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# The Ecumenical Movement and the Lutheran Church

By HERMANN SASSE

**EDITORIAL NOTE:** This article was presented as an essay to the 1959 convention of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod at San Francisco by request of President J. W. Behnken.

**C**HURCH history knows of great movements which sweep through the whole of Christendom, irrespective of national and denominational lines, and bring about profound changes in the inner life and the outward appearance of all churches. Such movements were Pietism and Rationalism in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the great European Awakening in the 19th century. Such a movement is the Ecumenical Movement, which in our time is penetrating all churches of Christendom, including Rome and the Eastern churches. The effects may prove to be as far-reaching as those of the great movement of the 16th century which we call the Reformation in its widest sense.

At that time the breakdown of the medieval church, long overdue and foreshadowed by minor upheavals, resulted in a complete change in the religious life and the ecclesiastical scene of the world. Within two generations a large part of Europe was lost to the papacy. Out of the Catholic Church of the West new churches have issued, Lutheran and Reformed churches, the Church of England, besides a number of smaller groups and sects. What remained of the papal church underwent such a profound change in the Roman Catholic reformation at the Council of Trent that in many respects it may be regarded as a new church, the modern

Roman Church, which found its completion at the Vatican Council of 1869—70, the largest of the confessional churches of Christendom. To make up for the losses suffered in Europe this church took up mission work in Asia and the Americas and thus inaugurated an era in which the entire earth, the *οἰκουμένη γῆ*, to use the Greek word for the inhabited earth, was to become the scene of church history.

This great era of 400 years seems now to be drawing to its end. In the second half of the 20th century we are witnessing not only the most revolutionary changes in the social, political, and economic life of mankind but also one of the greatest religious revolutions in human history. This revolution has often been described by our missionaries. We call to mind only a few bare facts. The ratio between Christians and non-Christians in the world is rapidly changing in favor of the non-Christians, no mission work being able to cope with the growth of mankind. The decline of Christianity in the old Christian countries makes these countries mission fields. The great religions of Asia are reviving in connection with the growth of nationalism and anticolonialism. And who would have expected in 1848, when the Communist *Manifesto* appeared, that this booklet would become the creed of one third of mankind only a century later?

## I

The Ecumenical Movement must be seen against this background. For in this movement Christendom is trying to solve the

problems presented by those facts. It is essentially a spiritual movement and cannot be understood only from its organizational aspects. A new relationship between the Christians throughout the world is developing, a new relationship also between the churches. Would it have been possible 50 years ago for German Roman Catholic bishops to speak of the Protestants as "our separated brethren"? Would it have been possible to sing hymns by Luther in Roman Catholic churches? A remarkable fellowship has grown out of theological conferences between Roman Catholics and Lutherans in Germany and between Reformed and Roman Catholics in France, to say nothing of the fellowship experienced by members of various churches in prisons, concentration camps, and in the emergencies of the war.

Apart from this change of the spiritual climate, a complete transformation of the external setup of Christendom is taking place. Think what it means for America that the venerable church of the Pilgrim Fathers, which has meant so much for the formation of the American nation, is now disappearing, as it has already disappeared in Canada and will disappear in Australia and New Zealand, being absorbed by a large united church. At the same time some millions of Eastern Christians have transplanted their old churches to the New World. The same process is going on in South America, in Australia, and on the mission fields of Asia and Africa, where out of the missions of the Protestant denominations new churches, and perhaps new types of Christianity, are growing. If we take into account, furthermore, the tremendous growth of sects in the world, we understand that no human mind is

able to imagine what Christendom will look like when in about 40 years it enters the third millennium. Of this movement is true what is true of every great religious movement in the world: we see the beginnings, but we do not know where it will end. Where will the movement represented by the WCC and the LWF end? Nobody knows. Conferences may make constitutions and programs, define aims and purposes. Executive secretaries may travel through the world and proclaim these aims. Conferences may appoint committees, and the committees may appoint subcommittees, to investigate the nature and purpose of what actually is going on. Of Randall Davidson, the great archbishop of Canterbury (1903—28), they said in England that, were he in office when the last trumpet sounds, "he would be sure to nominate a representative committee to consider and report whether it was the last trump or the last but one."<sup>1</sup> The real history is beyond the reach of man. As all history, so also the history of the Ecumenical Movement is a battle between God and Satan. Good and evil, blessing and curse, grace and judgment, are hidden in what is going on in the Ecumenical Movement of our age.

Time does not permit us to relate here the history of the Ecumenical Movement. Only a few lines can be drawn. This movement is deeply rooted in the European Awakening of the 1800s, when after the icy winter of Rationalism the Christian faith was revived. It was around 1830 that suddenly the church was rediscovered as one of the great articles of faith and

<sup>1</sup> F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters*, 1948, p. 356 f.

as a reality, by Roman theologians in Germany (Möhler) and France (Lacordaire, Lamennais), by great thinkers in Russia (Chomjakow), in the Church of England (Keble, Newman, Pusey) as well as in the Lutheran (Scheibel, Vilmar, Löhe, Rudelbach, Walther) and Reformed (Vinet, Kohlbrügge) churches of Europe. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod owes its existence to that European Awakening, just as our Lutheran churches in Australia and the Free churches in Germany do. For it was the quest for *the true church* that caused our fathers to leave their country, their people, their earthly possessions, after they had come to the conviction that the territorial churches of the Old World, which comprised all the people irrespective of their actual faith, could no longer be what they claimed to be: churches confessing before God and the world the truth of the Gospel as it was testified to in the *Book of Concord*. Some people call that separatism. You know from the history of your church how seriously your fathers searched their own conscience, asking themselves in the sight of God whether they were right or whether they were guilty of the sin of schism. Thank God for these consciences! Thank God for that holy separatism! The blessing of their faithful confession is still a very great reality in your church. And it is generally admitted that the faithful witness of the true confessors of that time has saved what has remained of the Lutheran Church in the old country.

Another example is the "Disruption" in the Church of Scotland in 1843, when "no less than 474 ministers—two-fifths of the entire number in the Church—left manes, stipends, and all the earthly goods

the State had given and, under Dr. Chalmers, went forth to continue the Church of Scotland Free."<sup>2</sup> They did so because their conscience did not allow them to sacrifice the confession of their church to an arbitrary law made by Parliament in London. Their confessional loyalty saved the Reformed faith in Scotland for the coming generations. Even a separation can be a great service to true ecumenicity if it is a separation from that which is bound to destroy the true church. The Ecumenical Movement is not primarily a union movement, though it might lead to unions, true or false unions. As old Bishop Palmer of Bombay said at the First World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, 1927, when he opened the discussion on the controversial subject "The Church's Ministry": "This is a conference about truth, not about reunion. We engage in it because we desire the visible unity of Christ's Church on earth. . . . As we differ greatly about cardinal matters, some of us must be wrong, and all may to some extent be wrong. We come here expecting to learn, and that must mean hoping to be corrected if we are wrong.—We seek God's truth about the whole of Christendom."<sup>3</sup> This is true ecumenicity, the concern for the *una sancta*, "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). In this sense I venture to say that the Synodical Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at San Francisco, 1959, is one of the very few really ecumenical events of this year.

<sup>2</sup> P. C. Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, Popular Edition (1904), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August 3—21, 1927*, ed. H. N. Bate (1927), p. 233.

The quest for the church always involves the quest for the unity of the church. For it belongs to the very nature of the church that it is the *una sancta*, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Thus also in Europe the rediscovery of the church in the 19th century made the unity of the church one of the great topics of theology and one of the great practical problems of church life. In a special way, however, this question was bound to come up in America. Europeans have always been surprised by, and have even mocked at, the variety of religious communities in the New World. What most of them failed to realize is that this is not altogether the fault of the Americans. On the contrary, they have inherited almost all of these divisions from European Christendom. The tragic situation of a divided Christendom in countries like America and Australia is caused by the fact that the groups and communities, which in Europe were and are separated by geographical and national boundaries, here live in the same city, in the same street, in the same house. This state of division is—and this should never be forgotten—the price that had to be paid for that great contribution which America has made not only to Western civilization but also to the life of the churches, of all churches: freedom of conscience, freedom of religion. Europe has never been quite able to get rid of the terrific heritage of the Roman Empire, which claimed the rule also over the souls of men. Neither the Lutheran nor the Reformed churches of Europe have been able to attain that freedom from secular powers which the confessions of the Reformation claimed for the church of Christ. In what a terrific

slavery these churches live is apparent when in Norway the Minister of the State for Church Affairs could decide that it is not a violation of the confessional obligation of a bishop to deny the Biblical and confessional doctrine of hell and eternal damnation. In Sweden, likewise, the Riksdag makes a law permitting the ordination of women, and the church follows and alters its constitution and its liturgy accordingly. Who possesses the "freedom to reform the church" of which Bishop Giertz spoke so convincingly at Minneapolis? The state, and that means, the ruling political party. The church has this right only as far as the state permits it. Or one may think of the terrific slavery of the Church of England, which is not able to bring about a real reform of the *Book of Common Prayer* because Parliament would not allow it. Only if one has lived in the slavery of the *cuius regio eius religio*, can one understand what religious freedom, freedom of conscience, is. And one who has lived in the world of religious freedom can understand why in America the quest for the church became the quest for unity and why America has given birth to the modern Ecumenical Movement.

In speaking of the Ecumenical Movement we must here confine ourselves to two great ecumenical programs that originated in America and that have produced the movement as it presents itself today.

## II

The first of these programs has its origin in American Reformed Protestantism. When Zinzendorf came to Pennsylvania, that great paradise of dissent and cradle of religious freedom, he conceived the strange idea of asking the governor to

see to it — what a European he was! — that the children of God in all denominations should attend the meetings of the *Brüdergemeinde*, not to become its members but to express the essential oneness of God's children in the various denominations. For the *Brüdergemeinde* was not to be a new denomination but a place where Lutherans, Reformed, Roman Catholics, and other Christians should meet as children of their heavenly Father, as souls redeemed through the blood of the Lamb. To Zinzendorf the various churches were "τρόποι παιδείας," ways of education, schools, as it were, in which God educated His children. According to Lutheran doctrine, it is indeed true that children of God, true believers, exist in all churches wherever the means of grace still exist. It is, however, un-Lutheran to assume that we are able to see and to make visible what only God can see. This is sheer enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm is the contribution of Pietism to the modern Ecumenical Movement. You find this enthusiasm in the Evangelical Alliance, which from 1846 on spread from Britain to Europe and America. You find this idea still as one of the strongest elements of modern ecumenicity, for instance, when in 1950 the member churches of the Federal Council merged their organization with the new National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA with the intention to "manifest more fully oneness in Jesus Christ as their divine Lord and Savior." I have never been able to understand how the president of the United Lutheran Church could solemnly inaugurate that council which has this formula as its basis. How can we manifest oneness in Jesus Christ between Lutherans, Presbyterians, Angli-

cans, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples, Quakers, and all sorts of sects, among them such as deny the *sola Scriptura*, the *sola fide* — Anglo-Catholics — and reject the sacrament of Christ, as the Salvation Army does? How can we manifest "oneness in Christ" with those who deny the deity of Christ as taught in the New Testament and the creeds of the church? Here lies one of the deepest of the problems that divide the Lutheran churches today, one that must be solved before we can talk of Lutheran unity.

I must resist the temptation to speak on such an interesting attempt to establish Christian unity as was made by the Disciples of Christ who wanted to go back behind all man-made creeds and constitutions to what they regarded as the church of the New Testament. Serious and important as this attempt has been, it was bound to have the same result as Zinzendorf's endeavors. You cannot diminish the number of Christian denominations by founding a new one. This is a simple arithmetical truth. But I want to mention briefly at least one man whose significance for the rise of American ecumenism has been generally recognized nowadays. This is the tragic figure of Samuel Simon Schmucker, for 40 years president of the first Lutheran seminary in this country at Gettysburg. The Lutheran churches had to reject his so-called *Definite Platform*, which appeared anonymously in 1855, the program of the so-called American Lutheranism, the Lutheran version of that "Americanism" which the Roman Church rejected in 1899. It was a sort of *Confessio Augustana Variata Americana* in which the distinctive doctrines of the Lutheran Reformation, such as baptismal

regeneration, the Real Presence of the true body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, private confession and absolution, had been given up. The Schmucker of the *Definite Platform* is a pathetic figure, one that should not be forgotten, for his life and work has clarified the situation of the Lutheran Church in your country. Just as the question has been asked: Can a Roman Catholic be a good American citizen? so the question is: Can the Lutheran Church be truly American without giving up what distinguishes it from the Reformed denominations in the midst of which it lives? At a time when Schmucker's ghost seems to haunt the Lutheran churches of America it is worthwhile to study him again. Such study would reveal him as one of the fathers of the Ecumenical Movement in the USA.<sup>4</sup> From his *Fraternal Appeal to the American Churches* (1838) to his book on *The True Unity of Christ's Church* (1870) and his last addresses he developed the idea that all Protestant churches are essentially one. He tried to express their common doctrine in a *United Confession*, in which he combines articles from the various Protestant confessions. The churches should remain what they are, but were called upon to do away with their sectarian names, with the man worship of Luther, Calvin, Wesley. They were to grant one another pulpit and altar fellowship. Schmucker is one of the fathers of the idea of federal union, the precursor of men like E. Stanley Jones.

Schmucker's plan of a "Protestant Apostolic Church of America" on a federal

<sup>4</sup> See D. H. Yoder in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. R. Rouse and S. C. Neill, p. 241 ff.

basis could not be carried out in the 19th century, confessionalism in all churches being too strong. Thus another version of federal union won the day: Let us not discuss doctrine, but rather work together in practical fields. "Doctrine divides, service unites," as one of the slogans at the beginning of this century puts it. This idea was first realized in the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America of 1908, one of the most important ecumenical organizations of our time. If we cannot have a common confession of faith, we can at least together follow our Lord in practical work. However, it became obvious — what later became apparent also in the World Conference on Life and Work at Stockholm, 1925 — that even common work among churches presupposes some kind of doctrinal agreement. Thus membership in the Federal Council was limited to churches for which Christ is the "divine Lord and Savior," whatever that may mean. For this formula was chosen after some churches had declared that they could not accept the term "Son of God." But what does "divine" mean if it does not mean the deity of Christ as the Son of God? What does "Lord" mean if not the Christ of the New Testament who bears the name  $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ , Lord, the holy name of God, in the Greek Bible? What does "Savior" mean if not Christ as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world? The entire tragedy of the modern Ecumenical Movement becomes clear at this point. And a very serious question arises. Neither the Protestant Episcopal Church nor the United Lutheran Church was able at that time to become a member of the Federal Council, though they found some way of co-operation.

What changes have made it possible for these churches now to be members of the National Council of the Churches of Christ? No basic changes have taken place in the ecumenical organization. They have taken place in these churches.

Before we go on, an appraisal of these attempts to achieve Christian unity may be in place. If we criticize them from the point of view of the Lutheran Confessions, we must realize that the majority of American Protestants are quite unable to understand our criticism. The Congregationalists, Baptists, Disciples, Quakers, and many other churches do not possess a confession and cannot possess one. Even for the Reformed and Presbyterians a confession has not only a different content but even a different function in the church. I remember one night during one of the confessional synods in Germany when a theological committee had to formulate certain suggestions. It was in the small hours when I said to Karl Barth: "Herr Barth, you cannot expect us to abandon the Augsburg Confession just at the moment when our bishop is a prisoner of the police because he adheres to that confession." His reply was: "Why not?" He was unable to understand that a Lutheran Church cannot confess before the world the truth of God's Word if it does not take quite seriously the Augsburg Confession, to which it has pledged itself because (*quia*, not only *quatenus*) it is the pure exposition of the Word of God. Also the Anglicans cannot understand our attitude toward our confessions. For most of them the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, which they have signed, have merely a historical meaning. They fail to understand, like other churches, that the confession binds to-

gether not only the living generation but all generations of the church, because it expresses the eternal truth of the Gospel, which is the same for all ages.

This explains the fruitlessness of so many ecumenical discussions. When the Lutheran churches in India had reached an agreement on the Lord's Supper with the Church of South India, the then secretary of the Commission on Faith and Order visited me in Adelaide and produced the document. He was overjoyed. I showed him that certain terms had different meanings on either side. I called his attention to the fact that even if it were a real agreement, it could have no binding force for the Church of South India, because the liturgy and the constitution of this church allows for several doctrines on the sacrament. Then we both felt what the French call "*la tristesse ecuménique*," the ecumenical sadness, that distress which comes over us when we look into the depth of the gulf that still separates Christians. We do not speak the same language. We do not mean the same things when we use the same words — Gospel, sacrament, consecration, Real Presence, and so on. This is the real tragedy of our divisions, which we must bravely face if we are to overcome them.

Much remains to be said on this first program of federal unity, for instance, on the deep influence exercised on it by the ideas of the Enlightenment of the 18th century which have played such a great role in the making of the United States of America and her institutions. We could refer to the close connection between the idea of freedom of religion and the rights of men, or to the assumption of the men who have shaped the young American na-



tion — that there is behind all historic religions one religion in which all men agree. Without this belief — an almost religious belief — one can understand neither the ecumenical organizations of America nor the tenacity with which American Protestants believe that eventually the Roman Church will commit suicide and join the united church of the future.

### III

The second ecumenical program, on which we now have to speak briefly, is the plan for organic unity. Behind it there is the Anglican concept of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church as it was developed in the 17th century and was renewed with great power in the Tractarian Movement since 1833. The article on the church in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England, shaped like the corresponding articles in all confessions of the 16th century, including the *Catechismus Romanus*, after the pattern of the 7th article of the Augsburg Confession, begins with the words "*Ecclesia Christi visibilis est coetus fidelium . . .*" "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered. . . ." According to the Lutheran Confession, the one, holy, catholic church, the congregation of saints, that means, of true believers, is a reality in this world, not a utopia, a "Platonic state." But this church, the "society of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts," is hidden in the outward church, the "society of external things and rites." "*Abscondita est ecclesia, latent sancti,*" as Luther puts it. "Hidden is the Church, hidden are the saints." We can-

not see the faith and holiness of any man. We cannot feel the Holy Spirit. We can only believe in Him. Therefore also the church in its "strict" sense remains an article of faith and never becomes in this world an object of observation. As the sacramental body of Christ is hidden in, with, and under the earthly elements, so also His mystical or spiritual body, the Church, is hidden in, with, and under the visible earthly church bodies.

Over against this Lutheran view, which is closely linked with the article on justification, the Anglican Church insists on the visibility of the *una sancta*. Hence men must be able to say where it is. The Anglican divines of former centuries would say: The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church exists on earth. It consists of three branches, the Eastern Orthodox, the Roman, and the Anglican Church. Today they would be more broad-minded and not exclude other churches so definitely. Thus William Temple, the late archbishop of Canterbury, used to say, and he said it quite seriously: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and sincerely regret that it does not at present exist."<sup>5</sup> At present there is no *one* church, there are many churches. The church, the body of Christ, is divided. But the Creed's article "I believe one, holy, catholic church" implies the conviction that once there has been one church and that eventually it will again exist. There must have been an "ancient undivided church," whatever that may mean. Some have thought of the church of the first four or five centuries. But was there one church at that time? Every student of church history

<sup>5</sup> Iremonger, *William Temple*, p. 387.

knows that ancient Christendom, too, was a divided Christendom. When Celsus about A.D. 180 wrote his book against Christianity he did not fail to mention this dividedness. Origen, in his great answer to Celsus, did not deny it, but he tried to explain it. When a pagan about A.D. 150 wanted to become a Christian, he was in exactly the same position as a pagan is today in Calcutta and Bombay. He had to make up his mind as to which was the true church of Christ among the several bodies—at that time three or four, and soon even more—each of which claimed to be the true church. The people whom John, the apostle of love, called false prophets and antichrists must have been quite upset by his lack of ecumenicity. For they, too, professed to love their Lord Jesus Christ. They certainly wanted to be Christians. The only difference seemed to be that they did not assume that the Lord's body had been a natural body of human flesh. Is that really church-divisive, as John thought? Or look into Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. When Peter came to Antioch he was not quite sure with whom he could and could not eat and drink, and that meant, since the Lord's Supper was still connected with a meal, where he could participate in Holy Communion. He did so in the Greek Church. But when people arrived from Jerusalem he switched over to the church in communion with James, and Paul called him a hypocrite. No, the "ancient undivided church" is an unproved axiom. The same is true of the "reunited church of the future." "It is an article of faith that the followers of Christ should form one united body on earth," so begins the book of a learned English historian on the schism between East and

West.<sup>6</sup> Really? The name "followers of Christ" has always been claimed, and is being claimed today, by the most dangerous heretics. When our Lord prayed, "that they all may be one," He did not think of all who would call themselves Christians but of all true believers. He prayed for the apostles whom He was sending into the world: "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy Word is truth," and He prayed "for them also which shall believe on Me through their Word, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be (one)<sup>7</sup> in us." The oneness which Christ has in mind is the oneness of those who believe in Him through the apostolic Word of truth. At no time have these words been understood as referring to the whole of outward Christendom. They have always been referred to the true church of Christ, which has kept the Word. (John 17:6, cp. 8:51; 14:21; 15:20; Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 4:7; Rev. 3:10)

Naturally, there have always been different opinions as to where the true church of Christ is. Novatians, Catholics, Donatists, adherents of the Nicene Creed, the various groups of Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, adherents of the Chalcedonense, to mention only a few of the ancient "denominations," were disagreed on that, just as the modern denominations of Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox are today. The idea that the petition of our Lord "That they all may be one" would have been fulfilled if

<sup>6</sup> L. Runciman, *The Eastern Schism* (1955), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> This second "one" (ἓν) seems not to have been a part of the original text of John 17:21.

all denominations were absorbed in one big body that would comprise all who called themselves Christians is foreign to the church fathers as well as to the Reformers and to the church of all ages up to the modern Ecumenical Movement. It overlooks the fact that there are, and always will be, heresies which the church has to anathematize, and heretics and schismatics for whose return to the Word and to itself the church has to pray and to work in the spirit of charity. But this church will always remain the "little flock," despised by the world, even the ecclesiastical world. That Christ in His high-priestly prayer cannot have thought of a oneness and glory that will be visible before the Last Day, appears from the fact that this oneness comprises the believers of all generations of the church and that it is at the same time the oneness with the Son and the Father (cp. John 17:21 ff. with 1 John 1:3), which is naturally invisible. On the Last Day only, with the advent of Christ in glory, the hidden glory and oneness of His church will be revealed (cp. John 17:21-26 with Phil. 2:10 f., Col. 3:3 f.). The idea of a glorious "future reunited church" in this world is a chiliastic dream.

It was out of the Anglican doctrine of the *ecclesia Christi visibilis*, with its assumption of an "ancient undivided church" and a "future reunited church," that in America the concrete program for reunion arose. At the request of the then Church of England in Canada the Anglican bishops of the world met for the first time in 1867 at Lambeth Palace, the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury in London, for a free conference. The Lambeth confer-

ences, held, as a rule, every 10 years, not only have been the instrument in creating the Anglican Communion as one of the great confessional bodies of the world but also have been of utmost importance to the Ecumenical Movement. A proposal for reunion, drafted in 1886 by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. on the basis of a document of 1870, was adopted by the Lambeth Conference in 1888. It has been improved and reaffirmed by all subsequent conferences, with greatest emphasis in 1908, the year of the creation of the Federal Council. Thus the idea of federal union, the product of American Protestantism, was supplemented by the Anglican concept of organic union.

What does this program, the "Lambeth Quadrilateral," contain? It proposes that agreement in four points is necessary, but is also sufficient to establish full fellowship between the churches and so to unite them. There must be a common acceptance of (1) the Holy Scriptures, (2) the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed, (3) the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion, (4) a generally acknowledged ministry which includes the historic episcopate. This program is the basis of all unions inaugurated by the Anglican Church. It underlies the constitution of the Church of South India, the "Scheme for Church Union in Ceylon," the corresponding plan for North India-Pakistan, and similar proposals for Australia, New Zealand, and New Guinea.

Let us briefly look at these points. The first is the acceptance of Holy Scripture. Since every church accepts the Scriptures, the question arises, In what sense must they be accepted? The first draft of the Quadrilateral spoke of "The Holy Scriptures of

the Old and the New Testament as the revealed Word of God." This was already in 1888 changed into the Scriptures "as 'containing all things necessary to salvation,' and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith." The definitive form of 1920 reads: "The Holy Scriptures, as the record of God's revelation of Himself to man, and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith." The development of the formula reveals a significant lack of clarity. It does justice neither to the Catholic churches nor to the churches of the Reformation. Why has the original "the revealed Word of God" been changed into "the record of God's revelation of Himself"? The Scriptures are no longer regarded as the Word of God, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but only as a record of God's revelation. This is equally unacceptable to the Eastern, the Roman, the Lutheran, and the Reformed churches. It is not necessary here to show how for all churches of the Reformation the Bible was the Word of God, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If the Lutheran Confessions do not contain an explicit article on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, but mention it only incidentally (e.g., Apology IV 108; FCSD VI 14; XI, 12; LC V 75), the only reason for that is the fact that this common Christian doctrine was *extra controversiam* in the 16th century. Nor does the Council of Trent mention it expressly, though it is presupposed in the decree on the Holy Scriptures. It was over against the modern denial of the classical doctrine on the Scriptures that Rome in the *Constitutio de fide catholica* of the Vatican Council spoke an anathema against the denial of the inspiration of the Bible. The positive doctrine is contained in the

statement that "the Church regards the books as sacred and canonical, not as books written only by human diligence, and later approved by the authority of the Church; nor for that reason only that they contain the revelation without error (*quod revelationem sine errore contineant*), but rather because they, written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have God as their author, and as such are given to the Church (*quod Spiritu Sancto inspirante conscripti Deum habent auctorem, atque ut tales ipsi Ecclesiae traditi sunt*)" (Denzinger 1788, cp. the canon Denz. 1809). Hence even Rome would have to reject the Quadrilateral's view of the Scripture "as the record of God's revelation," because it is insufficient and unable to establish the authority of the Scriptures. Lutherans and Reformed, on the other hand, would ask whether a mere record can be "the ultimate rule and standard of faith." Only God's Word can be that. Thus the first point of the Quadrilateral is unacceptable to both Catholics and Orthodox Protestants. As it denies the teaching of all Christendom of the Scripture as the Word of God, so it is unable to maintain the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation. This is confirmed by a statement made by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, under whose presidency the Lambeth Conference of 1958 reaffirmed the Quadrilateral. In reply to the question what the beliefs of the Church of England are he said, among other things: "The Church of England believes that the Holy Spirit of God, the only final authority, speaks to us in Scripture, in the tradition of the Church, and in the living thought and experience of today. Thus there is a threefold cord, each single strand of which, unrelated to the others, leads

astray."<sup>8</sup> The *sola Scriptura* leads astray. What would the Fathers of the English Reformation, men like Tyndale, Barnes, Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, who became martyrs of the *sola Scriptura*, say to this doctrine, which adds to the Scriptures "tradition and contemporary reason"? What is here actually "the rule and ultimate standard of faith"?

The second point of the Quadrilateral calls for agreement on the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed, the latter being regarded as "the sufficient statement of the Christian faith." This is the old idea of the Latitudinarians and syncretists of the 17th century: Let us be satisfied with the doctrines of the ancient creeds which were sufficient until the 16th century. Let us regard the confessions of the Reformation, the Augsburg Confession, the Anglican articles, the various Reformed confessions as valuable documents, but not as containing binding doctrine beyond the reaffirmation of the ancient creeds. This idea is proposed in all union plans for South East Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Every church entering these unions is free to retain its historic confessions and catechisms, provided their distinctive doctrines are not regarded as binding dogma. It is essentially the same idea which we find in the official definition of the Prussian Union, which does not abolish the authority of the existing confessions, but demands only that the differences be not regarded as justifying the refusal of intercommunion. This idea underlies also the Declaration of Barmen, which on the one hand expresses loyalty to the existing confessions, but on the other hand abolishes their exclusive character.

<sup>8</sup> G. F. Fisher, *Redeeming the Situation. Occasional Sermons* (1947), p. 43 f.

When Leibniz in the last negotiations with the Roman theologians proposed that the Lutherans should give up the Augsburg Confession and Rome should abandon the decrees of Trent, it became apparent that it is impossible to wipe out the 16th century from the history of the church. As Rome can never revoke the decrees of Trent and the Vatican Council, the great doctrines of the Reformation would at least be preserved in the condemnations proclaimed by these councils. If the Protestant churches could forget the *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*, the anathema by Rome would stand, and there would remain the question whether the *sola fide* is a heresy or the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. This question cannot remain unanswered. And so it is with all doctrines of our confessions. The Real Presence cannot be declared an open question. Why is that so? It is so because the doctrines of the Reformation were not new doctrines but eternal truths, contained in Holy Scripture and, at least implicitly, also in the ancient creeds. This is confirmed by the fact that no church that has discarded the confessions of the 16th century has been able to preserve the creeds in their integrity. This is not only true of so many Reformed churches which have abolished, along with the confessions of their Reformation, the creeds of the ancient church. It is also true of the Church of England, which practically has discarded the *Thirty-Nine Articles* as binding dogma, while emphatically claiming loyalty to the Nicene Creed and its central dogma of the incarnation. It would be interesting to find out what people understand by the incarnation who deny the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Christ, or who regard the church, and that

includes the Church of England, as a continuation of the incarnation. How doubtful even the authority of the Nicene Creed can be in the Anglican Church may be illustrated by a personal experience. An eminent theologian of an Australian diocese of mainly Anglo-Catholic character was asked by me: "What actually is the doctrinal standard of this diocese? Is it the *Thirty-Nine Articles*?" The answer was a definite no. "Is it the Nicene Creed?" The answer again was no. "We do not know whether we should accept it in the Western or the Eastern form, with or without the *filioque*. The former would block the way to a union with the Orthodox churches, the latter the way to a union with Rome." "What, then, is your standard?" I went on. "The doctrinal content of the *Book of Common Prayer*," I was told. But the English *Book of Common Prayer* contains not only the Nicene Creed in the Western form but also the *Symbolum quicunque*.—In such a church dogma has become a liturgical formula. With the teaching of the Reformation also the understanding of the teaching of the universal church has disappeared. This would be the destiny of all churches which regard the second point of the Quadri-lateral as sufficient.

The third point is the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. They are, indeed, essential for the church and its unity. But what is Baptism? In all the proposals and plans for a "reunited church" the necessity of Baptism, performed with water and the Trinitarian formula, is recognized. The most advanced of these plans is the *Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*, which has been recommended by the Lambeth Conference of

1958. Its significance lies in the fact that here for the first time are included Baptists and Disciples, who as a matter of principle reject infant Baptism. This new church is to have room for them as well as for Anglicans, Methodists, Brethren, and the various groups existing in the United Church of South India (among them former Presbyterians and Lutherans). Its statement on Baptism is a masterpiece of compromise. "Both Infant Baptism and Believer's Baptism shall be accepted as alternative practices." This is acceptable to the Anglicans because in either case the rite of initiation is completed through the confirmation by the bishop. It is acceptable to the Baptists because the admission to full membership in the church presupposes a personal confession of faith. Provision is even made for the case of a person who has been baptized as an infant and later regards this Baptism as invalid, or for the case of a minister who refuses to baptize infants. This is possible because Baptism is not regarded as the washing of regeneration, not as necessary for salvation. "Baptism is a *sign* of cleansing from sin, of entrance into the covenant of grace, of fellowship with Christ in His death and Resurrection and of rising to newness of life" (*Plan*, etc., pp. 5 f.). Baptism is no longer a real means of grace, but only a sign. It is no longer "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." How could this be acceptable to Lutherans and to Roman Catholics? Similarly, in all these attempts to carry out the third point of the Lambeth Quadri-lateral, the Lord's Supper loses its character as a sacrament. It must be celebrated with the proper elements and the words of institution. But what the sacrament is, this

is an open question, to be answered privately by the individual minister and Christian. This destroys the character of the sacrament. For it belongs to the very nature of the sacraments and rites of the church that they are not mystery rites but actions in which the minister as well as the recipient know what is happening: "I baptize thee in the name. . . ." "Take, eat, this is My body, which is given for you. . . ." If a pagan in India asks the question, "What is the Sacrament of the Altar?" neither the Church of South India nor the Church of North India could give him an authoritative answer.

The most important of the four points of the Quadrilateral for the Anglicans is the last one. Its formulation has varied, but the idea has always been this, that the church must have a generally recognized ministry with the historic episcopate as its center. This would imply a reordination of the ministers not ordained in the apostolic succession by a bishop who enjoys that privilege. Attempts have been made to make this acceptable by denying that this would be a reordination or by introducing a rite of mutual laying on of hands. Thus far all such attempts have failed—even in South India not all ministers are episcopally ordained—and they are bound to fail because no one is able to say what, e. g., a Presbyterian minister would receive when he undergoes such a rite and what the apostolic succession claimed by an Anglican bishop actually is. This became clear when the negotiations between the churches of England and Scotland that had gone on for many years broke down this year (1958). No church of the Reformation can accept this point of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. Nor can any Catholic

Church, Eastern or Western. For even if these churches could recognize the validity of the Anglican orders, which is at present not the case, or if these orders could be validated in a technical sense, these churches would not be satisfied with the mere possession of the so-called apostolic succession. Important and indispensable as the *apostolicitas successionis* may be to them, it has never played such a role in Rome or in the Eastern churches as it plays in Anglicanism, especially since the first of the "Tracts for the Times" of 1833 based the claims of the Church of England and the rights and duties of its clergy on it. At the latest negotiations between a delegation of the Church of England and the Patriarchate of Moscow it was made clear to the Anglicans that the Orthodox Church is primarily interested in the doctrine. What do you teach? This was the question addressed to them, as it also is the main question put to the Anglican Church by Rome. Organic union presupposes unity in doctrine, as also we Lutherans would point out. It is the tragedy of the union negotiations based on the Lambeth Quadrilateral that they necessarily end in compromise on the doctrine of the church, and that means in the loss of even the most elementary truths of the creeds.

#### IV

In a very rough outline we have spoken of the program of organic union which Anglicanism has contributed to the Ecumenical Movement as a supplement to the plans of federal union. It is worth remembering that both plans have grown in America. The Anglican Church of England in Canada and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States have

developed the Quadrilateral. It took a long time until the Church of England overcame its reluctance to accept what some people called an American utopia. Thus America is the real home of the modern Ecumenical Movement with its two branches, federal and organic union, "Life and Work" and "Faith and Order," Stockholm and Lausanne, which have grown together into the World Council of Churches in 1948, 40 years after the establishment of the Federal Council and of the Fifth Lambeth Conference. This movement, which has shaped the history of the church in the 20th century, has become the greatest challenge to the Lutheran Church.

One year after the First Lambeth Conference, in which the Anglican churches began to rally, the first ecumenical Lutheran organization was founded, *Die Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Konferenz* of 1868. This alliance of the Lutheran churches of Germany at once took up relations with the Church of Sweden and with the General Council in America. Out of this work grew, again under American leadership, the Lutheran World Convention, founded at Eisenach in 1923. Time does not permit to tell the story how men like Morehead, Reu, Long, Knubel, together with the leading Lutherans in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, built up the first loose alliance of Lutheran churches and how these Lutherans faithfully testified to the Lutheran doctrine before the other denominations at Lausanne, 1927. Nor can we discuss here the question why the Lutheran World Convention, in spite of serious attempts, was not able to meet the challenge of the Ecumenical Movement by developing a Lutheran program of interchurch relationship

over against the dogmatically impossible programs of American Reformed Protestantism and Anglicanism. Perhaps it was too late. When in 1947 the World Convention was transformed into the Lutheran World Federation, the Lutheran churches had already been influenced by the foreign ideas of American and Anglican ecumenism to such a degree that the new organization was unable to produce a clear testimony to the Lutheran and Biblical doctrine of the church.

But this testimony must be given inside and outside the Lutheran World Federation. For as there are Lutherans within this federation who want to preserve the confessional and Biblical heritage of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, so there are others who for reasons of conscience cannot belong to that federation so long as it does not take a clear stand against the errors and heresies of the modern Ecumenical Movement. This testimony, if it is to be truly Lutheran, can be nothing else but a testimony to the Biblical doctrine of the church. It belongs to the very nature of the Lutheran faith that it is not interested in the Lutheran Church as such. We do not believe in a Lutheran Church, but in the *una sancta catholica*. Of this our confessions speak when in the Augsburg Confession and in the Apology they explain the "comforting and highly necessary article of the catholic or universal church." One must compare these passages with the corresponding articles of the other confessions of the 16th century in order to understand what belief in the church, a profound faith in the divine mystery of the church, has meant to the church of the Lutheran Reformation. In this world of sin and death there exists



God's holy people, the congregation of saints, Christ's kingdom in which He reigns through the inconspicuous means of grace, forgiving sins, redeeming from eternal death. This kingdom is *cruce tectum* until at the end of the world with the glory of Christ also the glory of His church will be revealed. This doctrine of the *ecclesia abscondita* is not a Lutheran invention. Like the doctrine of the justification of the sinner, like the Lutheran doctrine of the sacraments, and like the entire *theologia crucis* of our Reformers, it is a rediscovery of the eschatology of the New Testament: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). The church lives always "in these last days" (Heb. 1:2), in the "last hour" (1 John 2:18), on the border between time and eternity, in the twilight between this world and the world to come. That is the reason why its nature cannot be expressed in the terms of human sociology. In, with, and under the earthly organization which we call "church" or "churches" — the *ecclesia late dicta* — there lives the true church of Christ, the *ecclesia stricte dicta*. This church is among us. It consists of actual living men, women and children, even infants. We do not know who they are. God only knows them. They are saints in His judgment, real saints though they know themselves only as sinners. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the church within the church. We cannot speak too realistically of these children of God "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13), "born again," which means at the same time "born from above," "born of water and the Spirit" (3:2 ff.). These

people, real people here on earth, outwardly just like other people, are the holy people of God, not a nation after the flesh, like Israel of old, but the Israel after the Spirit. They are God's people, not in a figurative sense or in the sense of what human sociology calls a people. They are the body of Christ, which again is no figurative speech. A human society can be figuratively called a body, a corporation, with its constituents as members. In this sense the outward organization of Christendom, the church as the "society of external things and rites," can be understood as a social organism and may be called a body with members. The modern way of speaking of the whole of Christendom, the sum total of ecclesiastical organizations, as the body of Christ of which the individual churches are members, cannot be justified from the New Testament. There the "members" of the church as the body of Christ are always the individual believers, "for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Nowhere does the New Testament teach or presuppose that the individual "churches" are members of the church as the body of Christ. It is highly significant that the New Testament does not distinguish terminologically between the church as a local church and as the church universal. This is due not to an undeveloped terminology but rather to the fact that the church cannot be understood as a quantity in terms of human sociology. The church, the *una sancta catholica*, is there where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, and it is present in the entire world, wherever the people of God exist. The church as the spiritual or mystical body of Christ

exists wherever members of this body are, but it exists also in the smallest local church, just as the sacramental body of Christ is in its entirety in, with, and under each consecrated host and in each particle of the host. And just as the sacramental body of Christ remains unbroken, undivided, so the spiritual body remains one. Paul's pleading with the Corinthians to avoid schisms rests on the conviction that Christ is not and cannot be divided (1 Cor. 1:13), because the body is essentially one. What a schism can destroy is the unity of the outward ecclesiastical organization. That it cannot destroy the unity of the church of Christ was the common conviction of all Christendom until at least the 17th century. The schismatic separates himself from the unity of the church, but he cannot destroy this unity. This is the teaching of the primitive church, which emphasized, when speaking of schism, that the church is and remains one. When Cyprian occasionally speaks of heretics that are splitting the "body of the church" (ep. 44, 3, cp. 46, 1), he significantly avoids the term "body of Christ" (see also 1 Clement 46). A body of men, a social organism, can be divided, but not the church as the body of Christ.

This, then, would be the pre-eminent task of the Lutheran Church in view of the present Ecumenical Movement, to testify to the Biblical doctrine of the church. This requires the humble confession on the part of Lutheran theology that also our thinking on the church and its unity has been deeply influenced by modern secular sociology, which can just as little understand the mystery of Christ's church as psychology can understand the work of the Holy Spirit. It requires a fresh study of

the Word of God and the humble readiness to submit to this Word alone. The study of the Word of God can and will, where and when it pleases God, renew our faith in the great reality of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. And such faith will find means and ways to work for the outward unity of God's people. It is wrong to conclude from the reluctance of Lutherans to co-operate in certain ecumenical organizations of our time that our church is not interested in the outward unity of the children of God and does not feel its ecumenical obligation. On the contrary, no church has a broader ecumenical outlook than the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Lutherans do not refuse to co-operate with other churches in such matters as do not involve the recognition of heresy. Such recognition would be the end of the church. In an age when large parts of Christendom have lost the Biblical distinction between truth and error, church and heresy, and have lost or are in danger of losing, with this distinction, the pure Gospel and the sacraments of Christ, the means of grace by which the church lives, it is the highest ecumenical duty to call all Christians back to the truth of the Gospel — all Christians, including ourselves. In deep humility only, always aware of our own shortcomings, of the weakness of our faith, our lack of love, our failure to confess where we ought to have confessed, in deep repentance of our manifold sins and with continuous prayer that God may keep us steadfast in His Word can we and must we ask our fellow Christians to submit with us to the Word that, as it maintains and saves the church, judges us all.

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Where will the great Ecumenical Movement lead to? What will Christendom look

like at the threshold of the 21st century? No human eye can see what the results of this movement will be. Church history is unpredictable. It was almost 50 years ago that the first of the great ecumenical gatherings of our century was held, the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910. Everyone had the feeling that this was a turning point in the history of the church. It was indeed a turning point. But what it meant no one was able to see. The conviction seemed to prevail that a new era of world missions had begun, the final battle for the Christianization of mankind. The time seemed to be at hand when the nations and races of the world would accept with the Western civilization also its finest flower and the secret of its greatness, the Christian religion. The vision of a Christian world appeared on the horizon. In a touching address on the 23d of June, John Mott closed the conference. "The end of the Conference is the beginning of conquest. The end of the planning is the beginning of doing." Then he called upon every one of his hearers to resolve before God to plan and to act as best he could.

And referring to an address which Archbishop Davidson had delivered at the opening of the conference he concluded: "And it may be that the words of the Archbishop shall prove to be a splendid prophecy, and that before many of us taste death we shall see the Kingdom of God come with power."

As one of the last survivors of the conference of Edinburgh the great American leader of world missions died some years ago. The prophecy had not come true. The Kingdom had not come with power. Four years after the conference the Great War broke out. Again three years later began the greatest persecution that the history of the church has known. More martyrs have died in this century than in all previous centuries of the church. It was the way of the cross the church had to go. But this is the way of the true church at all times, the church of the crucified and risen Lord. *Cruce tectum*, hidden under the cross, is His Kingdom in this world, until with His advent in glory, the hidden glory and unity of His body, the church, will be revealed.

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