians could find each other and meet together. It was in the Christian worship service that believers were separated from the world and could partake of the heavenly blessings of Word and Sacrament which spoke of their future hope. The gathering together in worship, around Word and Sacrament, was the high point of the Christian life. This realization of the separateness of God's people, who are in the world but not of the world, has been to a great extent lost to Christians as the church moved from a persecuted people to one accepted and even promoted by the powers of the earth. For the Christians of the early church, however, it was the fellowship of the worship service which really mattered.

The early church was also a church which was seriously divided. The heresies of Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Montanism followed quick on the heels of the false teachers of the New Testament church. The great Christological controversies of the fourth century A. D. almost split the church in two. Even after the Chalcedonian settlement, Nestorianism and Monophysitism con-

tinued in many churches. It must be kept in mind that these false teachers always arose within the church. Speaking of the false prophets mentioned in Second Corinthians, Elert writes,

From the apostle's warning we must conclude that the false apostles had established themselves in the congregation. They certainly claimed to be as much in the church as Paul, for they gave themselves out to be apostles of Christ. This claim is characteristic of all heresy. The line between truth and error is indeed forever unchangeable, but it first must be discovered in the case of each teacher and his teaching. There is usually some element of truth resident even in the doctrine of false teachers.¹

The question for the church then was how to recognize these false movements which divided the church. While the Apostles were alive they could determine who were the true and who were the false prophets by their special authority.² Yet they always determined this boundary by judging the teachings in question by the Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Ignatius, basing his answer upon the apostolic succession,³ recommended that members of the church always follow their bishop. Unfortunately, this worked only as long as the bishops remained faithful to the apostolic doctrine themselves. The apostolic succession had no guarantee in itself that the Gospel would remain pure. At one time in Antioch, during the Meletian schism, there were four bishops who all condemned each other.⁴

To deal with the divisive false teachings the early church based its fellowship decisions upon a common confession of faith. First, it determined what the Apostles had done in similar circumstances and then applied the principles derived from this to specific situations. This was an attempt to stop the divisions before they could start. Three norms, or walls, of the church's confession arose from this: the episcopate, the canon of the New Testament, and the Rule of Faith.⁵ As Ignatius' experience had already shown, the wall of the episcopate worked only as long as the bishops remained faithful. The second wall, that of the New Testament canon (and the Old Testament

canon as well) worked out better because here the Apostles themselves spoke. The church now had an authority to which it could appeal all questions. The only problem with this wall of the canon was that the heretics appealed to the Scriptures as much as the orthodox did.⁶ In the third wall, the Rule of Faith, which was similar to the baptismal formulas which were being used, the church was provided with a clearly defined teaching of the Gospel which the episcopate was to defend.⁷ Again, the Rule of Faith, though often strengthening the apostolic position of the episcopate, became worthless when a bishop did not safeguard and defend it.

In the Rule of Faith, however, was born an approach to the problems of determining fellowship which lasted. Elert writes,

...despite the conjunction of bishop and Rule of Faith they did not stand or fall together. The name Rule of Faith and similar expressions declined in use but not the formulas which expressed their basic content and which were the same as the baptismal creeds. These persisted with astonishing constancy....Even though the synods which made doctrinal decisions were composed of bishops, the orthodox doctrine, once formulated, from the fourth century on had such weight of its own that bishops were judged by it and patriarchs who did not meet its standard were excommunicated.⁸

This formulation of doctrine was not done at the expense of Scripture but rather as a precise expression of the Scriptural teaching of the Gospel. It was expanded and defined further only in the statements which new controversies showed to be inadequate. The formulas applied Scripture to these controversies and developed a witness to which all believers were to confess.

Confessing is a duty incumbent on each Christian, particularly before baptism. The New Testament shows clearly that for this purpose settled forms were in use from the beginning. It could scarcely have been otherwise. The formulas do not declare, "I believe what my bishop believes," also not, "I believe in the Holy Scriptures." They all point back to the confession of Peter and soon underwent expansion. The early church never forgot that dogma is confession.⁹

Thus confession of the faith formed the basis for church fellowship. It was required of every member of the local church in both faith and life. All

who did not agree with it were excluded.¹⁰

It has already been noted that, for the early church, worship was considered a separation from the world which early Christians participated in during the rest of the week. This was taken quite seriously. As soon as a congregation was established as a result of evangelistic efforts, it drew rigid and clear boundaries around its worship service. Outsiders and new converts were not admitted to the worship service at all until they had been instructed and had proved their serious intent. Then they were admitted as "hearers" and could participate in the first half of the service--the "Service of the Word." At the call of the deacon--"τὰ ἁγία τοῖς ἁγίοις" ("the holy things for the holy ones")--which began the second half of the service --the Eucharist--both the "hearers" and the catechumens had to leave.¹¹ This was not done out of some desire for secrecy, a ritual which only the "initiated" could participate in and know about. Such a secret ritual was what the mystery religions practiced. The service of the Christians was not secret but restricted. The details of the service were described openly by the early church fathers.¹² The fact is that the early church practiced close communion.

The admission to the Lord's Supper was very dependent upon a Christian's Baptism. It was after one had been fully instructed in the faith that he made his full confession (using the baptismal formula) before the congregation and was baptized. Thereafter he was a full member of the church and so could remain for the Eucharist.

And yet one could lose one's right to be included in the celebration of the Sacrament. The reason for such denial to a baptized Christian was that he was causing a division of the body of Christ.¹³ That division could be because of gross sinfulness on his part (1 Cor. 5:1-2). In this case

church discipline was initiated and if there was no repentance, the offender was excommunicated.¹⁴ Elert shows in detail that this expulsion from the fellowship was no less than the denial of Holy Communion to the offender.¹⁵ He goes on to show that this denial was essential,

For his own sake the congregation cannot admit an unrepentent sinner to the Holy Communion when he is manifestly recognizable as such. Nor can the congregation do this for its own sake. It is not prompted by police-like narrow-mindedness when it protects itself from blemish and taint. Behind the earnestness with which it watches over participation in the Holy Communion we see the Pauline understanding of the Sacrament including its communion character. The koinonia of Christians with one another is essentially the koinonia of the body of Christ (p. 17). Therefore the unity of the local congregation is most concretely expressed when its members celebrate the Holy Communion together. Each member gives personal testimony of this fact by his participation....There would otherwise be a simulated koinonia of the body of Christ which would be neither real nor true.¹⁶

The other cause of division for which one was denied the Lord's Supper was heresy. Heresy was false doctrine or contradiction of the orthodox doctrine of the church. The one who espouses it causes a confessional division between the confession agreed upon by the believers and the one who denies some part of that confession. It necessarily entails the witness of the church as it is expressed in its baptismal formulas, the Rule of Faith, dogma, and especially the divine worship.¹⁷ Since the Eucharist was the highest form of that worship for the early church, Elert concludes, "Heterodoxy breaks church fellowship and therefore self-evidently and primarily also altar fellowship."¹⁸

The insistence upon close communion in the early church, as well as the Lord's Supper's continual tie to doctrinal content of confession can be seen active in several other practices of the early church. The early churches soon discovered that they had to do something about members who were excommunicated from one congregation who then move to another congregation.

Since the excommunication of a church (especially when it was validated by a synod) was the same as if all churches had excommunicated the individual, there had to be some way for the other churches in the fellowship to know whether the one applying for membership was a member in good standing back at his previous congregation. To accomplish this, the early church developed documents which were variously called "Letters of Commendation," "Letters of Peace," or "Letters of Fellowship." These letters certified that a member of one congregation could be accepted in another congregation's fellowship.²⁰

At first, questions of church fellowship were increasingly connected to the fellowship between each church's bishop with the other bishops since they were the guardians of the confession of the church and therefore of its fellowship. With the growth of the church and the rise of synods in which the bishops of a fellowship of churches met together, the fellowship was maintained more and more by the synods themselves--often in opposition to individual bishops.²¹ This fellowship between churches was carried out and verified by the exchange of letters also.²²

This did not mean that the confessional position of the bishop no longer meant anything. One of the greatest indications of the necessity for doctrinal agreement being reached before altar fellowship could take place was in the early church's practice of praying for the individual bishops of churches with whom the church had fellowship. These bishops' names were recorded on the diptychs²³ and read off in the appropriate place. "If fellowship was broken off with anyone named in these...his name was crossed out in the diptych."²⁴ If the congregation of the bishop thus removed continued to follow him, this necessarily meant a break in fellowship with the congregation also.

It must be noted also that the orthodox congregations and synods

were not the only churches who denied altar fellowship to those with whom they could not agree in confession. The heretical churches were just as adamant in excluding the orthodox from their fellowship. Of course, they did this because they considered themselves to have the orthodox doctrine. Thus for these too, doctrinal unity was a prerequisite for altar fellowship.²⁵

The early church did try to overcome the divisions which existed in it and kept churches from practicing altar fellowship with each other. The synods, and later the councils, main function was to come to agreement on disputed doctrine through Scriptural study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that altar fellowship could be reestablished. Elert points out two basic methods which were used to reestablish fellowship among the churches. Both were done at the instigation and prodding of the Emperors who were trying to bring the divided empire back together. The first method was to approach the differences from the perspective of trying to work out the doctrinal divisions. These often worked for a while but didn't seem to last long for the most part.²⁶ The other method was for the Emperors to ignore the doctrinal differences of the two sides and just force them to join in the Lord's Supper. These attempts were singular failures.²⁷ But they do point out an important fact. Joining together in the Sacrament of the Altar was considered to show church fellowship. The forcing of the two sides of a dispute indicates that nothing else was important; church fellowship was altar fellowship.

This overview of the early church indicates two facts which are important to this study. The first has just been stated. The New Testament view continued into the early church. It was understood by all that church fellowship is altar fellowship--no more, no less. In contrasting this to contemporary views of altar fellowship Elert writes,

Interconfessional relations are nowadays sometimes so arranged that where church fellowship is complete there is a mutual welcoming

of the laity to the Sacrament and of the clergy to its celebration, while where church fellowship is incomplete the laity may mutually receive the Sacrament but the clergy may not mutually celebrate it. Such gradations and distinctions in church fellowship have absolutely no connection with the regulations of the early church, except that a distinction as such is made between receiving the Sacrament and officiating at it. Church fellowship was not achieved in the early church by the reception of communicants or celebrants from elsewhere. In every case established church fellowship was the indispensable condition of any such reception. Either there was or there was not fellowship between two churches or two bishops, which practically amounted to the same thing. If there was, then the laity and clergy of one might receive and celebrate the Sacrament in the other; if not, neither was possible.²⁸(underlining mine)

The other fact has already been hinted at by the first. The early church understood the New Testament teaching on fellowship to be that church fellowship was determined by agreement in the Gospel as witnessed to by the basic dogma of the church. This confession of dogma reached its height in the expressions of the Chalcedonian creed.

The Understanding of the Church of the Reformation

The church changed a great deal in the years which separate the early church from the church at the time of the Reformation. The split between east and west, already evident in the latter years of the early church, grew ever greater until finally the Roman and the Eastern churches broke completely with each other and became in fact two separate churches. In the east the Lord's Supper remained a _____, bound to the liturgy. In the west a growing interest in the Sacraments²⁹ led to attempts to formulate definite doctrines about the Eucharist. In 1079 the doctrine of the Real Presence was defined, closely followed by the doctrines of Transubstantiation (1215) and communion in one kind (1415). This interest in the Sacrament shown by the medieval church reappeared in the church as it moved into the sixteenth century.³⁰

This concern for the Sacrament and what it means reveals why the Lord's

Supper became the controversy of the Reformation. On the one hand, the destruction of the Gospel accomplished by Rome's doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass became the focus of Luther's contention with the Roman church.³¹ On the other hand, the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper proved to be by far the major matter of dispute between Luther and Zwingli and those who followed in their shadows.³²

The churches of the Reformation insisted upon doctrinal unity before church fellowship could be declared. The Lutherans established that this unity be demonstrated by agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel at the Diet of Augsburg in the Augsburg Confession. Zwingli and his followers recognized this also. This was their whole purpose in calling the Marburg Colloquy of 1529. In the interests of a political alliance between the German princes, Philip of Hesse and Zwingli wanted to work out a doctrinal accord with Luther concerning the Lord's Supper so that the Lutheran churches and the churches of the Swiss reformation could enter into fellowship.³³ And yet there was a difference,

...Zwingli and all Reformed theologians...did not regard a divergence of opinion on the Lord's Supper as church-divisive, for Luther the denial of the Real Presence was heresy destructive to the church-- closely related to the great heresies that threatened the existence of the church throughout the centuries.³⁴

This is why Zwingli was ready to establish church fellowship with Luther at the end of the Colloquy even though agreement had not been reached on only this one doctrine.³⁵ It was not because he thought church fellowship could be established between churches even though they could not agree on the doctrines of the Gospel. Rather it was because Zwingli did not consider the Lord's Supper to be part of the Gospel while Luther did.³⁶

The churches of the Reformation practiced close communion. Those churches they were not in agreement with were not allowed to participate in

their celebration of the Lord's Supper. The churches of the Reformation did not understand church fellowship to consist of levels of fellowship.³⁷ If they had, some kind of cooperation could have been established at Marburg for the desire for unity was strong. Nothing shows this more than that Luther, when the Colloquy ended in failure, strived to come up with a formula that both sides could accept.³⁸ But as long as full agreement was not reached there was no fellowship. Luther could not even give Zwingli the right hand of fellowship, recognizing him as a brother, in good conscience.³⁹

Despite the failure at full agreement, Philip of Hesse urged that a statement of what had been agreed upon be drawn up.⁴⁰ This statement, the Marburg articles, was an attempt to form some kind of union--even if just a political one--but in the world of the sixteenth century, where politics and religion were so closely tied, the Articles were a failure. The Leipzig Interim attempted union between Lutherans and Catholics after Charles V's victory at Muehlburg. The Interim, however, was primarily based on force and sidestepped the doctrinal issues.⁴¹ It too failed. Finally, amid a divided Lutheranism at the end of the sixteenth century, the Formula of Concord offered itself as a way to reunion. Lutheran theologians worked with pastors and teachers in addressing the disputed doctrines directly and reaching agreement in them on the basis of what the Scriptures and the earlier Confessions had said. This effort ended with success.⁴²

In conclusion, several things can be noted. The churches of the Reformation were not just interested in doctrine for its own sake and polemics for the derision of others--their concern was for a true God-pleasing union.⁴³ This union could only be accomplished by agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel. The failure to reach agreement concerning even one point meant that fellowship of any kind was denied. Luther's defense of the Real Presence in

the Lord's Supper points out one other thing. The Sacrament of the Altar is an intimate expression of the Gospel. It is not to be taken lightly nor treated as if men can dispense with it as they will. God has made it what it is by His Word, and with His Word it should be protected as a Christian's greatest treasure.

The Understanding of Nineteenth
Century American Lutheranism

The colonization of North America provided a whole new world for the church to confront. Cut free from the social structures and limitations of Europe, fleeing from the persecutions and restrictions of state religions, Christians found themselves surrounded by diverse backgrounds and beliefs. The problem of fellowship became an acute one.

This is true also of the Lutheran immigrants who came to the New World. They were divided in a way that the church had not experienced before. There were cultural and linguistic divisions which separated German Lutherans, Danish Lutherans, Swedish Lutherans, Norwegian Lutherans and others from each other.⁴⁴ These were not easily given up. The linguistic division was so acute that when a German immigrant found another who spoke German and was also a Protestant, it often made little difference whether or not they were both Lutherans. This cultural affinity led to a down-playing of confessional identity--later called Unionism in one of its forms⁴⁵--which caused some very deep problems in Lutheranism in America later on. There was also a wide array of doctrinal disunity among the transplanted Lutherans, ranging from a almost non-existent confessional identity, to a moderate one, to an extremely committed confessional theology.⁴⁶

These factors led to church fellowship in America with widely defined boundaries.⁴⁷ But an influx of more confessional Lutherans from var-

ious parts of Europe coupled with an increasing interest among Lutherans as to who they were and what the confessions meant for them resulted in a shift in most church organizations from a lax confessional stance to a more conservative one.⁴⁸ Yet many divisions remained. Different attempts were made to overcome these divisions. One was the "Definite Synodical Platform"⁴⁹ which attempted to rewrite the confessions to fit the American scene. This met considerable opposition.⁵⁰ Another attempt was that of Charles Porterfield Krauth's "Theses on Faith and Polity"⁵¹ which ultimately led to the union of a fairly conservative group of Lutherans into the General Council.⁵² One other attempt at establishing church fellowship among American Lutherans was the Missouri Synod's "Free Conferences",⁵³ which ultimately led to the formation of the Synodical Conference. The one common factor in each of these major attempts of fellowship was that they all tried to reach that fellowship upon the basis of an agreement in the Augsburg Confession. Thus Lutherans once again were trying to reach fellowship through a common confession of the Gospel's teaching.

Two further examples of this can clarify how this agreement was understood. The first is C. F. W. Walther's exposition of confessional subscription.⁵⁴ In this, Walther explains the different forms of subscription to the confessions and then explains why "unconditional subscription" is necessary for unity in the church. The second example is Sigmund Fritschel's article on the "Doctrinal Agreement Essential to Church Unity"⁵⁵ in which Fritschel disagrees with Walther's "unconditional subscription" and instead states that agreement is on the essential doctrines of faith⁵⁶ which are "...the articles of faith and chief parts of Christian doctrine that make up the contents of the church's confessions."⁵⁷ Contrary to Walther, Fritschel then goes on to show that everything the Lutheran Confessions mention fall into this cate-

fall into this category. The difference between the two positions becomes, as it was between Luther and Zwingli (though in a much finer distinction), not a disagreement that fellowship is dependent upon a common confession of the doctrine of the Gospel but rather a disagreement as to what makes up that doctrine of the Gospel.

The practice of close communion was a problem for Lutheranism in nineteenth century American Lutheranism. The Union churches of the colonial days developed into fully combined churches who shared not only a building but worship services also.⁵⁸ This became known as "unionism" and was vehemently attacked by the growing confessionalism of the nineteenth century. On the whole, Lutheranism in America observed close communion. This received its most definite formulation in the Galesburg Rule. This Rule was given in response to the fellowship questions which arose out of the "Four Points Controversy".⁵⁹ The Rule stated, "Lutheran Pulpits for Lutheran ministers only-- Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only."⁶⁰ It is this rule which is the source of the phrase "pulpit and altar fellowship." This rule is not a new distinction in levels of fellowship nor does it break with the consistent practice of the church. In his theses on the Galesburg Rule Charles Porterfield Krauth writes,

The fundamental principle on which rests the accord of the Rule, with the Word and the Confessions, is that the pulpits of a pure Christian communion are for those only who have been officially approved by it as preachers, and its altars for those only who have been officially approved by it as communicants,...and who are subject to its discipline if they prove unworthy of its privileges. This is the New Testament Rule, and...the "Galesburg Rule" is identical with it...⁶¹

The Galesburg Rule was a distinctively Lutheran answer to the problem of fellowship in the free and pluralistic atmosphere of America.

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a time of increasing interest in uniting the various strands of Lutheranism which had immigrated to

America. The formation of the General Conference⁶² and the Synodical Conference⁶³ along with the reunification of the General Council⁶⁴ and several smaller mergers all point to the basic success of fellowship procedures which use doctrinal concensus as the basis for fellowship.

In order to gain a full understanding of the differences in establishing fellowship, especially among American Lutherans, which exist today, a few developments in the church of the twentieth century should be considered. First, the development and spread of Biblical Criticism in the modern church has influenced how Christians today approach fellowship. The growth of the Historical-Critical Methodolgy has caused a change in the basic attitude which is taken toward the Bible and which breaks with all previous periods of Christianity. Scripture is no longer an authority in itself to many. It now must be measured and distilled to find its real message by means of scholarly analysis. This has necessarily questioned the legitimacy of Scripture to be a norm for the expression of the Gospel in confessional statements--or at least, of those statements of the past.

Another force in the modern church which has affected Christians' view of fellowship has been the Ecumenical Movement.⁶⁵ Growing out of a concern for addressing the problems of the modern world with a common front, more and more churches in the wake of this movement have passed by doctrinal distinctions in order to form unions based upon the common confession, "Jesus is Lord." Elert remarks,

The division at the Lord's Table, about which Asmussen justly grieves, is in fact much older than that viz., the Reformation. In the Codex Theodosianus of 428 we observe a respectable number of Christian confessions existing beside one another. All but one are pronounced heretical and punishable in civil law, but this may not lead us to suppose that they are thereby excluded from Christendom. None of them, except the Manichaeans, would have denied that "Jesus is the Lord," a statement which in our day has been taken as sufficient

to qualify a church as Christian. None of these heretics was united at the Lord's Table with the others or with the majority church.⁶⁶

Thus membership in the Una Sancta is not the only requirement for church fellowship even in the early church. There has to be an explanation of what the statement "Jesus is Lord" means in a confession of the doctrine of the Gospel.

The Lutheran mergers of the twentieth century also point out some basic changes of attitude in Lutheranism toward fellowship. The article of Sigmund Fritschel which was mentioned earlier set forth the idea of fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines in the Lutheran Confessions. This developed into the concept of "open questions"--doctrines which the Scripture and the Confessions address but which are not divisive of church fellowship if not agreed upon.⁶⁷ It was this concept which led to the Madison Agreement of 1912⁶⁸ which ultimately resulted in the merger of the Norwegian Lutherans in 1917. The Lutheran Church in America came about by a subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, but in its Washington Declaration of 1920⁶⁹ indicated that it would not define what that subscription meant. For this new Lutheran church no discussion was necessary to determine if other church bodies understood the Confessions in the same way it did. This meant that the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) considered itself to be in fellowship with any church which says it subscribes to the confessions. This is its stance towards Lutheran fellowship still today.

The discussions between the American Lutheran Conference and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod which took place throughout the middle of this century indicated a continuing desire of many American Lutherans to be confessionally loyal.⁷⁰ These discussions also indicate the growing split between the two church bodies over what the doctrine of the Gospel is. There has been a growing trend to redefine the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession's use of Gospel as "Gospel in the narrow sense." In the American Lutheran Church's

merger with the Evangelical Lutheran Church to form the American Lutheran Church, one section of American Lutheranism drew itself towards this understanding of the Gospel. The LCMS has officially retained its historical stand that the Augustana is talking of the "Gospel in the broad sense."⁷¹

It becomes apparent that the LCMS recognized this basic difference when it declared fellowship with the ALC in 1969.⁷² The differences have only grown worse since then.⁷³ It remains evident that true fellowship can only occur after full doctrinal agreement has been reached.

Three facts can be concluded from this historical study of fellowship in the church. The first is that the church, up through the twentieth century, has practiced altar fellowship as the indication of full church fellowship. The second conclusion is that the church, up through the twentieth century, has based fellowship upon agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel. The content of this doctrine has always been in debate. Third, the modern church has tended to narrow the definition of the doctrine of the Gospel to mean the Gospel in the narrow sense in order to bypass divisions and disagreements and thus achieve fellowship. This has been done due to many factors, not the least of which are the reduction of the Bible as norm of the Gospel and the influence of the Ecumenical Movement.

Notes to Chapter III

¹ Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, trans. N. E. Nagel, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 48

² Ibid., p. 47.

³ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

- ⁶ Ibid., p. 54.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 54.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 55.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 57.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 69-72.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 75.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 77.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 80.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 84-93.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 94-96.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 100.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 111, 112.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 113.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 129.
- ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 130-134.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 141.
- ²² Ibid., pp. 149-157.
- ²³ Diptychs were a pair of panels, hinged together and covered with wax, which could then be written upon.
- ²⁴ Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, p. 160.
- ²⁵ Ibid., pp. 166-170.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 186-187.
- ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 187-197.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 164.
- ²⁹ Hermann Sasse, This is My Body, rev. ed. (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), pp. 10-13.
- ³⁰ Ibid., pp. 56-61; cf., p. 63.
- ³¹ Martin Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther's Works, American Edition, Helmut T. Lehmann gen. ed., Vol. 36, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 11-126.

- ³² Hermann Sasse, This is My Body, pp. 111-118
- ³³ Ibid., pp. 159-173.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 153.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 212.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 228.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 216.
- ³⁸ Ibid., pp. 214-215.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 233.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 216-220.
- ⁴¹ F. Bente, Historical Introductions of the Book of Concord, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 95-102.
- ⁴² Ibid., pp. 247-250.
- ⁴³ Hermann Sasse, This is My Body, p. 243.
- ⁴⁴ Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966; reprint ed., St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1980), p. 134.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 132; E. Clifford Nelson, ed., The Lutherans in North America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 60-61.
- ⁴⁶ Richard Wolf, Documents, pp. 210-215.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 26-29; 31; 60-65; 74; 82-84.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 66, 123.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 100-104.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-106.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 143-148.
- ⁵² Ibid., pp. 148-152.
- ⁵³ Ibid., pp. 107-108, 154.
- ⁵⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., Lutheran Confessional Theology in America: 1840-1880, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 56-77.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 78-100.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 81-87.

- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 91.
- ⁵⁸ Richard Wolf, Documents, pp. 45, 47, 73; 188.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 155-156, 160-165.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 171.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 172.
- ⁶² Ibid., pp. 137-151.
- ⁶³ Ibid., pp. 179-197.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 259-282.
- ⁶⁵ Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, 3rd ed., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 538-544.
- ⁶⁶ Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship, pp. 43-44.
- ⁶⁷ Richard Wolf, Documents, p. 211.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 232-235.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 350.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., the "Inspiration Controversy"--pp. 329-336; the "Chicago Theses" (1925-1928)--pp. 361-371; the "Brief Statement" (1932)--pp. 381-394; the "Sandusky Declaration" (1938)--pp. 394-428.
- ⁷¹ "A Statement of Doctrinal Differences," A Report of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Commission on Fellowship, October 1980, pp. 13-16.
- ⁷² "To Declare Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with The American Lutheran Church," Resolution 3-15 of the 1969 Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Convention Proceedings, 1969, pp. 96-99.
- ⁷³ "A Statement of Doctrinal Differences," AIC/ICMS Commission on Fellowship, p. 2; "To continue 'Fellowship in Protest' with the American Lutheran Church," Resolution 3-03 of the 1979 Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Convention Proceedings, pp. 117-119.

CHAPTER IV

THE VALIDITY OF SEPARATING ALTAR AND PULPIT FELLOWSHIP

Altar Fellowship is Church Fellowship

The purpose of this paper has been to gain a proper understanding of fellowship in order to determine whether the separation of altar fellowship from pulpit fellowship is a valid practice for the church. A study of the Scriptural and Confessional basis of fellowship has been done to determine exactly what fellowship is and to what extent men can form their own expressions of it. A study of the history of the practice of fellowship in the church then was done in order to determine what the New Testament people of God through the ages have recognized as the necessary principles of fellowship in carrying out the mission of the church. This chapter will conclude the paper by applying the findings of these two studies to the specific question of the validity of separating altar from pulpit fellowship.

The testimony of Scripture and the witness of the Lutheran Confessions agree with the consistent practice of the church in the basic principle that altar fellowship is church fellowship. For Christians from New Testament times to today the ultimate outward expression of the true unity of the body of Christ has been in the Sacrament of the Altar. In order for this to take place, it has been necessary for Christians to outwardly witness to the Jesus Christ who binds them together in the Sacrament and confess who He truly is. When they agree in that witness in a common confession of faith, there is fellowship. They recognize that fellowship publically while protecting it

among themselves by allowing all who agree in their confession to come together with them in worship, specifically, in sharing the means of grace--hearing the Word of God and joining in the Sacrament of unity, the Lord's Supper.

"Altar and Pulpit Fellowship" is a Single Term

The second basic principle of fellowship derives from the first. Since altar fellowship is church fellowship and since it happens only when agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel is reached, these two factors cannot be separated. This is the meaning of Luther's insistence that the Lord's Supper is the Gospel and the Gospel is the Lord's Supper. Thus the designation "pulpit and altar fellowship" is truly a single term which describes full church fellowship. The phrase is a human designation for fellowship which rose out of nineteenth century Lutheranism in America. The wording of the Lutheran understanding of fellowship found in the Galesburg Rule, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers--Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants," naturally led to a short hand form--"pulpit and altar fellowship."

This phrase does not indicate that there are two levels of fellowship. Rather it is based on the special Lutheran understandings of the Church and the means of grace (Augustana VII/VIII and V). For Lutherans, fellowship is possible only because of the Una Sancta (AC VII) but can only be achieved in this life by the empirical churches (AC VIII). So it is that agreement in the visible marks of the church is what is necessary for fellowship (AC VII,2). But these marks are really one and the same thing--the means of grace--since they are just different expressions (one that is heard only and one that is seen and heard) of the same thing--the Gospel (AC V). Thus agreement in one is agreement in the other--disagreement in one necessarily means disagreement in the other.

True Lutheran Fellowship is Based Upon Agreement
in the Doctrine of the Gospel

The third and final major principle of fellowship this paper has discovered has been mentioned already. Though this principle is implicit in the practice of the early church, it is stated clearly in Lutheranism. Since the declaration of the Confession at Augsburg, Lutherans have considered fellowship to be dependent upon agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel. There has always been debate over what articles are to be included in the doctrine of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the basic principle that true fellowship is agreement in the fundamental articles of faith has remained unchallenged in confessional Lutheranism. Much of the problem today in discussing fellowship between the ALC and the LCMS is that there is a basic difference of opinion as to what comprises the doctrine of the Gospel.¹ The task for these two church bodies, then, is not to ignore this difference and practice church fellowship with out true unity. Rather, it is to strive to achieve agreement between the two as to what comprises the Gospel message of the church.

Separating Altar Fellowship from
Pulpit Fellowship is not Valid

From these three major principles it can be concluded that separating altar fellowship from pulpit fellowship is not a valid option for Christians. God has joined the two together as His wondrous instruments of His grace given to His people. It is not up to men to split them for any reason, no matter how practical the reasons may be. In addition, to separate these two facets of God's grace would mean either that the fellowship enjoyed at the Lord's Table is inferior to the doctrine of the Gospel which is proclaimed, or that the common confession of the Lord's Supper is sufficient agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel to establish fellowship.² Either of these militates against a Lutheran understanding of both the Lord's Supper and fellowship. Whatever

the reason, the result of separating altar fellowship from pulpit fellowship would compromise the Christian witness both to other churches and to the world of the truth of God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions.

Implications for Missouri Synod--AIC Fellowship

If, therefore, the solution which was presented at the beginning of this paper is not valid, then it offers no hope of providing the proper answer to the problems of church fellowship which face the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. It is a sad situation, but the fact remains that the basis for true fellowship--agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel--does not exist between the two church bodies. To establish altar fellowship with the differences remaining will do nothing to make a fuller agreement possible. Indeed, since altar fellowship is church fellowship, it will be maintained that there is no longer any need for serious doctrinal discussion because fellowship already exists. What can be done? It will do no good for the church to trick itself into thinking it is maintaining its doctrinal position by allowing altar fellowship and refusing pulpit fellowship. Instead, the differences must be faced honestly and discussed thoroughly. The only way to do so is to withhold fellowship until agreement can be reached in these doctrinal divisions. Both church bodies need to reexamine their historical stands on the doctrine of the Gospel and what articles of faith make it up so that they are sure they are protecting the truth of the message of Jesus Christ while not adding the doctrines of men. Both church bodies should be willing and eager to meet at all levels in order to find the agreement which will produce a God-pleasing fellowship.

Notes to Chapter IV

¹An in-depth study of what the Augsburg Confession means by the phrase and how Lutherans today are to understand it, attempted only briefly in this paper, coupled with a detailed review of what the AIC and the LCMS have said

on the topic over the years would make a helpful clarification in understanding and resolving the fellowship problems today.

²A surprising discovery of my research which could also be followed up on is that it is not at all safe to assume a common understanding of the Lord's Supper among Lutherans any longer. In three books, one by a Roman Catholic scholar (Edward Kilmartin), a second by an Anglican theological publisher (SPCK), and the last by American Lutheran scholars (Helmut T. Lehmann, ed.) I found substantially the same arguments for what amounted to a virtual denial of the Real Presence.

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