Interaction: Ecumenism and Confessionalism

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ECUMENISM AS AN IMPETUS FOR CONFESSIONALISM

It is ironic that the contemporary confessional movement owes its origin, in part at least, to the ecumenical movement. Visser 't Hooft himself predicted that certain confessional and denominational retrenchments would occur after the first World Council of Churches convention at Amsterdam in 1948. Nor did he consider this a tragic development. The question of enduring significance was, what would follow next? W. A. Visser 't Hooft asked:

Will that self-consciousness resulting from ecumenical contact be the end of the process? Or, will Christians work through that self-consciousness to a position where they say, "Yes, we have a new understanding of our own heritage, but we also see that our heritage has its real meaning and sense and worth in the total fellowship of the ecumenical movement." [1]

Stephen Bayne, erstwhile executive officer of the Anglican communion, offered an interpretation of the development of confessionalism which paralleled that of Visser 't Hooft:

As we have been thrown more and more into confrontation with other Christian traditions, and into the urgent search for unity, we have in the same breath tended to turn in on ourselves, to study what is distinctive about us, and to try to be more faithful to what was to be, perhaps, our own "contribution" to a united church, or at least to some less-conclusive ecumenical dialogue. [2]

Bayne was in general agreement with Visser 't Hooft in his suggestion that the worldwide unity of the Anglican communion did not betray its commitment to local unity, for "it is precisely through the support and guidance of such bodies as the Lambeth Conference that the individual churches of our Communion are encouraged and strengthened in their own ecumenical pilgrimage." [3]

CASE STUDY: LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION AND ECUMENISM

It will be helpful to examine briefly how the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a federated confessional family, has exerted itself toward ecumenism through internal and external activities. The Lutheran World Convention (LWC), the

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[1] Martin J. Heinecken, *Christ Frees and Unites* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 9. Historians note, of course, that the current confessional movement has its roots in the 19th century (see Hermann Sasse, "Confessional Churches in the Ecumenical Movement," *The Springfielder*, XXX [Spring 1967], 4—5). Early 19th-century Romanticism, especially in Germany, provided an impetus for a quickened confessionalism. The encounter with other world religions that came as a result of flourishing missionary activity in the 19th century also played an important role. Nevertheless, current confessional interest took shape in the "identity crisis" that derived from the encounter with other Christians in the ecumenical movement.

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[2] Stephen Fielding Bayne, *An Anglican Turning Point* (Austin, Tex.: Church Historical Society, 1964), p. 116.

[3] Ibid., p. 119.

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predecessor of the LWF, did not remain aloof from the ecumenical movement. In its 1936 New York City meeting the executive committee of the LWC considered the topic "The Ecumenical Character of Lutheranism." The committee explained it this way:

> The all-embracing scope of the Lutheran understanding of Scripture, the fundamental character of the Lutheran understanding of faith, and the catholic broadness of the Lutheran doctrine of the church lend Lutheranism an ecumenical character that in these times of stress on externals must be kept in mind. Lutheranism itself is an ecumenical movement in the truest sense.[4]

In practical affairs Lutheran churches were involved in the International Missionary Council, Faith and Order, and Life and Work commissions.[5] The LWC and the LWF had no intention of dismissing the ecumenical movement. In 1923, even before the 1936 executive committee study, D. Ihmels addressed the Eisenach LWC on the theme "The Ecumenicity of the Lutheran Church." At Lund the executive secretary of the LWF was a member of the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC). There has been regular consultation between the executive secretary of the LWF and the secretary of the WCC at Geneva in matters of church reconstruction, interchurch aid, and refugee resettlement.[6] In addition, the Hannover convention of the LWF established a standing committee for world mis-

sion within the executive secretariat of the LWF. The task of the committee was

> to accept responsibility for orphaned missions and — in cooperation with a participating group or representatives of the young churches and also of the mission directors and missionary societies — to maintain and extend the scope of the joint work between young churches, the mission directors, and the missionary societies.[7]

Finally, the recent Helsinki convention of the LWF created a "Lutheran Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research."[8]

Some ecumenists question the ecumenical commitment of the LWF in spite of the aforementioned activities. They ask whether the administrative parallels between the confessional families and the WCC truly serve the spirit of unity.[9] Those who emphasize the LWF's diaconal, social, and relief operations answer the question in the affirmative. Such activities enable the WCC to concentrate its efforts on the study of controversial points, they suggest. In theory, the Lutheran family nurtures a sense of the church's obligation to *all* its members in its charitable works.[10] For these proponents the LWF is proof of the intention of the Lutheran churches to take an ecumenical responsibility. Before the LWF was organized, they claim, the ma-

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[4] Siegfried Grundmann, *Der lutherische Weltbund* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1957), pp. 356—357.

[5] Ibid., pp. 520—522. The judgment is not beyond question.

[6] Ibid., pp. 523—524.

[7] Ibid., p. 430. The commission began its work Oct. 1, 1952.

[8] Herman Dietzfelbinger, "The Establishment of the 'Lutheran Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research,'" *Lutheran World*, XI (January 1964), 86.

[9] Kurt Schmidt-Clausen, "The World Confessional Families and the Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran World*, X (January 1963), 39.

[10] Ibid., p. 40. For a description of the charitable endeavors of the LWC and the LWF see Sasse, pp. 16—21.

jority of Lutheran churches were state churches with few opportunities for cultivating inter-Lutheran concern.[11]

The younger churches of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) do not accept the argument that world confessional families such as the LWF provide a means for concretizing the universality of the church. They find the argument fallacious because this sort of universality would be untrue to the nature of the church. The propagation of schism is not a way to universality. A realistic approach to universality involves a strengthening of the mission activities of the church (since mission presupposes unity) in order that Christians from throughout the world may serve in countries and churches other than their own.[12]

On the other hand, Norman Goodall writes that "world confessional organizations stand within, not in opposition to, the ecumenical movement." This is true because confessional families have declared their intention to serve the cause of ecumenism, because the families embody a confessionalism centuries older than its organizational manifestation, because the confessional organizations do not relieve their members of the responsibility of "making clear to others the nature of the beliefs confessed," and because the "family

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[11] Schmidt-Clausen, p. 38.

[12] *The Christian Community within the Human Community, Containing Statements from the Bangkok Assembly of the E. A. C. C., Feb.—March 1964; Minutes—Part 2* (Bangalore: C. L. S. Press, n. d.), p. 75. Interestingly, during the 18th and 19th centuries "confessional missions" along with the other interdenominational missions thundered against the universality of the Roman Catholic missions. There appears to be a parallel between their argument and the argument of the EACC.

colloquies" have remained self-critical and progressive.[13]

THE WCC AND THE CONFESSIONAL FAMILIES

It is helpful, in this context, to see how the WCC has dealt with confessional families in recent encounters. The January 1960 issue of *Ecumenical Review,* the official journal of the WCC, reported a meeting between WCC representatives and representatives of confessional bodies including Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists, Friends, Methodists, Lutherans, Orthodox, Presbyterians (all of which had participated in earlier meetings), and the Pentecostals. It was evident, the report stated, that "none of these bodies exercise ecclesiastical authority over their member churches and that they are all federations of autonomous churches." The article em-

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[13] Norman Goodall, "World Confessionalism and the Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran World,* X (January 1963), 54—55. Stephen Bayne, the executive officer of the Anglican communion, agrees with Goodall at this point. Bayne noted in his 1963 report that "there were those who feared that the summer [1963 Anglican Congress at Toronto] would bring an increase in confessional self-consciousness, a renewal of Anglican narcissism, a symposium of like-minded denominational *aficionados.* This did not happen" (Bayne, *An Anglican Turning Point,* p. 82). As he previewed the congress in 1962, Bayne did not consider the convention a "confessional" as opposed to an "ecumenical" gathering: he visualized no contradiction between the two unless the congress were to withdraw from the WCC in order to "go it alone" (p. 67). In a memorandum prepared for the WCC Consultation at Geneva, Oct. 2—5, 1963, Bayne argued that the "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence" (MRI) document adopted at the August 1963 Toronto Congress would provide a rebirth for inter-Anglican life, but "equally with this, it is felt, will come a deeper sense of mission and ecumenical involvement at home." (P. 104)

phasized that the meeting was beneficial for the WCC because some important problems were resolved and some administrative economies realized. Such contacts "make us aware of the attitudes of a number of churches which are not members of the World Council,"[14] the report continued.

In attendance at an April 1962 meeting in Geneva were representatives from the LWF, World Presbyterian Alliance, World Methodist Council, World Baptist Alliance, International Congregational Council, World Convention of Churches of Christ, World Conference of Pentecostal Churches, and Friends' World Commission for Consultation. The WCC, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Old Catholic Church sent observers, but there was no Anglican representative present.[15] The conference adopted a tentative definition of the term "confessional bodies." "We understand the term 'confessional bodies' as used in the Constitution of the World Council to mean the organizations which represent families of churches," the definition said in part. These bodies claim to "share together . . . specific traditions which have grown out of spiritual crises in the history of the Church." Furthermore, they "desire to render witness to specific conventions of doctrinal or ecclesiological character which they consider essential for the life of the whole Church of Christ."[16]

Since 1962, discussions between the WCC and the world confessional representatives have dealt with the more fundamental issues of the confessional organizations, especially as they relate to Asia and Africa.[17] In 1962 the officers of the Youth Department of the WCC challenged the youth leaders of the world confessional bodies to determine whether their activities and organizations were frustrating the youth of their churches in matters of unity, mission, and renewal.[18]

Norman Goodall presided at a Geneva meeting Oct. 2—5, 1963. Forty representatives from the WCC, EACC, and world confessional organizations were present. C. H. Hwang of Formosa spoke forcefully of the problems created in the younger Asian churches by the confessional-ecumenical tension. D. T. Niles and Michael Hollis reinforced his argument. "The assertion was constantly made that an authentic confession involves witness through unity. . . . What are the implications of this inseparable conjunction of confession — witness — unity — truth?"[19]

In 1965 a consultation of "Confessional

14 "World Council Diary," *Ecumenical Review*, XII (January 1960), 268—269.

15 "World Confessionalism and the Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran World*, X (January 1963), 34.

16 Ibid., p. 35.

17 "Report of the Executive Committee to the Central Committee, Enugu, Nigeria, January 1965," *Ecumenical Review*, XVII (April 1965), 161.

18 *Faith and Order Trends*, III (December 1962), 8.

19 "World Council Diary," *Ecumenical Review*, XVI (January 1964), 63—64. Hwang gives a fuller explanation of how the "missionary situation" must always take precedence over the "confessional situations" and how the subsequent distinction between the "confessing church" and the "confessional church" derives from this precedence in his article *"Confessing the Faith in Asia Today," South East Asia Journal of Theology*, VIII (July/October 1966), 76—78. In his recent book, *Mission, Unity, and Truth* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), Bishop Hollis contends that local church union has clear priority and that Asian churches must be freed from so-called ecclesiastical paternalism.

Families and the Churches of Asia" was conducted in Ceylon. Several representatives from world confessional bodies attended.[20] In October 1965 representatives of the confessional families and the WCC met to discuss the theme "Confessional Movements and Mission and Unity," and a document seeking to clarify the issues was drafted.[21] The *Ecumenical Review* reported that a new "confessional body came into existence" when a permanent organization was set up by the Conference of the Heads of Oriental Churches in early 1965. WCC representatives attended a meeting of this body in Cairo Jan. 6, 1966.[22]

It appears that the WCC and the confessional bodies have taken up the challenge which ecumenism brings to confessionalism and which confessionalism brings to ecumenism. At least there is dialog.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CONFESSIONAL UNITY

It is possible to interpret the tension that exists between ecumenism and confessionalism as an outgrowth of two varying principles of unity, the "geographical" principle and the "confessional" principle. In any case, a consideration of the two

principles may provide a perspective from which to view the interaction and interrelation of ecumenism and confessionalism.

Most significant Protestant church unions in recent years, whether consummated or in serious negotiation, have been based on the geographical principle of unity. This has been true in Japan, the Phillipines, South India, North India, Ceylon, and the U.S.A. Lutheran churches, on the other hand, have generally sought to express family relationships in federal or organic unions based on the confessional principle, as in Japan, mainland China, the Republic of China, Hong Kong, New Guinea, Malaya, India, Tanzania, the Malagasy Republic, and South Africa. In the light of these developments churchmen in the young Lutheran churches experience a period of trial and tension in their attempt to relate the two principles.[23] Compounding this difficulty for the younger Lutherans, proponents of the geographical principle often interpret a confession as a "particular ecclesiastical eccentricity." On the other hand, the young Lutherans who support the confessional principle see a valid expression of the nature of the church in their confession.[24]

The geographical principle of unity was forcefully supported at the New Delhi convention of the WCC. With its plea for unity of "all in each place," the convention emphasized the local nature of un-

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[20] "Report of the Executive Committee to the Central Committee," *Ecumenical Review*, XVIII (April 1966), 234. At the Kandy, Ceylon, conference an attempt was made to distinguish a "confessing theology" from a "confessional theology." For a brief description of the consultation see John Fleming, "Confessions, Confessionalism and the Confessing Church in Asia Today," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, VIII (July/October 1966), 13—15.

[21] "Report of the Executive Committee to the Central Committee," p. 233.

[22] Ibid., p. 234.

[23] Vilmos Vajta and Hans Weissgerber, eds., *The Church and the Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 150—151. For a summary of the confessional development in the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) subsequent to the union see Yoshinobu Kumazawa, "Confessing the Faith in Japan," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, VIII (July/October 1966), 162—166.

[24] Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 155.

ity.[25]   Presupposing   the   geographical principle, the report on unity addressed a question   to   the   so-called   confessional bodies:

> Probably the critical question is whether or not the leaders of confessional bodies agree with the emphasis we have already made upon the centrality of unity of all Christians *in each place,* which must, of course, always seek to be a "unity in truth." [26]

Vilmos Vajta, a confessional spokesman, takes issue with the report. He concedes that the unity of the church has local ramifications, but the essential question is whether unity "in each place" can be created when there is little agreement on the denotation of the word "unity." In sum, "the case for local unity cannot be pleaded if the premises of 'unity in truth' have not yet been clarified." [27]

The principle of geographical unity had strong support at the Bangkok assembly of the EACC in 1964 as well. Delegates argued that in Asia the crucial issues of the day lie between the "churches together and the world." This phenomenon itself, the assembly cautioned, could prevent a union between churches of different lands. The young Asian churchmen argued that "the ultimate aim must be the restoration of the one Holy Catholic Church, to the end that the united church in any one area will have an organic place in the Church

universal." [28] The assembly presupposed the geographical principle when it asked the confessional bodies (especially anyone "seeking to preserve for the universal Church some fundamental insight into an aspect of Christian truth") whether a fundamental insight is best preserved "by an organization built around that truth." [29] When the assembly report warned against the argument that whatever is accomplished through local unity schemes should and must be attempted on a world scale through the confessional families,[30] the Asian churchmen were either discrediting the confessional principle of unity or endorsing the geographical principle.

By their existence the confessional families call into question the geographical principle of unity, as well as any unity principle based on "one's taste, linguistics, and cultural environment or rational expediency." These families challenge the church to confess what makes it church. A regional solution to a doctrinal or ecclesiastical problem will betray its inherent weakness, if it has one, when submitted to the test of fire in a worldwide confessional fellowship.[31]

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25 *The New Delhi Report* (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 118.

26 Ibid., p. 133. The report on unity at New Delhi recommended that local churches take a "responsible risk" in attempting to explore the meaning of unity with other Christians, while at the same time they were to respect "our confessional principle." (P. 125)

27 Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 186.

28 "Issues on 'Confessional Families and the Churches in Asia,'" *Ecumenical Review,* XVI (October 1964), 553—557. The obstacles created by confessional loyalties in the younger churches, as they were described by the EACC at Bangalore in 1961 and at Bangkok in 1964, are noted in Fleming, pp. 9—13.

29 "Issues on 'Confessional Families and the Churches in Asia,'" p. 555.

30 The *Christian Community,* p. 76.

31 Schmidt-Clausen, p. 41. See also an article by Arne Sovik, director of the department of world missions of the LWF, titled "Confessions and Confessing *the Faith* in Asia," *South East Asia Journal of Theology,* VIII (July/ October 1966), 87—90.

What would result if local churches throughout the world achieved unity solely under the geographical principle? It is possible that the result would be a conglomeration of local church unions, each with its own confessionality.

> Under such conditions a unity of all Christendom could then only consist of a consolidation of these national churches, and that would be a confessionless amalgamation which would not dare to raise the real ecumenical question concerning a common faith.

In view of this possibility, one can appreciate the ecumenical rationale of the Lutheran churches, which insists on a universal confessional unity within the confines of Christendom.[32] In addition, if union schemes provide primarily local solutions, there is reason to expect that churches united in this way would be isolated from international doctrinal ties and would be closely affiliated with their respective states.[33]

Surprisingly, even some members of the Anglican communion have recognized the danger of pursuing only geographic unity. Stephen Bayne, for example, contends that the "confessional" families play a significant role in keeping the quest for local unity and the quest for wider unity "abreast of one another." At present "it is only within those families that the same *depth* of unity, in both its local and wider manifestation, can be maintained." In this way world confessionalism provides a healthy balance to local unities.[34] Bayne describes the "deeper" unity of full communion in the Anglican family as

> a deeper expression of unity than any federation of local unities could be, for it transcends "federation," at least potentially, with all the implications that federation has of being a voluntary action of men, and confronts us with the fact of our indivisible unity in the sacrament which, with baptism, is the deepest of all unities given us in this world.

This type of unity has within it "the seed of a universality which is different in kind from what I call a 'federation of local unities.'" For Bayne, unity is given by God; it is not attained by men in one place and then extended to men in other places.[35]

In a discussion of the principles of geography and confession applied in the quest for unity, the recent negotiations between the Church of South India (CSI) and the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of India are of great importance. In a sense, "here the geographical and confessional approaches to Christian unity are meeting in a representative encounter with ecumenical implications reaching far be-

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[32] Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 187.

[33] Schmidt-Clausen, p. 42. This argument is highly resented by younger churchmen. They emphasize that many Western churches were not saved from nationalistic subservience by their confessional positions, especially during World War II. Hermann Diem, a professor at Tübingen, recounts for the Asian churches the opportunity and the predicament which the confessional churches in Germany confronted during the church struggle in the 1930s in his "Confessional Church or Confessing Church," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, VIII (July/ October 1966), 131—141.

[34] Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., "'World Confessionalism' and the Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran World*, X (January 1963), 65—66. Bayne was executive officer of the Anglican communion at the time this article was published.

[35] Ibid., pp. 66—67.

yond South India." [36] Michael Hollis, who served as moderator of the CSI for some time, suggested that in the negotiations the Lutherans failed to trust the Holy Spirit fully. According to Hollis, the only protection against exporting a full-blown denominational pattern to a foreign mission field is total reliance on the Holy Spirit.[37] However, it would be a simple matter for the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of India to accuse the CSI of a similar mistrust of the Spirit in view of the CSI's implicit reliance on the geographical principle in these negotiations.

CREATIVE TENSION: ECUMENISM AND CONFESSIONALISM

It is advantageous to see the interrelation of ecumenism and confessionalism as a creative tension. Held in check by ecumenical forces, confessional forces have gathered into families; in turn, these assemblies have broadened the ecumenical perspective of their family members. On the other hand, challenged to confess the Source of their being, ecumenical forces have modified the doctrinal base of the WCC and increased participation in faith

and order discussions. At the same time a growing interest in the phenomenon of contemporary confession and a crude attempt to discredit confessionalism have worked together to build up a line of tension between ecumenism and confessionalism. The data that flows from this confessional-ecumenical encounter must be studied in greater detail.

In recent years confessional bodies have stressed the need for contemporary confessions of faith. A rationale for the acceptance of the historic confessions is integral to this emphasis. At a conference of Lutherans in Marangu, Africa, Heinrich Meyer cited four arguments for a contemporary confession of faith. First, a mere repetition of Biblical statements is not a proclamation of faith. Second, a disinterested account of Christ's work is not a confession of faith. Third, Christians proclaim their message as members of the communion of saints, not as individuals; a confession is presupposed. Fourth, the church needs a confession to ward off the demonic and evil that would betray it.[38] Confessionalists

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[36] Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 156. The CSI is attempting to integrate a sturdy Anglican and Congregational tradition into a strong Reformed confessionalism, all within a geographically delimited area.

[37] Michael Hollis, "The Challenge of Non-Lutherans to the Lutheran Churches," *Lutheran World*, X (January 1963), 73—78. In his call for contemporary confession in Asian churches, J. L. Ch. Abineno, chairman of the Indonesian Council of Churches, warns the churches to expect little help from the older churches in their task, but the younger churches need not worry since the Spirit is working and will lead them to confession. See his "Church Confession," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, VIII (July/October 1966), 53—64.

[38] *Marangu: A Record of the All-Africa Lutheran Conference*, edited by the Lutheran World Federation, Department of World Mission, Fridtjov Birkeli, director (Geneva: n. p., 1956), p. 38. It must be noted that the younger churches are showing a definite interest in the phenomenon connected with the verb "to confess." They are more concerned with "confessing" than "confession." Although the Bangkok Assembly of the EACC set as the theme of the Oct. 26—Nov. 3, 1966 Faith and Order Conference in Hong Kong the topic "The Confession of Faith in Asia Today," the theme was changed to "Confessing the Faith in Asia Today" in order, says John Fleming, "to make it quite clear that as churches in Asia we were concerned with the total form of the confession — *the* confession, not just *a* confession, a written dogmatic confession, either traditional or new" (Fleming, p. 7; see also pp. 15—18

presuppose a rationale and hermeneutics for the historic confessions and for the ecumenical character of the historic confessions in their call for contemporary confession:

> "Ecumenical" symbols are those confessions of faith through which the reality of Christ, as witnessed to in the Holy Scriptures, is confessed as the Gospel by the concrete church, in such an exemplary way that through them the true Church, however or wherever it may be, can be strikingly recognized historically, and its consensus measured regulatively.[39]

With this definition of "ecumenical" — which is a specifically Lutheran understanding of the term — there is a fundamental mutation of meaning. Until the Reformation the term referred to a specific geographic or institutional sphere. But in the Reformation it was agreed that the term

> was not to be reduced to its formal or phenomenological aspects but must refer to the substance, and specifically, the substance of the Gospel. The unity of the church is determined principally by the one faith which has been confessed throughout Christendom since the apostles.

While this unity may be geographic or institutional, the ecumenicity of the church "must be understood as unity in truth, which can also be manifested locally."[40] In sum, the confession of the church finds its *raison d'être* in the fact that the Scriptures must be interpreted by every age. In subsequent interpretations of the Bible the confessionality of the church of Christ surfaces again and again. Even some contemporary evangelical churchmen of a non-confessional stripe are becoming aware of this process in their Biblical studies as they uncover a tradition of kerygmatic material that forms the core of the Scriptures.[41] If one admits the need for a contemporary confession, one also provides a rationale for the historic confessions.

> It is not in the least a phenomenon peculiar to the Reformation that confessions are created; this is a fact that is founded in the very essence of the church. In this respect, the Reformation considered itself to be nothing more than a link in the historical development of the church.[42]

In sum, the "positive" function of contemporary confession offers a means for appreciating the "positive" character of the historic confessions.

The "positive," doxological function of confession is related to the question of tradition and its role in the church. When faith creates fellowship, a confession will result. All confessions of faith which grow out of these fellowships in the church's history must be tested by criteria that evaluate their positive witness to the Gospel. Even the "negative" function of confession, the delimitation of the boundary

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and 115—120). T. B. Simatupang, an Indonesian layman who is vice-president of the Indonesian Council of Churches, discusses the necessity for contemporary confession in Indonesia in "The Confessing Church in Contemporary Asia," *South East Asia Journal of Theology,* VIII (January 1967), 53—70.

[39] Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 173. Vajta takes this definition from E. Kinder.

[40] Ibid. This statement is Vajta's.

[41] Ibid., p. 171. H. D. Beeby, professor of theology in Taiwan, and John Fleming, executive secretary for the EACC, are two nonconfessional churchmen who have investigated the role of the confession of faith in the Old and New Testaments as it applies to the confessing church today. See their articles in the *South East Asia Journal of Theology,* VIII (July/October 1966), 21—35, 37—52.

[42] Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 171.

of false confession in the church, is primarily concerned with authentic Christian confession in the true church.[43]

Now if both "positive" and "negative" confessional functions deal in essence with the nature and unity of the church, the ecumenist cannot dismiss the matter of confession lightly.

> If . . . the ecumenists criticize the fact that the "Lutherans" hold fast to the confession in its kerygmatic-sacramental function, then they are on dangerous ground since such a setting aside of the confession would mean an indifference on the part of the church towards that which constitutes it, i.e., towards that which establishes its unity. This must not happen in the ecumenical movement. An ecumene which no longer knew what it confessed but wanted to bring its world wide unity to expression simply in terms of organization would not be a *Christian* ecumene.[44]

Kurt Schmidt-Clausen predicts that in the future even the WCC may be forced to adopt a confession since

> it is illusory to suppose that a united church of the future could exist without confessing its faith and without the rejection of erroneous doctrine that is part and parcel of every confession.[45]

And Bishop Bayne, commenting on the ecumenical discussions between Methodists and Anglicans, recommended that

> we examine with new eyes the whole "confessional" issue. It is no secret that I am entirely content with our freedom from a confessional theology. . . . But this nobility, as it sometimes is, can lead us to a dangerous illusion, that no confession is called for from Christians. . . . What

should our confession be, in the face of racial strife, of a cold and triumphant secularism, of the increasingly irrational and ungoverned use of power? It may be that a new confessionalism — one that may chafe tender Anglican shoulders — is required for this age and unity.[46]

On the other side, younger Lutheran churches have been challenged to turn the *confessio scripta* into a *confessio in actu*. The question of the "Lutheran" character of a church body is not wholly dependent on how the ecumenical symbols and the confessions of the Book of Concord are treated in its constitution. The "Lutheran" character of a body depends in great part on how and to what degree the church creates a vibrant confession for its contemporary situation, drawing from the historic confessions. Siegfried Grundmann states his case well when he says: "For them the normative power of the historical confessions must consist, above everything else, in this that their own confessional statements apply the fundamental truths which they contain to the concrete situations of the younger churches."[47]

Confessionalism clashes with ecumenism on the question of the need for contemporary confession and the rationale for the historic confessions implicit in any contemporary confession. In the struggle the term "confessionalism" has suffered distortion at the hands of both parties. In fact, the term has become a symbol of the creative tension that exists between the two parties.

Some confessionalists assert that every church body has a "confession," perhaps unbeknown. Vajta, for example, argues

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[43] Ibid., p. 165.

[44] Ibid., p. 163.

[45] Schmidt-Clausen, p. 43.

[46] Bayne, *An Anglican Turning Point*, p. 91.

[47] Grundmann, pp. 434—436.

that each church group is characterized by loyalty to a confession "which determines [the church's] appearance in the world and forms the actual principle of its existence." Such a "confession" can be transmitted orally, in writing, or in ritual. "Each church confesses Christ in the manner of its proclamation and in the method in which it administers the sacraments and above all in its total expression of life.... Its 'confession' appears in each church at the point where its ministry begins to function." Especially when a body enters union negotiations its "confession" — whether dogmatic, kerygmatic, ritualistic, or activist in character — becomes increasingly evident. That which a denomination maintains "to the bitter end" Vajta terms its "confessionality." In this line of reasoning the question of unity is not one between confessional and nonconfessional churches, but a question of discovering where true confessionality resides.[48] Nevertheless, this use of the term "confession" has certainly muddied the meaning of the word.

On the other hand, the ecumenical party has contributed its share of verbal distortion to the "confession"-"confessionalism" word syndrome as well. Some contemporary ecumenists use the term "confessionalism" to denote "not only churches of a common doctrinal allegiance, but also international structures of church federation, and the like, which are often structures of considerable collective power and durability." Even less honorably, the word is used to describe a multitude of interchurch problems including "tensions between older and newer churches and cultures, tensions arising out of differing patterns of education, tensions inherited from older historical or social situations, tensions born in problems of money or property."[49] Because of the stigma attached to the word "confessionalism," some confessionalists prefer to use the word "confessionality" and reserve the term "confessionalism" for the "legalistic expression of the confessionality of the church."[50] Such "exaggerated confessionalism" displaces God in favor of the confessional system. The problem of "exaggerated confessionalism" may befall those who have no publicly acknowledged confession as well as those who publicly admit to their confessional stance.[51]

The creative tension that exists between confessionalism (or confessionality) and ecumenism comes to the surface whenever confessional conventions come under discussion. On numerous occasions confessional families have discussed issues central to the Christian faith at their assemblies and conventions.[52] In viewing these de-

[48] Vajta and Weissgerber, pp. 163—164. See Schmidt-Clausen, p. 43, for a similar argument, and also Vajta's article in *Ecumenical Review*, XV (October 1962), 29.

[49] Bayne, *An Anglican Turning Point*, pp. 57, 67—68. For reasons cited, Bayne prefers not to use the term "confessionalism."

[50] Vajta and Weissgerber, p. 165. Vajta argues that this type of "confessionalism" may be present in churches that have not recorded their loyalties to a specific confession in written documents. Hence, "confessionalism" can be ascribed to a body that brushes aside historical confessional writings and appeals exclusively to the Bible or to a particular church order in a legalistic way.

[51] Schmidt-Clausen, p. 44.

[52] In 1963 at Helsinki, for example, the LWF discussed "Christ Today," especially as His presence is manifest in the doctrine of justification.

velopments, some ecumenists ask whether the confessional families are serving the true purpose of the confessional movement by gathering around themes so pivotal and essential to the Christian faith. They suggest that themes of such importance could be studied more profitably in an ecumenical gathering than in a "confessional discussion." They doubt that confessional assemblies convened under crucial themes are essential for the goal of "making a distinctive contribution" to the ecumenical conversation, especially when the conventions demand so much time and energy from men who are "key people" in the ecumenical movement at the same time.[53] The Bangkok assembly of the EACC leveled this charge in 1964 when it stated that world confessional families have little reason to conduct world or regional conferences on topics such as "the relation between Christianity and other world religions" or "the Christian family." It was the opinion of the EACC that a confessional family "has the obligation to set up a programme for its own membership which is concerned with its denominational confessional distinctiveness." [54] But the confessional families, at least the LWF, argue that it *is* their business to discuss the essential doctrines of the Christian faith; precisely in the clarification of these doctrines the historic confessions retain their integrity. In addition, the LWF has never publicly stated that it exists in order to "make a distinctive contribution" to the ecumenical movement. Its very existence *is* a contribution to the unity of the church.

The interrelation of ecumenism and confessionalism is a creative tension. This is

apparent from the fact that the interrelation has pointed up the need for reciprocity between East and West, between the younger churches and the traditional churches. The younger churches of Asia and Africa have a widespread fear of world confessional organizations. They interpret the world families as a threat to the essential unity of the church. In the eyes of the younger churches, the Western churches play the role of "judge" in every unity scheme proposed by the younger churches. At the same time the Western churches refuse to subject their own divisions to the "new experiences and leadings which are being granted to other parts of the church universal"; the guardians of the confessional tradition appear unable or unwilling to subject the traditional to the novel. For this reason the younger churches often attack the confessional organizations openly. It is suggested that the East would listen if it could be assured that the West had ears too.

> There would be a greater readiness in Asia to heed the lessons of the past if there appeared a greater readiness outside Asia to learn what the Spirit is saying to the churches in the present. This, too, is a requirement of genuine participation in the ecumenical movement. Acceptance of it needs to be more in evidence if the terms *confessional* and *ecumenical* are to be seen as belonging together.[55]

As the Western churches begin to assess the Spirit's work in the younger churches, the interrelation of ecumenism and confessionalism will assume a different character.

Finally, a creative tension issues from

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[53] Goodall, p. 57.

[54] *The Christian Community,* pp. 74—75.

[55] Goodall, p. 56.

the interaction of ecumenism and confessionalism because both movements have stated their intention to further the Gospel of truth. There is validity in the reasoning that "the method of *re*-union depends ultimately upon the conception one holds of the existing *dis*-union. And these conceptions utterly differ. Prescription always depends upon diagnosis." [56] But after analyzing all the nontheological factors in disunity, it is possible to conclude that "there remains at the heart of our confessional differences the issue of truth." This concern for truth is the integrating feature of the ecumenical movement: the movement is a challenge to face squarely all schismatic differences and to submit these differences to the "light and power of the Word in which unity and truth are inseparably one." In consequence,

> what the ecumenical movement requires of churches identified with a particular historic confession is that they shall be manifestly open to this encounter with the Word, humbly examining their own structure and life as well as the content of their confession in the light of it, entering into deep and often costly relationships with other churches for the sake of it, and seeking with them the renewal and unity which are agreeable to the Word.[57]

At the same time the concern for the truth of the Gospel is the *raison d'être* of the confessional families; truth and unity are interdependent. The tension between confessionalism and ecumenism will continue to be a creative tension as long as both parties pursue the truth of the Gospel and

plumb the depths of the Word in their quest for unity.

ECUMENISM AND CONFESSIONALISM: FAITH EXPERIENCED AND FAITH REFLECTIVE

Ecumenism and confessionalism appear to be macroscopic projections of two phenomena which, in microscopic form, may be labelled "faith experienced" and "faith reflective." [58] If this is true, a knowledge of the historical and theological factors that increase the tension between "faith experienced" and "faith reflective" will provide a key for understanding the complex interrelation of ecumenism and confessionalism.

Almost antiphonally "faith experienced" and "faith reflective" have stimulated and interacted with each other for centuries. This has been the case not only in recent macroscopic manifestations in the form of ecumenism and confessionalism but throughout the church's history. Faith has expressed itself through the emotion and will of the Christian — in mystic flights,

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[56] Georges Florovsky, "Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement," *Intercommunion,* eds. Donald Baillie and John Marsh (London: SCM Press, 1952), pp. 196—197.

[57] Goodall, pp. 53—54.

[58] Contemporary philosophical theology is discussing the antiphonal cleavage between "faith experienced" and "faith reflective" from a different perspective in its current consideration of religious language. See especially John A. Hutchinson, *Language and Faith* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957); *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* eds. Antony G. N. Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955); Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1957), and other works on the subject. There is a slight echo of this distinction between "faith experienced" and "faith reflective" in a statement by an Asian churchman and ecumenist, C. H. Hwang, when he says, "I feel that the clear distinction between the Gospel *as such* and *our understanding* of the Gospel is not fully maintained" (italics his). He suggests that our understanding of the Gospel can never be equated with the Gospel. See his *"Confessing* the Faith in Asia Today," p. 82.

in monastic seclusion, in ritual, in musical score, in art, and, significantly, in the encounter of Christian with Christian as a demonstration of the unity of the church. On the other hand, faith has always shown a propensity for self-reflection as well: cognitive statements of doctrine and dogma, confessional and doxological statements of belief, tomes of systematic writings, liturgical expressions and creeds — "faith reflective" uses these and many other avenues to present itself to the world and church for inspection and consideration. Again, in faith's attempt merely "to be" before God on the one hand and "to be *something*" recognizable in confession before men on the other these two elements, "faith experienced" and "faith reflective," have interacted for the good of the church and the glory of God.

Since the Kantian intellectual revolution in the early 19th century the church has become increasingly aware of the schizoid tension between faith as an experiential conviction and faith as it reflects itself in language. Immanuel Kant's "Copernican revolution" in philosophy opened a new era in Western intellectual history that has been unravelling itself since the turn of the 19th century. As he works out the ramifications of Kant's revolution, man, including Christian man, has been occupied with determining how one's subjective apprehension of data provides a novel perspective from which to interpret the data.

This intellectual revolution began working its way into Christian theology as the nineteenth century progressed, especially through the influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher. As the "objective" nature of theology became less significant than the "subjective" apprehension of theological data, the importance of dogma and doctrine diminished. At this juncture in intellectual history "faith experienced" assumed a position of greater validity and higher importance than "faith reflective." As if to avenge the reflective distortions of previous centuries, the pendulum swung overbalance in favor of "faith experienced" as the 19th century progressed.

This development in intellectual history is vitally important in considering the interrelation of ecumenism and confessionalism. Schleiermacher, the first theologian to apply the principles of the Kantian revolution in religion and in the sphere of interchurch relations, was the official theologian of the 1817 Prussian Union. Since Lutheran Christians differed from Reformed Christians only in externals that concerned the realms of knowing and doing as opposed to "feeling," and not in the area of personal piety[59] (may we call it "faith experienced"?), Schleiermacher saw little reason for the two churches to be divided.

It is reasonable to assert that the ecumenical movement gained momentum in the 19th century largely because the Kantian intellectual revolution was making its impact within the organizational construct of Western Christianity, namely, the visible church with its many denominations. In the fields of politics and society, theo-

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[59] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, eds. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), I, 107. The important role the concept of organic community played in Schleiermacher's thought is discussed briefly in Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany, Its History and Civilization* (second edition; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 42—43.

ries and practices that had prevailed for centuries crumbled before ideologies that went "straight to the people" for theory and action in the societal-political spheres of life. There is little reason to think that the church escaped a similar experience in its considerations of the meaning of organic unity and in the definition of its nature and mission.

The contemporary ecumenical movement is, in some degree at least, an attempt to work out organizationally in the church the ramifications of the intellectual revolution that struck in the 19th century. This is clearly apparent from the assurances given by some ecumenists that "face-to-face" encounter among Christians will produce — despite numerous obstacles and almost miraculously — the inevitable and automatic unity of the church.[60] Linked to the geographical principle of unity that implements this argument, "the power of encounter" is the ecclesiastical incarnation of the Kantian intellectual revolution and

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[60] Related to this implicit reliance on the ecumenical encounter is a recent definition of the Christian mission activity as a mere encounter between human beings in which God calls forth the best from the adherents of two world religions, the Christian and the non-Christian, each in terms of his religion. For a study of the furor raised at the 1964 Bombay Eucharistic Congress, where such a definition of mission was at least insinuated for Roman Catholics, see T. J. Sheridan, "A Problem for Missions," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, VIII (July/October 1966), 121—129.

its modifications. In part at least, the ecumenical movement finds its ancestry at Königsberg.

Can it be equally true, on the other hand, that confessionalism is carrying the major responsibility for "faith reflective" in the 20th century? In its contention that confession is essential to the nature of the church and in its rationale for the historic confessions, the confessional movement refuses to admit that "faith experienced" can exist by itself. The confessional movement has identified the shift in Western intellectual history that occurred early in the 19th century. But it will not sell the history of the church for a pot of porridge. It has the conviction that man is more than emotion and will, that every subjectivity entails objectivity, that "faith experienced" contains some element of "faith reflective" if it would — and it must — express itself.

It appears that a healthy tension between ecumenism and confessionalism will continue to exist for some time. Just as "faith" without "works" is dead, and just as "faith experienced" implies "faith reflective," so ecumenism cannot achieve its objective without an integral confessionalism, and confessionalism cannot be true to confession without ecumenism. Not the question of the chicken and the egg but the parable of the mustard seed lies at the core of the interrelation of confessionalism and ecumenism.

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