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# The Lutheran World Federation

By GILBERT A. THIELE

**EDITORIAL NOTE.** This article on the origin and development of the Lutheran World Federation reproduces another chapter from the author's dissertation, submitted to the theological faculty of the University of Basel, Switzerland.

**I**N the years immediately after World War I, tentative attempts were made to establish contact for purposes of fellowship and understanding between European, North American, Asian, and other Lutheran bodies in the world. The first real meeting of representatives of Lutheran churches throughout the world took place in 1923 at Eisenach, Germany. Here 160 delegates from twenty-two nations met August 19—24, 1923, in order to explore and express their unity of faith and spiritual kinship. The way for this gathering and all that followed from it "was prepared by the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference, which, although at first confined to Germany, was even before 1900 extended to Scandinavia."<sup>1</sup> The Eisenach delegates decided there was need for a world organization and created the Lutheran World Convention. "In Eisenach in 1923 an organization was effected under the name of the Lutheran World Convention, uniting Lutherans on the doctrinal basis of the Holy Scriptures, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Shorter Catechism."<sup>2</sup> They accepted the doctrinal statement which is now paragraph one in the constitution of the Lutheran World Federation.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1923 and 1929 developments continued to favor a growing feeling of fellowship among Lutherans in Scandinavian countries, Germany, the United States of America, Canada, Asia, and Australia. The Lutheran Church in Germany, as represented in the life of the theological faculties and its Church bodies, worked under a new system necessitated by the establishment of the Weimar

<sup>1</sup> *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517—1948*, edd. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, London: SPCK, 1954, p. 615.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings of the LWF Assembly, Lund, Sweden*, Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1948, p. 126, hereafter referred to as *LR*.

Republic, in which the hereditary princes and nobility were no longer the *summi episcopi* of the various territorial Lutheran Churches. The American Churches that were represented at Eisenach continued to prosper and to grow in mutual understanding. The constituent bodies of the National Lutheran Council in the United States consolidated their work more and more. By the time the Lutheran World Convention met in 1929 at Copenhagen, Denmark, Lutheranism had begun to recover its strength and vigor after the severe setbacks of World War I.

The Lutheran World Convention at Copenhagen was larger than that at Eisenach. From June 26 to July 4, 1929, 147 delegates from twenty-one countries and one thousand unofficial delegates were present. The confessional declaration which was adopted at Eisenach was reaffirmed. (*LR*, p. 127.)

At Eisenach a furthering of Lutheran solidarity and the projection of a program of relief for the strengthening of weak and suffering Lutheran Churches throughout the world had been initiated. Copenhagen heard and approved the report on the implementation of this assignment by the executive committee and resolved: "In all its work of serving love the Lutheran World Convention and its committees shall, so far as the means are available, assist the needy and deserving Churches of the faith without respect to race, language, or political alignment" (*LR*, p. 127). In this resolution lies the basis for the vast program of relief and rehabilitation undertaken since World War II by the Lutheran World Federation, the eventual successor of the Lutheran World Convention.

In 1935 (October 13—20) the Lutheran World Convention met again, in Paris, France, where one would not expect to find a strong Lutheran representation. In spirit and purpose this convention followed the pattern set by the two previous ones. By resolution it declared its purpose to be:

"To bring the Lutheran Churches and organizations of the world into an enduring and intimate relationship with one another, in order to promote oneness of faith and confession and to ward off antagonistic and hostile influences" (*LR*, p. 127). It was also decided "for the sake of continuity and efficiency of the work of the Lutheran World Convention," to create the office of an executive secretary (*LR*, p. 127).

The reference to "antagonistic and hostile influences" has a double background, that of the situation in the German Reich in 1935 and that of the Barmen Declaration, 1934. The pressure under which the Church, regardless of denomination, existed in Germany is too well known to need discussion and recollection. However, the part that the Barmen Declaration played in combating Hitlerism and also in awakening a greater Lutheran solidarity in Germany and in the Lutheran World Convention will be briefly characterized.<sup>4</sup>

Of the Barmen Declaration it has been said: "The 'Confessional Union' proposed by (Karl) Barth is comprehended in the 'Bekennende Kirche' — the 'Confessing Church' — as it is called by the Barthians. 'Good Lutherans' and 'good Reformed' dwell in boundaries that have been declared to be no more than distinctions between theological schools. But who are these 'good' Lutherans and 'good' Reformed people? As circumstances have revealed, they are those Reformed and Lutheran Christians who are Barthians or who have at least accepted the theological Declaration of Barmen, proposed and largely prepared by Barth for a common testimony of Lutherans and Reformed against the heresies of our day — that is, prepared for a new Confession to express agreement between the two communions. In the Confessing Church of Old Prussia the *Confessio Barmensis* has already been set alongside the former Confessions as an obligatory Confession for Lutherans and Reformed who are candidates for ordination. In these circles only those are considered 'good' Lutherans (that is, orthodox Lutherans) who have accepted the Barmen Declaration as a Confession and who expound the Augsburg Confession in accordance with it. The attempt to unite the 'good' Lutherans and Reformed has consequently ended by transforming ecclesiastical boundaries into school boundaries and by asserting that the boundaries between theological schools are boundaries between Churches. . . . The Confessing Church, with its Barmen Confession, in behalf of which Barth has already demanded ecumenical recognition, has become a new Church, a Church which must be repudiated as a sect by

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<sup>4</sup> Cp. Edmund Schlink, in his essay on the doctrine of the church in Lutheran Churches in Germany in *The Nature of the Church*, preparatory volume for Faith and Order at Lund, 1952, p. 54.

the Reformed Church as well as by the Lutheran. . . . The Confessing Church is already reflecting the characteristics of a society of enthusiasts. The claim has already been advanced that the Barmen Confession was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is consequently the Word of God."<sup>5</sup>

In Paris the Lutheran World Convention adopted a resolution which stressed confessional integrity and identity. This emphasis was a sign of things to come, as shall be showed later. However, while emphasizing Lutheran solidarity, the Lutheran World Convention, through its executive committee, in 1936 drew up propositions for presentation to the contemplated Philadelphia Assembly in 1940, which emphasized the continuation of Lutheran ecumenicity. They are given here as part of the pre-Lund 1947 development.

*"The Lutheran Church Ecumenical in Character*

"Based upon prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and growing out of the elemental experiences of personal faith, the Lutheran interpretation of the Gospel is not bound to incidentals, such as polity or liturgy or type of piety. With the God-Man as its center and the universal priesthood of believers as its radius, it covers the whole range of the human family and can never be the exclusive possession of any particular race, nation, or temperament.

"The universal appeal of the Lutheran interpretation of the Gospel, the elemental quality of the Lutheran understanding of faith and the catholic breadth of the Lutheran doctrine of the Church, impart to Lutheranism an ecumenical quality that must be remembered in these days of emphasis on externals. In the truest sense Lutheranism is itself an ecumenical movement.

*"Lutheran Solidarity*

"The times seem to demand that the inner unity already existing among Lutherans of the world be cultivated and mobilized in Lutheran world solidarity.

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<sup>5</sup> *Here We Stand*, Herman Sasse, p. 168, as translated from the German *Was heisst lutherisch?* Published in 1937, it was republished by Augsburg Publishing House, 1946.

"The purpose in seeking to develop Lutheran solidarity is to help meet the difficulties that confront our Churches just now in common with all Christendom, to unite our forces in support of our Lutheran brethren who even now are suffering for their faith, and secure the co-operation of Lutherans everywhere in entering the new doors and traversing the new paths that God has recently opened to the progress of the evangelical spirit. The purpose is to help one another in preserving and sharing with all nations the treasures we possess in the Gospel of our Lord, whom we know to be the Redeemer of the world from sin.

*"Ecclesiastical Relationships*

"The Lutheran Churches of the World should proceed with united front in their relations with ecumenical Christian movements, general co-operative organizations, or Christian Churches claiming universality. They should agree among themselves as to their united participation or nonparticipation" (*LR*, p. 128).

These propositions insist on an important principle which is operative in the relationship of the Lutheran World Federation to the World Council of Churches. Representation is to be on the basis of confession or denomination and not according to countries, as the original plan for the WCC provided. This principle is recognized also beyond the Lutheran Church, as the following statement will illustrate:

"One effect of the strong Lutheran consciousness has been the continued emphasis by Lutherans on the important principle of confessional representation in the World Council of Churches. In explanation of this position Dr. Franklin Clark Fry has declared: 'For us the strongest existing realities outside our individual Churches are the ties which unite us with our fellow-confessors of the Augsburg Confession. All over the world our primary Christian loyalties are not geographical but confessional.' The constitutional amendment adopted by the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948 satisfied the desires of the Lutheran World Federation. It reads: 'Seats in the Assembly shall be allocated to the member Churches by the Central Committee, due regard being given to such factors as numerical size, adequate

confessional representation, and adequate geographical distribution.'"<sup>6</sup>

Lutheranism's distinction from Romanism and from all non-Roman groups is thus already expressed in 1936 and declared as almost a condition for any Lutheran participation in the larger ecumenical movement.

The Philadelphia meeting was not held.<sup>7</sup> The tragic involvement in World War II of almost every country where the Lutheran Church is represented to any extent at all, put a stop to all Lutheran ecumenical meetings, even as it caused the suspension of large ecumenical meetings of every kind everywhere.<sup>8</sup>

#### MEETING OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION, LUND, 1947

The Lutheran World Convention met once more two years after V-E and V-J days, in the university buildings and ancient cathedral at Lund, Sweden. Here it constituted itself as a Federation of Churches and Synods and asserted its identity as the largest single group of Churches formed up to that time.

The Lund Report appeared under the title of *The Proceedings of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly, Lund, Sweden, June 30—July 6, 1947*. 185 delegates from sixty-six Churches and Church federations in twenty-six countries attended. (LR, p. 98f.) They came from every continent and racial group.<sup>9</sup> The global scope of the Lutheran World Federation is as great in extent as that of the World Council of Churches. Lutheranism, one of the largest non-Roman groups, through the Lutheran World Federation seeks to express the world-wide nature of its membership, its task, and its potential. Languages, peoples, and cultures of immense variety have been reached and influenced by the Gospel

<sup>6</sup> *History of the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 616, quoting also the *Amsterdam Report of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, p. 113, and *The Lutheran Churches of the World*, Abdel R. Wentz, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Current (1956) plans call for an LWF meeting in Minneapolis, Minn., in 1957.

<sup>8</sup> In order to summarize the ecumenical setbacks caused by such catastrophes as World War I and II, surveys should be undertaken of the effect of global wars on the church. Stewart Herman's *Report from Christian Europe* (N. Y.: Friendship Press, 1953) attempts such an assessment.

<sup>9</sup> The bodies represented at Lund are listed on pp. 163—171 of the *Lund Report*.

as preached by the Lutheran Church. From Australia to China, from the Hawaiian Islands to Poland, Hungary, and beyond, from Italy to Norway and Finland, and from Argentina to Alaska, Lutheranism has driven its stakes and lengthened its cords.

How can such a heterogeneous group maintain and foster the solidarity for which it proposes to stand and to speak? To accomplish this purpose, the Lutheran World Federation adopted a constitution at Lund, which was to furnish a *modus vivendi* for so large, scattered, and polyglot an organization as that portion of the Lutheran Church banded together in the Federation. (*LR*, pp. 15, 19, 100, 104.)

Since the constitutional paragraphs on membership, organization, finance, and amendments to the constitution deal largely with administrative questions (*LR*, pp. 16—19; 101, 104; Constitution, pp. 3—10), the first three, and especially the second and third paragraphs of the LWF constitution, are those on which any judgment of membership in the LWF will be based. A comparison of the LWF constitution at those points where it speaks of its doctrinal basis and its purpose, with relevant passages in the constitutions of the Synodical Conference bodies, is of interest.

The confessional paragraph of the LWF constitution (paragraph two on Doctrinal Basis) reads: "The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the only source and infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and sees in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God."<sup>10</sup>

The confessional paragraph of the Synodical Conference reads: "The Synodical Conference accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the Word of God and also the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, constituting the *Book of Concord* of 1580."<sup>11</sup> In its revised form this paragraph now reads:

<sup>10</sup> Pamphlet: *The Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation*, Lausanne, 1948, p. 1. Also *LR*, pp. 15, 100.

<sup>11</sup> *Doctrinal Declarations*, p. 3. This wording dates back to 1872, the year of the organization of the Synodical Conference.



"The Synodical Conference of North America accepts without reservation the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the verbally inspired Word of God and the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, constituting the Book of Concord of 1580, as its confession of faith."<sup>12</sup>

The confessional paragraph of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod reads:

"Synod, and every member of Synod, accepts without reservation:  
1. The Scripture of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;

2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit, the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord."<sup>13</sup>

At the organization of the Wisconsin Synod in 1850 the confessional declaration was based "on Scriptures and upon the Augsburg Confession (UAC) and the other Lutheran Confessions." At their ordination candidates were to be obligated to these confessions.<sup>14</sup>

The confessional paragraph of the Wisconsin Synod today reads: "This synod accepts the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament, as the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of doctrine, faith, and life. This Synod adheres to the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church embodied in the Book of Concord of 1580, not in so far as, but because they are a correct

<sup>12</sup> This reworded statement was adopted in answer to the Pittsburgh Agreement between the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church of America, 1940, in which the term "verbally inspired" does not occur, but in which the Bible is described as "a complete, errorless, unbreakable whole of which Christ is the center."

<sup>13</sup> Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace* (St. Louis: CPH, 1946), pp. 99f. *Handbook of The Lutheran Church* — Missouri Synod: Constitution, Article II.

<sup>14</sup> *Continuing in His Word*, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publ. House, 1950, p. 15.

presentation and exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God."<sup>15</sup>

The confessional paragraph of the Norwegian Synod reads as follows:

"2. The only source and rule of doctrine is the Word of God as revealed in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments

"3. The Norwegian Synod adopts as its confession all the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord."<sup>16</sup>

The confessional paragraph of the Slovak Synod says:

"The Slovak American Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the United States of North America confesses the divinity of the Holy Scriptures (Canonical)."<sup>17</sup>

The acknowledgment of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the only source and infallible norm of Church doctrine and practice is characteristically Lutheran if the quoted paragraphs on doctrinal bases can serve as criteria. Remembering that this is the LWF constitution, not a "confessional document" in the sense that the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms of Luther are, it appears that its doctrinal basis paragraph expresses a truly Lutheran standpoint. The constitution of the LWF gives its members the right to insist on a conservative and orthodox view of Scripture. Because the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are recognized as the only source, the infallible norm of Church doctrine and practice, the LWF by its constitution guarantees the continuation in the Federation of the Biblical standard of teaching and life.

The Lutheran World Federation also sees in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church a pure exposition of the Word of God. Remembering the emphasis placed on the importance and normative nature of the confessions by the Missouri Synod in 1847 and its present-day constitution, by the Wisconsin Synod in 1850 and thereafter, by the Synodical Conference in 1872 and 1944, this same emphasis by the LWF in 1947 appears to place a case of marked similarity in confessional acceptance before us.

<sup>15</sup> Constitution of the Ev. Luth. Jt. Synod of Wis. a. o. St., p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> S. C. Ylvisaker, *Grace for Grace*, Mankato, 1943, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Geo. Dolak, *A History of the Slovak Ev. Luth. Church*, pp. 56f.

The "purpose" paragraph of the Lutheran World Federation constitution likewise has a similarity to the purposes outlined in the constitutions of the various Lutheran Synods in the Synodical Conference and of the Synodical Conference itself. The entire paragraph reads as follows:

*"Nature and Purpose*

"1. The Lutheran World Federation shall be a free association of Lutheran Churches. It shall have no power to legislate for the Churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it.

"2. The purposes of the Lutheran World Federation are:

- a) To bear united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation;
- b) To cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran Churches of the world;
- c) To promote fellowship and co-operation in study among Lutherans;
- d) To foster Lutheran participation in ecumenical movements;
- e) To develop a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in missions and education; and to
- f) Support Lutheran groups in need of spiritual and material aid.

"3. The Lutheran World Federation may take action on behalf of member Churches in such matters as one or more of them may commit to it." (LR, pp. 15, 16, 100, 101; Constitution, pp. 2, 3.)

With the exception of 2d almost every conservative group could — and some do — subscribe to these purposes. The reference to the ecumenical movements is a matter of time and timing. Ecumenical movements in the modern sense did not exist when the Lutheran bodies in the United States were organized. The paragraph cited below from the Missouri Synod constitution as to the renunciation of unionism and syncretism certainly was meant seriously. Still it also was always the stated purpose of Dr. Walther and other Lutheran theologians to unite at least American Lu-

theranism in one body. When the Synodical Conference was founded in 1872, this purpose was given expression in the constitutional definition of purpose and object of the Conference:

"An expression of the unity of the Spirit existing among the respective synods; mutual encouragement as to faith and confession; promotion of unity as to doctrine and practice and the removal of threatening disturbance thereof; co-operation in matters of mutual interest; and effort to establish territorial boundaries for the synods, provided that the language used does not separate them; *the uniting of all Lutheran Synods of America into one orthodox Lutheran Church.*"<sup>18</sup> (Ital. ours.)

An important point mentioned at the time of the founding of the Synodical Conference in 1872 is already reflected in its name as a "Conference." It is not to be a superchurch but a consultative and advisory body which was to carry out such joint work as might be approved by all its member bodies. Paragraph III.1 (LR, pp. 15, 16, 100, 101) of the constitution of the LWF expresses a similar regard for the autonomy of its member groups. Because of the intercontinental character of its work, it does, however, leave the door open for a larger scope of work, if so requested. (LR, v. s.) Thus a comparison of the Lutheran World Federation constitution with the constitutional documents of the Synodical Conference and its member synods bears out a basic similarity of ideals and purpose.<sup>19</sup>

The confessional paragraphs of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the American Lutheran Conference (ALCF), and the National Lutheran Council (NLC) are in agreement with those of the Lutheran World Federation. All the synods in these church federations of the United States were members of the Lutheran World Convention prior to the organization of the Federation.

The constitution of the Lutheran World Federation, adopted in Lund, has been in force since July 4, 1948.

<sup>18</sup> *A Century of Grace*, p. 161. *Continuing in His Word*, p. 75. *Grace for Grace*, p. 58. The two latter accounts omit the phrase emphasized by us above, which in the 1944 Constitution of the Synodical Conference has survived thus: "To strive for true unity in doctrine and practice among Lutheran church bodies." Constitution of the Synodical Conference, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Cp. Constitution of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, Art. III, 1, and VII.

The theological, missionary, and ecumenical outlook is expressed in the addresses and sermons delivered at Lund. The assembly heard two sermons, both delivered at Communion services, and eight addresses, given by nine speakers from as many countries.

Archbishop Erling Eidem of Uppsala opened the Federation meeting with a sermon and address of welcome based on Col. 3: 12-17 (*LR*, pp. 109—112). The reference to Lutheran ecumenicity in the sermon is largely confined to these statements concerning love, peace, and gratitude. On love he said:

"Love, which looks toward the Lord, sees in His forgiving goodness its model and guiding star, will help us to discover our responsibilities in life's personal relations as well as our duties as true Christians to the community, the nation, and to mankind." On peace:

"And this peace of Christ, given through grace and received through faith, binds us together in a communion of the heart, which goes beyond the boundaries of time and space, which removes all differences and conflicts. We are as limbs of one and the same body. That we should need one another and serve one another and give joy to one another is a requisite which God demands in His gracious calling to us who believe. The peace of Christ creates a holy catholic church." On gratitude:

"My brethren, thanksgiving befits us. It befits us particularly in these times filled with heavy and tragic memories, with spiritual and physical needs, with its uncertain and menacing outlook for the future. This is grace to be thankful for, that we may begin all in the name of our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Then all that we undertake in word and in deed cannot be without its blessing. In this blessed name we begin and continue this whole meeting for which we are now gathered."

In his opening address of welcome Archbishop Eidem more pointedly gave expression to the principle of Lutheran solidarity as well as to the wider Christian understanding which the Lutheran World Federation was to put into operation.

"Through the church inheritance which we have received in the Lutheran Reformation we belong to each other. Thus it is only right that we should be thankful and glad to experience and give expression to *our spiritual kinship*, and we must also be thankful

for the fact that side by side we can fight sin in the world, a struggle to which our Lord Jesus calls us. Naturally this must never imply any Lutheran egotism or an indifference toward our Christian sister Churches. Christ is our one Lord, and therefore we must try with all zeal to keep and deepen the unity of the spirit amongst all who confess with us the blessed Name of Christ. The Lutheran World Federation can and must promote the effort for universal Christian understanding and co-operation." (Text, 1 Peter 1:7; *LR*, pp. 112—114.)

In these words there is a clear indication of the spirit of that Lutheranism which is to be expressed in the Lutheran World Federation also in its emphasis, noticeably Scandinavian (Swedish), on ecumenicity beyond denominational boundaries.

An American point of view on the need for a federation was expressed by Dr. Ralph Long, Executive director of the National Lutheran Council, New York, in his keynote address, from which we have taken some quotations earlier. He said:

"There is (in the Lutheran Church) a diversity of organization and custom, yet there is a fundamental unity of faith which binds all constituencies into a common fellowship and comradeship" (*LR*, p. 126). He further mentioned three basic presuppositions underlying a Lutheran World Federation:

1. A Lutheran World Federation is desirable and possible and has a place and definite responsibility in the world.
2. The Lutheran Churches of the world urgently need this federated strength themselves.
3. Through a united approach Lutherans can make their best contribution to the ecumenical movement of evangelical Christianity. (*LR*, p. 126.)

Dr. Long continued to point out in his keynote address that after the paralyzing effects of World War II both the greater need and the greater difficulty of a Lutheran World Federation were seen as preparations were made for the Lund Assembly. Now that this Assembly could be achieved, he explained the meaning of the terse statements under § III in the Constitution. What he said on the purposes of the Lutheran World Federation can be summarized thus:

1. United witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation. This stresses the "doctrine of justification by faith through the grace of God as the most important fact for the world to learn today."

2. Unity of faith — the future existence and usefulness of the Lutheran Church depends very largely upon their being knit together by a common faith rather than by a common organization.

3. Fellowship and co-operation in study among Lutherans to dispel suspicion and distrust.

4. Ecumenical responsibilities — a united approach, not a house divided against itself in its approach to the ecumenical movement. The World Council of Churches needs strong confessional groups. Those who oppose the consolidation of Churches of the same faith are not truly ecumenical. They seek by a syncretic process to amalgamate all Protestant faiths by ignoring confessional differences and thus breaking down the devotion and loyalty to confessional principles. This also applies to missions, in which field and its tremendous problems the Lutheran Churches must counsel together and not act independently of one another.

5. To give aid where needed. Not only do the weak and endangered Lutheran Churches need the encouraging help of their stronger and more favored brethren, but the obverse is also true. All are members of the body of Christ, consequently the affliction affects all. There is a reciprocal blessing in helping one another. Through the Lutheran World Federation we shall be joined not only in the fellowship of a common faith but also in the fellowship of common suffering and sympathetic understanding. Out of this fellowship will come untold blessings and benedictions to all. (*LR*, pp. 130—138.)

Dr. Long's keynote address may answer some of the questions which have been asked of the Lutheran World Federation. His evident readiness to commit the Lutheran World Federation to a confessional stand — a stand that has still greater practical significance in American Lutheranism than in European, particularly Scandinavian and German Lutheranism — parallels in some respects the numerous attempts of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

to reach the German Union and Landeskirchen in gatherings known generally as Bad Boll Conferences, 1947—1954.<sup>20</sup>

The address which most clearly expresses the desire to meet and work together with the larger ecumenical movement came from the first executive secretary of the Federation, Dr. S. C. Michelfelder. He had been sent by the Lutheran Churches of the United States through the National Lutheran Council to work for the physical and spiritual care of stranded Lutherans all over Europe. Geneva was his headquarters. In carrying out his broad commission, he had to work with the still not formally organized but nevertheless functioning World Council of Churches. From this experience and against this background of working, planning, and direction, he could say:

"We have held to our (Lutheran) common confessions. We will not surrender them, now, for any temporary advantage, no matter how tempting that may be. Unity (Lutheran) must be our watchword. United in faith, hope and love." (*LR*, p. 35.)

"In the World Council of Churches the Lutheran Church must be represented confessionally, so that our birthright be not lost. This is not time for a watered-down or least-common-denominator compromise to be attempted confessionally, pretending there is unity of confession. Such a Church is only a house of sand. The success of the World Council of Churches lies in this, that it remain a council of churches — plural — with each Church body maintaining its full autonomy. Coordination and not elimination will assure life to this healthy ecumenical movement." (*LR*, p. 39.)

The policy that governs the approach of the Lutheran Churches to one another in the Lutheran World Federation and their joint approach as a federation to the rest of Christendom as represented in the World Council of Churches is also reflected in the message:

"Before the altar and pulpit our hearts have been knit together and we have sealed enduring bonds of fellowship with one-another as children of God in Christ. — The federation of the Lutheran Churches of the world has now become a reality. Based on Scriptural foundations, it has been formed in Christian faith and love.

<sup>20</sup> *The Story of Bad Boll*, F. E. Mayer, 1948; *Bad Boll*, M. F. Franzmann, 1949.



This brings to fulfilment at last a great dream that for centuries lived in the hearts of Lutheran people." (*LR*, p. 97.)

Lutheran intra- and extra-ecumenicity, as understood by the bodies participating in the Lutheran World Federation, is expressed and defined also in the sectional reports. "The Gospel is so exceedingly rich that no one section of the Church can claim to have fully and exhaustively comprehended all its wealth. One Church has grasped more of it, while another has remained on the circumference. One has grasped one aspect and another another. In this respect the Churches can learn from each other and help each other to a simpler, richer, and deeper understanding of the Gospel." (*LR*, p. 58.)

"Christ's Church on earth is divided into a multiplicity of separate Churches. The reason for this is not to be found simply in the superabundant riches of the Gospel, but also in human sin. Consequently, the prayer of the Lord, 'Ut omnes unum sint,' constitutes a call to repentance for all Churches and puts them under the vital obligation to strive for the realization of unity. No Church, however, must let itself be led by its concern for unity to surrender anything of the truth that has been entrusted to it. Therefore, our Evangelical Lutheran Church may not surrender anything of what was given to it at the Reformation, when it was brought back to the fountainhead of the Gospel, the message of Christ as our righteousness (Justification by faith alone). Such unity as our Church possesses in virtue of its obedience to the Word, and of its common Confession, finds expression in the deep inward fellowship in which the individual members are bound up with each other in the body of the Church in spite of all differences between them and of the sin that besets them. As the vine with its branches and leaves is but one vine with one common life, so is the Church with its members through whom flows the power and life of Christ. Different as they are and remain in nationality, class, and station, yet in their fellowship with Christ they are one. This fellowship is something which calls for constant renewal, yet at the same time it is something already given and constantly there." (*LR*, p. 58.)

"As an antidote for the ills, weakness, and problems of the world today, we state our profound conviction that the pathway of God for the spiritual renewal of the Church and of the world will be

marked out only by a newly aroused and passionately applied program of evangelism and stewardship" (LR, p. 63).

The important terms *evangelism* and *stewardship* are defined thus:

"Evangelism is the winning of men to Jesus Christ. Its aim is to present Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall be led, first, to accept Christ as their Savior; second to follow and serve Him as their King; and third, to put unlimited trust in Him as their Provider and Protector, in the fellowship of the Church.

"Christian stewardship is the practice of the Christian religion on the part of those who have been won for Christ. It is man's response, his total response, to God's grace. It is what he *does* as a Christian — all that he does, once he has accepted Christ as his Lord and Redeemer. It is, therefore, the complete fruitage of his total Christian experience, the fruitage by which the whole faith is tested. 'Every sound tree bears good fruit.' Matt. 7, 17." (LR, p. 63.)

After the sectional reports, the message, and the constitution had been adopted, the Federation closed its meeting. The way ahead was described by Dr. Michelfelder in the preface to the printed report:

"It is the aim of the founders of the Federation to make it an important instrument for every department of the Church, both clergy and laity; for theologians, pastors, teachers, missionaries, social workers, students, young people, Sunday schools, brotherhoods, women's societies, Luther Leagues. It is the hope that at the next meeting of the Federation in 1952 the Assembly will be the culmination of a series of international conferences of kindred groups. Before the Assembly at Lund many Churches prayed for the success of this convention. We felt the strength of these prayers every hour during the meetings. Prayers were answered. We ask you now to pray for the Federation continuously. Pray for its Executive Committee and officers. Thank God for the opportunity He has given us to serve Him. We are all workers together with Him who said, 'I will build My Church.' *Soli Deo Gloria!*" (LR, pp. 5, 6.)

The Lutheran World Federation was on its way.

1947—1952

As soon as the Lutheran World Federation had taken form, it began to lose its former unorganized character as a mere convention. A central office was established on the grounds of the World Council of Churches, 17 Route de Malagnou, Geneva, Switzerland. Dr. S. C. Michelfelder's work on behalf of the Churches in Europe, particularly Germany, Dr. Herman's work in behalf of refugees, the publication of information in several languages on the work and progress of the Federation, have been concentrated there and radiate from there. The office serves as an exchange point for information also with the corresponding committees of the World Council. It assists in maintaining the identity of the Lutheran World Federation over against the World Council of Churches, in which congregations and Churches of the Federation are at the same time the largest of the numerical contingents. It corresponds at least to the reasons for the origins of *Life and Work* that the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches should be in close relationship and not work at cross purposes although each remains in its own area in the fields of theological study, welfare, and missions.

The department of theological study which was fully activated at Hannover in 1952, already began to function in preparation for this convention. It endeavors to crystallize the teaching and practice of the Lutheran Churches that hold membership in the Federation on a confessional basis. The detailed theological study documents that are included in the Hannover report were prepared under the supervision of the Geneva office of the Federation. They served as the basis of the lectures, debates, and resolutions at Hannover. The department's work is facilitated by the opening of a library in Geneva, and the appointment of a special staff member, whose express duty it is to observe, summarize, and also in some instances to encourage theological study in the various countries of the Federation's member Churches.

In the welfare area the Lutheran World Convention and the Lutheran World Federation have done an enormous amount of work since World War II on the European continent, in the Near east among the Palestinian Arabs, and in DP camps all over the world. Some of the European countries that were nearly ruined by

the war—Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Russia, the Baltic lands, Norway, Denmark—were also, it is good to remember, lands which contain large, in some cases, majority populations of Lutheran people. By its participation in Lutheran World Relief The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has contributed to the implementation of this work of mercy and rescue.

Displaced persons from the Baltic countries, from Poland, from Eastern Germany, and from a number of Balkan lands were taken under the wing of the Lutheran World Convention in a manner that gives Lutherans reason for pride of achievement for years to come. The DP camps were operated largely by UNRRA, but the religious work and the welfare work of clothing, food, and medical distribution was very much the responsibility of the Federation. Estonians, Letts, and Lithuanians, to cite only three of the most severely damaged nations, found a haven in the Federation DP offices. Hundreds of young people and families were successfully settled in Canada, the United States of America, South America, and Australia, largely through the direct supervision of Drs. Michelfelder and Herman. The spiritual need was supplied through religious services and the administration of the Sacraments. Resettlement in cities, homes, and families, always through qualified social agencies in the countries of adoption, promoted their physical welfare. Thousands of lives were not only physically and spiritually saved, but carefully rerooted in favorable surroundings and circumstances. Today persons still left in the hard core of refugees are constantly being rescreened to allow the maximum number to find new homes—homes for those whose homes are forever gone.

In the field of missions the Federation also achieved far-reaching results. It undertook on a global scale the difficult but rewarding work of caring for orphaned missions during World War II, which formerly were operated especially by German and Norwegian Churches. The Federation as such does not ordinarily operate any missions, but it assists in the relief of poor missions in emergency situations. In these circumstances it resettles Lutheran refugees from many lands in places where they can strike new roots without losing their religious identity to other groups in the struggle for economic rehabilitation; and it organizes and encourages councils

of Lutheran Churches in such widely separated regions as South Africa, South America, and Central America. In doing so, every effort is made to observe the integrity of doctrine and tradition in the groups it seeks to assist. This work is closely allied with the global-scale welfare work described above.

The Lutheran World Federation since 1947 is actively engaged in the publication of periodicals. The German *Rundschau*, edited for years by F. Ullmann, was a bimonthly review of the Lutheran scene in many lands. It often contained articles by leaders in the Federation on the theological issues that confront the Lutheran Church. In the English language a bimonthly bulletin for information accomplishes the same thing. In addition it presents the problems of the Lutheran World Federation, e. g., the inquiry from the United Ev. Luth. Church of Australia about the doctrinal soundness and care for correct teaching in the Federation, or the problem of the future of Lutheranism in so large and promising a field as Africa. The publication of a theological review called the *Lutheran World*, a quarterly journal, has now replaced the *Rundschau*, and brings theological essays and objective reports on the Federation's various projects.

Although federative work is not one of its principal fields or aims of endeavor, still the Federation assists where advice or counsel are requested. In response to such a request the Federation assisted in the forming of the Batak Church and sponsored its membership in the Lutheran World Federation. The Batak Church represents perhaps the greatest single missionary success in point of numbers as well as of Christian awareness and indigenous growth and leadership in the history of modern missions. Its formation follows years of assistance from the Berlin Gossner Mission.

The Federation can draw upon the experience in its own history or the work of such Lutheran groups as the National Lutheran Council in the United States for help in organizing councils and church federations that have as their prime aim and purpose the conservation of manpower, and funds, the presentation of a common voice that speaks for many Church groups. In this way the same purpose of such similar federated assistance is fulfilled by the Federation on a world-wide scale. Its purpose is to prevent

duplication of mission work, to give assistance in fund-raising campaigns, welfare work, and educational programs.

In 1952, five years after Lund, the Lutheran World Federation had member-churches in Germany, France, all Scandinavian lands, Finland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Jugoslavia, Rumania, India, Indonesia, China, South America, Canada, United States, and Australia.

#### HANNOVER 1952

The five years of the existence of the Lutheran World Federation from Lund, 1947, to Hannover, 1952, gave promise of a much different, more thorough and effective convention. In the midst of the preparations for the convention a great loss was sustained in 1951, when Dr. S. C. Michelfelder died in Chicago. His successor, Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist, called from the post of public relations secretary of the National Lutheran Council in the United States, entered the work of heading the Geneva office in the thick of the pre-Hannover arrangements. Under his supervision the study reports, later incorporated in the printed report of Hannover, were carefully worked out. The agenda for the meeting had a pattern somewhat similar to that of the Faith and Order meeting at Lund, which was preparatory to the World Council of Churches meeting at Evanston.

The Hannover Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation was the largest meeting of Christians who consider themselves and want to be known to the world as Lutherans. The world did take notice. Press coverage from practically every country in which there is a sizable Lutheran constituency was good. Newspapers in the Scandinavian countries, Germany, and the United States, gave the Lutheran World Federation a wide span of publicity. The election of Dr. Hanns Lilje, a former prisoner under the pre-1945 German government, as president of the Federation, the presence of such European figures as Bishop Nygren of Sweden, Bishop Berggrav of Norway, and Professor Elert of Germany, and delegates from Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas, all helped to give Hannover an international aspect as well as an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation. Add to this that visitors from the Free churches of Europe and Australia, and from The Lutheran Church

— Missouri Synod, were present, and Hannover appears as a representative cross section of world Lutheranism.

Hannover, in Germany, July 25—August 3, 1952, was much later after the end of the war in Europe than Amsterdam, when such dramatic occurrences stirred all the attendants. But this meeting at Hannover was held in Germany, the sorely wounded, rent Germany, which had been the object of destruction of some of the very lands that sent delegates, and delegates were there from countries that had suffered under German occupation during the same period.

Following the Lund pattern of 1947, there were reports from the study groups, addresses by various men and women. From their thousands of words a certain theological pattern emerged. Resolutions were developed, especially in regard to theology, relief, and missionary work. The entire business of reporting the Hannover meeting was taken care of in the *Hannover Report*. This book is the source of the information now being given concerning this meeting.<sup>21</sup>

Under the general theme "The Living Word in a Responsible Church" bishops, theological professors, and executive secretaries presented lengthy reports and essays on the theological, missionary, welfare, and personal relations work carried on by the Lutheran World Federation since Lund. Some of these deserve review.

"The central message of the Gospel—forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ—formed the basis of all our deliberations." Section I on Theology and Bishop Nygren's lecture on the Assembly theme dealt with this central topic of the Lutheran Reformation. "The unique testimony of the Reformation was in its proclamation that sinners are justified by grace alone. Therein the Church of the Reformation heard that Word which God Himself had spoken in Jesus Christ as the only means of saving a lost world. By this same Word, moreover, the Church lives in any age. With this Word even the Church today brings new life to a world that is lost. . . . That in Jesus Christ alone the world has found a salva-

<sup>21</sup> *Proceedings of the LWF Assembly, Hannover, Germany, Geneva: LWF, 1952, p. 7, hereafter referred to as HR.*

tion from the power of sin and death and thereby a new life of righteousness before God — that is the meaning of the Reformation's testimony concerning justification by faith alone. Justification means that God in Jesus Christ graciously forgives the sinner whom He had sentenced to death. Faith means trust in and submission to this forgiving Word of God in Jesus Christ." (HR, p. 117.)

The Report on Theology of Section I, as reflected in the idea of a "responsible Church," uses the term "responsible" not only in the sense of assuming responsibility, but responsible in the sense of responding, of answering, confessing, and witnessing over against the world.

"Above all the 'Word' means the Incarnation. 'Scripture is inspired' of God means that as a whole Scripture bears witness of a mystery which man's eyes cannot perceive and man's mind cannot comprehend, namely, the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, a mystery which God Himself can disclose through the witness of His Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 2:7-10. In proclaiming the message of the Bible as the Word of life, the Church worships the mystery of the Incarnation, while the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are looked upon as the climax and triumph in the life of the incarnate Word. The life which the Word, the living Word gives, is the life of faith, through the Word, through Baptism, nourished through growth in the Word and Holy Communion, finding its consummation in eternal life, after the ministry of faith and love have merged in the ministry of hope that is performed through preaching and prayer." (HR, p. 119.)

As both the introduction to the entire report volume and this section as well states, there is no complete agreement on doctrine in all matters, nor on practice, in the Churches. The way to agreement is stated thus: to crystallize the specific problems of doctrine and practice and have the Federation, through its department of theology, give attention to the urgent need of studying and clarifying them. The problems, as stated in the report of Section I on Theology, are:

"It was quite evident during the sessions of our Section (I) that on a number of subjects there is among us neither perfect unanimity



nor sufficient clarity, even though we all recognize the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>22</sup> Among these subjects are the following:

"How do we interpret our common doctrine that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

"How do we understand the nature and extent of the authority which we all join in ascribing to our Confessions?

"What is the relationship between Church and law?

"Is unanimity in doctrine the indispensable condition for altar fellowship (intercommunion)?

"What place should be assigned, in the worship and doctrine of our church, to the Sacraments, which we all accept, on the basis of the Bible and in harmony with the Confessions, as God's own life-giving means of grace?" (*HR*, p. 116.)

These questions, not new in any case, were recommended for study to the churches banded together in the Lutheran World Federation and to the department of theology, also because the answers to them profoundly affect the position taken by the Lutheran Churches and the Federation to the ecumenical movement of today.

As in the case of the World Council of Churches, so also in the Lutheran World Federation, working together was easier than achieving doctrinal agreement. "While the representatives of the Lutheran Churches in Section I could achieve no more than agreement on the problems that need to be studied carefully by all of us jointly, the work in the other Sections produced many far more tangible results." The sections here referred to were those on foreign missions, World Service (a new agency was created), Inner Missions, stewardship, youth, and women. The tension observable throughout the churches of the world between the faith (and order) emphasis and the life and work emphasis is found in most religious groups and is not peculiar to one ecumenical association, or even to one denomination.

In the vast area of world missions, the report summarized its findings thus: "In the situation (that in the world mission fields it

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<sup>22</sup> The lack of clarity and agreement also became apparent during the assembly sessions, where, however, the Federation did not attempt to direct the thinking of the Assembly to the point of adopting predetermined results. The leadership did not press for a larger measure of unanimity. *HR*, pp. 8, 9.

is a matter of faith and conviction that since Christ is the only Lord, His Church ought not to be divided) the Lutheran Church holds a unique and central position because Christ has always been the heart and core of its preaching. The Holy Scripture as the infallible witness of Christ has been the only basis and source of faith. The love of God, who redeemed the world by identifying Himself, through His Son, with man, has been proclaimed in purity as the real consolation for burdened consciences and lost men.

"The Lutheran Church is therefore called to use its confession in the service of all churches. This does not mean using it as a law of faith, but it does mean proclaiming it as a clear and true exposition of the Gospel truth which will invite others to confess the same Christ at their place and time and in their language. Among all the churches particularly the Lutheran Church has been entrusted with the task of witnessing to the necessity of a clear confession at all times and for all churches. The Lutheran Church itself is, therefore, under a constant obligation to make use of the confessional statements which it has received from the fathers as an unceasing inspiration for a personal confession of faith to be made by all its members, on every occasion and before all men. This can and must be the service the Lutheran Church will render to the ecumenical movements." (HR, p. 137.)

*Inner missions* is a term that denotes Christian social welfare work in American terminology and therefore includes the application of the Gospel to the situations in which unfortunate people find themselves, in hospitals, prisons, slums, mental hospitals, orphanages, etc. According to the report of Section III it is the Church's responsibility to urge social legislation upon the state which is designed to produce a more harmonious social order and allows every person to live his life in dignity and freedom. It will also be ready to call the state's attention to possible improvements in social legislation and public welfare work. It will protest against totalitarian ideas which emphasize that here on earth man belongs to the state and that the church has no other task save to prepare man for eternity. In such a situation the church would have to act *in statu confessionis*. (HR, p. 142.)

An important aspect was emphasized in the report of Section IV on stewardship and evangelism when this report pointed out: "It is

inadequate to define a Christian only as one who believes what Christ taught, or even as one who believes in Christ. A Christian is one who follows Christ in the obedience of faith." By that is meant that faith worketh by love, and that faith without works is dead. (*HR*, p. 149f.) The vast implications of evangelism on the parish and the national and world levels are carefully worked out in this report and emphasize the necessity that the lives of all members of the church be dedicated to the winning of souls and the extension of the Kingdom through preaching and works of love. Stewardship of the whole life and person of the Christian, not only of his money, is presented as a goal in all the churches bearing the name Lutheran.

While there were separate sections on youth and women (V and VI) reminiscent of Amsterdam, the thought was emphasized here also that the church should not be thought of as consisting of so many different categories or groups, but as a whole fellowship of believers who together give the various services and expressions of their faith where they are, and where, collectively, they can bring a Christian faith and life into the existence of the unbelievers and the unchurched.

A strong eschatological note is evident when the Federation said: "We are entrusted with the message which can save the world. How can we remain silent and withhold this message for which our fathers fought and suffered, and which God has committed to our hands! Let us be witnesses and declare the works of the Lord in every possible way until He comes. To Him be glory and honor and praise forevermore." (*HR*, p. 32.)

To bring to a close this brief survey of the way in which the goals set at Lund, in 1947, were in part achieved, and how plans were put into operation to reach them and other goals more fully and effectively, we summarize a passage from the message of Hannover to its members and the world. The dedication to the "declaration of the works of the Lord" (Ps. 118:7) is pointed to as the Lord's will and as the task to which the Churches and the federation are dedicated. The Churches of the Federation "wish to grow as a world-wide community based on the fellowship of a common faith and active in deeds of brotherly love" (*HR*, p. 31f.).

In services of worship, prayer, and communion, members of Lutheran Churches were united in what the report calls the chief strength of the Assembly. This "lay in the worship services, the morning and evening prayers, the intercessory services, and other prayer services conducted by various churches and outdoors, the confessional service, and the numerous evangelistic evening programs, and in the special events offered by the 'Lutheran Week.' . . . 8,000 persons regularly studied the Bible." (*HR*, p. 9.)

Hannover, the second of the Federation's world assemblies, was looked upon by all observers as a unique contribution of the Lutheran Churches of the world to Lutheran ecumenism and solidarity. What remains to be achieved by way of doctrinal solidarity, and there is much, must be sought by prayerful labor under obedience to the Word of God. At the same time, the large joint tasks of Lutherans throughout the world will be carried out with unabated devotion. It is doubtless safe to say: Scriptural study, an understanding attitude toward those Lutherans who for reasons of conscience have not joined the Federation, and continued work together for the expression of the faith called for by the circumstances in which the Churches of the federation find themselves, will give the Federation a purpose and an achievement that fulfills the Hannover expectations.