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Fellowship

THOMAS COATES

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of New Year's Day several years ago I stood in the outer court of Yasukuni Shrine in the city of Tokyo. New Year's Day, of course, is the highest festival day of the Shinto religion, when virtually all of the Japanese go to the shrines to pay their respects to their ancestors and begin the new year with "a clean slate." For some time I watched with fascination as the worshipers bowed before the sanctuary, clapped their hands three times to awaken the attention of the spirits, cast their coins into the coffer, bought their good luck arrows to ward off evil from their households for the coming year, and purified themselves by washing their mouths with holy water.

Thereupon I left and walked a few blocks to the chapel where Lutheran services were to be conducted that New Year's morning. For the next hour I joined with the congregation as it took part in the beautiful moving rite of the historic Lutheran liturgy and listened to the simple and dignified message of the Gospel from the pulpit.

The contrast between the two types of New Year's worship was dramatic. Just wherein did that difference lie? For one thing, it lay in the contrast between a

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religion of works on the one hand and a religion of grace on the other. But then, too, it lay in the contrast between the concept of worship as an individual performance in the one case, and the concept of worship as a matter of *fellowship*, or mutuality, in the other. In the first, religion was conceived in terms of the individual; in the second, religion was conceived in terms of the *koinonia*. It is to this unique Christian concept of *fellowship*, then, that we wish to address ourselves.

I. THE BIBLICAL ROOTAGE OF FELLOWSHIP

Basically, our fellowship is with God, through Christ. This fellowship must be seen in its Trinitarian frame of reference.

First, our fellowship with God and with all men rests on the basis of our creation by the Father. "It is He that made us, and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture" (Ps. 100:3); "In Him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed His offspring.'" (Acts 17:28)

Second, our fellowship with God in a more specific Christian sense has as its basis the fact of our redemption through His Son. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3); "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith." (Gal. 3:26)

Third, our fellowship in Christ is the product of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. "Through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then

you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:18-19). "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . . All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills." (1 Cor. 12:4, 11)

The fellowship with God that was an integral part of the divine image with which man was originally endowed was, unfortunately, disrupted by man's fall into sin. Ever since that time this fellowship has been continually marred and negated by the ineradicable presence of sin in the human heart. Conversely, however, this fellowship is continually being restored and sustained through Christ, as He Himself prayed in the high-priestly prayer, "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 17:11)

We dare never lose sight of the fact that our fellowship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, is a *gift*. It is a gift because it is the result alone of God's grace. In ourselves—because of our alienation from and rebellion against Him who is the Giver of all good—there is nothing to evoke God's desire or need for fellowship with us. It is the mark of His boundless and undeserved favor that the severed bonds of man's pristine fellowship with God have been knit together again in Christ. That sacred fellowship, though still impaired by the endemic presence of sin within us, enriches and ennobles our earthly life. And the full and eternal restoration of that fellowship belongs to the ineffable joys of heaven.

Derivatively, our fellowship with God through Christ is to be viewed as the bond

that unites Christians in faith and love. This fellowship is based on the fact of our common sonship, with God as our Father. "He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth." (Acts 17:26)

In the wider sense, of course, our common creation by the hand of God binds us together with all members of the human family. Of this universal fellowship all men are members. In this sense, indeed, it is proper to speak of the "brotherhood of man."

In the narrower sense, however, the term "fellowship" refers to the special bond that exists between and among Christians. This fellowship is the highest possible expression of unity: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). Especially striking is the beautiful passage on Christian unity, Eph. 2:11-22.

This fellowship on the horizontal level, though marred and disrupted by sin and human weakness, is continually being restored and sanctified by Christ. This restoration takes place through the spirit of love that the Holy Spirit implants in the hearts of all believers. The fellowship itself is established by the action of God through the Word and sacraments, whereby the gifts of divine grace and love are communicated to us and made manifest within us. *Koinonia* describes the reciprocal relationship that exists among the members of the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12-27)

The fellowship of Christians may be examined according to the various aspects in which it becomes evident. The apostolic church provides an excellent example for the multifaceted expression of the *koi-*

nonia. Seven elements of this fellowship may be identified.

1. Christian fellowship finds expression through worship. It is natural and proper that the people of God should assemble gladly and regularly for corporate worship, whether of a formal or informal nature: "I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, with a multitude keeping festival" (Ps. 42:4). "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some." (Heb. 10:25)

2. This fellowship finds deep and meaningful expression in the joint, mutual prayers and intercessions in which Christians engage as they bring their common needs before the throne of God. There is incalculable strength and comfort in the knowledge that one's burdens and cares are being carried to God in the prayers of those who share with us the fellowship of God's people. "They devoted themselves to prayers" (Acts 2:42). "Prayer for him was made to God by the church" (Acts 12:5). "These [the apostles] with one accord devoted themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Acts 1:14)

3. A sublime expression of Christian fellowship is the mutual experience of the Eucharist. Thus, participation in the Sacrament has traditionally been regarded as the prerogative of those who are able to "discern the Lord's body" and as a manifestation of Christian unity in the most consummate sense. "They devoted themselves to . . . the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf." (1 Cor. 10:17)

4. Christian fellowship also involves the common acceptance, sharing, and communication of Scriptural doctrine and of instruction in the faith. Richard R. Caemmerer has aptly described the church as "the mutually nourishing community." It is but natural that those whom the Holy Spirit has bound together in faith and love should strive to edify one another in the knowledge of the truth, to aid in the spiritual maturation of their fellow Christians, and to spread the Gospel abroad, so that the fellowship might be enlarged. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). "Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." (Acts 5:42)

5. A necessary part of the Christian fellowship is also that of rebuke and correction of the erring and the weak. Unpalatable as this task may often be, it is actually an evidence of mutual love and concern for the misguided or fallen brother. The purpose is to restore him to the full experience of the fellowship, rather than to exclude him from it. We may refer to such instances in the life of the apostolic church as are recorded in Acts 15:5-29; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; and Gal. 2:11-14.

6. Fellowship among Christians should also be characterized by social contact. It should naturally follow that those who share the same spiritual union should find mutual edification and enjoyment within the circle of their fellow Christians. "They partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people." (Acts 2:46)

7. As a final item in this series, it is apparent that Christian fellowship should find expression, as occasion warrants, in eco-

conomic aid toward those of the community who are in need. This will serve as a concrete evidence of the love and concern that Christians profess toward those who share in the fellowship. Christians will not be content to relegate this responsibility to the government or to some secular charitable agency, but will stand ready to assist the needy brother with the full resources of Christian love—also in the tangible form of money, service, and goods. This, indeed, is in the highest tradition of the Christian community down through the ages. For this spirit, too, the apostolic church gives us some notable examples. (Acts 4:32-37; 6:1-6; 11:27-30)

In summarizing these aspects of the Christian fellowship, it becomes clear that this fellowship expresses itself in "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). This remains the unique and transcendent feature of that relationship that binds together all those who are "in Christ Jesus . . . sons of God through faith." (Gal. 3:26)

The true nature of this fellowship is made concrete in the graphic, moving picture of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:5). It is this concept that most effectively describes the interrelationship between Christ as the Head and the Christians as the members of the body, as well as the interrelationship among the members themselves.

The implications of this mutual relationship are clear. By virtue of our incorporation into the body of Christ through Baptism (Col. 2:11), we are no longer independent, but we are joined with Him and He with us. St. Paul declares, Rom. 8:17: "We suffer with Him in order that we may be also glorified with Him." And again, Eph. 4:15-16, he shows how we "grow up in every way into Him who is the Head,

into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love." The risen Christ, therefore, is incarnate in the church, His body, through which He lives and works. For the Christian, then, to be a member of the body of Christ is not merely a subjective, mystical experience, but it is an objective reality—fellowship in its consummate form.

As Christians, members of the body of Christ, are bound inseparably to Him who is the Head, so they are also bound inseparably to all the other members of that body. The church, therefore, is not merely an assembly, a coming together of believers; it is not just a holy institution. It is an organism, and only in a secondary sense an organization.

Now, this body is composed of many different parts and organs, each of which has its specific purpose and function. For the proper coordination of the body there must be a close interaction among these various members. Among them there must exist a fellow-feeling, a spirit of mutual sympathy and concern, of mercy and forgiveness, of patience and understanding. Thus, as St. Paul points out, if one member of the body suffers pain, the whole body aches. If one member is gladdened, the whole body rejoices. If one part is amputated, the whole body is crippled. No part of the body can say to another, "I have no need of you." No part can claim a greater dignity or greater importance than the others.

Luther caught and conveyed the idea of the actual, existential nature of this fellowship of the church when he wrote:

What does it mean to believe the holy Christian church, if not the communion of saints? And in what do the saints have fellowship? Certainly, they share mutually all blessings and evils. . . . What does the small toe endure but that the entire body suffers? Or what benefit comes to the feet that does not gladden the entire body? We are one body. Therefore, when we have pain and suffer, let us firmly believe and be certain that it is not we, or we alone, but that Christ and the entire church suffer and die with us." (Weimar Edition, Vol. 6, p. 131)

Or again:

There is no doubt that all—the dear angels, the saints, and all Christians—as one body rush to that member who is in death, in sin, and help him to conquer hell. Thus the work of love and communion of saints goes on earnestly and diligently." (Weimar Edition, Vol. 2, p. 695)

This living body, then, actualizes the unity and the fellowship of the church. As a partaker of the divine life flowing through the body, each member receives his own proper task and ability. What God did and continues to do for us must serve both as the pattern and the motivation for our attitude and service to others in the fellowship, as St. Paul declares: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for his good to edify him. For Christ did not please Himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell on me.' . . . Welcome one another . . . as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Rom. 15:1-3, 7)

Now, this relationship of Christians with one another and with their Lord in the body of Christ through Baptism finds its

unique expression in love. The New Testament concept of love (*agape*) is different from human love (*eros*). *Eros* may indeed be intense, noble, even sacrificial in its expression. It may be philanthropic, humanitarian, altruistic—as history and experience amply testify.

Ultimately, however, it must be recognized that even at its best, *eros* is humanly motivated. Upon close analysis it will be discerned as desiring to gain something for itself; to enjoy, use, and derive benefit from its object; or to gain some measure of inner satisfaction from the very act of expressing itself or of bestowing some benefit upon its object. *Eros*, therefore, is a calculating type of love, however subtle and refined such calculation may be. It is basically ego-centered rather than Christ-centered.

Agape, on the other hand, is the spiritual love, the divine love, that reflects the very nature of God. Its attitude toward others is not one of desire but of service. It is not predicated on the worthiness of its object. It is not offered on a *quid pro quo* basis, expecting some compensation or reward.

Luther compares *agape* to a "vessel or tube through which the stream of divine blessings flows through us without intermission into the lives of other people." Again, Luther speaks of *agape* as *amor crucis, ex cruce natus* ("the love of the cross, born of the cross"). This love, indeed, is to be realized only through Christ, as St. Paul cites this motivation in 2 Cor. 5:14: "The love of Christ controls us."

It is a characteristic of *agape*, moreover, that it extends to *all*. It does not exclude or ignore those who, in the sight of men, are poor, weak, or insignificant. Most re-

markable of all, it extends even to the enemy. This unique precept of Christianity is set forth by Jesus Himself, Matt. 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

This concept of love for the enemy, so alien to every natural inclination, so distinct from every other religion and philosophical system, is in itself a convincing testimony of the supernatural origin of the Christian religion. For this consummate expression of love reveals the very heart of God. And of this *agape* only those partake who share the fellowship in Christ.

II. THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FELLOWSHIP

Christian fellowship, *koinonia*, is of the very essence of the Christian life. It is, as Bonhoeffer has pointed out, not an ideal for which we must strive but a reality in which we may participate. It is not predicated on similarity of culture, race, economic or social status, or other mundane considerations. For, while it is our natural predilection to associate with and to prefer those who are "like us," in Christian fellowship these man-made boundaries are transcended. For "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). "For He is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility." (Eph. 2:14)

Christian fellowship involves the concept of mutuality. In this fellowship the weak need the strong and the strong need the weak. Their mutual interdependence

is like that of a chain in which each link is indispensable. We need to speak the Word to others and to hear the Word from others. Thus, in this fellowship Christians bear witness to the *Word* through the words that they speak to one another. They lend encouragement, support, sympathy to one another through *words* that they speak on the basis of the *Word*.

This Christian fellowship, indeed, is not confined alone to "mountaintop experiences"—a spiritual retreat, Bible camp, etc.—but it must rather find its test and its expression in the daily routine of life. It must be the spirit that directs our ordinary day-to-day relationships with our fellow Christians.

This, then, leads to the question of *how* we are to serve one another in the fellowship. First, this requires a spirit of *humility*. Bonhoeffer asks: "How can I possibly serve another person in unfeigned humility if I seriously regard his sinfulness as worse than my own?" Like Paul, each Christian must regard himself as "chief of sinners." If we remember always that we are guilty before God and that we are *what* we are only by His grace, the result will be a spirit of meekness and the elimination of all pride and vainglory. We need to listen to St. Paul: "For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him" (Rom. 12:3). Again: "Never be conceited." (Rom. 12:16)

We must, accordingly, have regard for our neighbor's *will*. This of course does not mean supine deference to his every

whim, or neglect of brotherly admonition when this becomes necessary. It does, however, mean understanding of his interests and concerns and giving due respect to them. By the same token we must have regard for our neighbor's *honor*. This means respecting his integrity as a person, upholding and defending his good name. Above all, we are not to seek our own honor above his, as St. Paul insists: "Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor." (Rom. 12:10)

Second, mutual service in the fellowship requires a spirit of *concern*. Caemmerer has aptly described *agape* as "being for the other person." If we are for him, we will begin by *listening* to him. Indeed, listening is often a greater service than speaking. It is often the best possible counseling technique! God Himself is the greatest listener of all: "O Thou who hearest prayer, to Thee shall all flesh come" (Ps. 65:2). "While they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24). Bonhoeffer has stated it well: "We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God."

Our spirit of concern for the brother will mean also that we are never "too busy" to help him when he is in need of our help. This helpfulness should extend also to those matters which may seem "trifling" to us but may not seem quite so trivial to him. Indeed, we should never be too preoccupied to be "interrupted" by people whom God sends to us with their needs and petitions. Our schedule, after all, is not our own but God's!

Third, our mutual service in the Christian fellowship must be characterized by a spirit of *burden-bearing*. Indeed, the

"law of Christ" is a "law of bearing," as St. Paul specifically indicates: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). And such bearing actually has a double significance: It means both sustaining and forbearing.

On the one hand, the Bible often speaks of "bearing" a load—either our own or that of others. For this we have the pre-eminent example of Christ, the burden-bearing Lamb of God who bore the weight of our sin in our behalf. The whole Christian life may be described as an ongoing process of bearing the cross. This is, in the words of Bonhoeffer, "the cost of discipleship": "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." (Matt. 16:24)

It is the fellowship of the cross to experience the burden of others and thus to help lighten it. This of course is no problem for the heathen; lacking the sense of spiritual fellowship, they may simply evade any involvement with the burden of the neighbor. But, if we are to take the admonition of St. Paul seriously, for the Christian the lesson is clear: If he does not bear the brother's burden, he shirks and breaks the "law of Christ."

But more: We are not only to *bear* but to *forbear*. We are to "bear with" not only the brother's troubles and problems but also with his idiosyncracies and weaknesses. Indeed, we must bear with him also in his sins. Not that we are to condone sins; the erring brother, however, should not be the object of our judgment but of our spiritual concern. We must apply to him in appropriate measure both Law and Gospel, as we seek not only to reprove him but to restore him to the fellowship. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any

trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). Mutual forgiveness is the need of us all — daily, freely, in the spirit of Christ!

III. SOME PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF FELLOWSHIP

We turn our attention now to the concept and practice of fellowship, particularly in the overseas mission areas of the church. Among Christian missionaries abroad the bonds of fellowship are especially close, and naturally so.

There is first of all the basic human ingredient in this fellowship. Missionaries are a small minority in a foreign land and in the midst of an alien culture, which in most cases is overwhelmingly heathen. Thus, they are drawn together by the ties of a common faith, a common background, and a common task.

William J. Danker, in *Two Worlds or None*, speaks on the basis of personal experience of this Christian fellowship of the mission field as it expresses itself in a unique comradeship:

One of the most priceless dividends of missionary work is the deep comradeship that develops between fellow missionaries and goes on to include friends and fellow Christians among the people of the land. One can grow profoundly homesick for them. The returned missionary misses this depth of fellowship that comes, apparently, only as a by-product of fighting shoulder to shoulder on a far and difficult frontier, where people may differ and disagree but where they absolutely need one another. . . . The returned missionary sees the warp and woof of life in the States as much looser, and though he has longed and yearned to return on furlough, soon he

is lonely. His relatives are not always so close to him as his sisters and brothers overseas. . . . And among the fine Christian men and women who lay siege to Japan's high blank wall, this comradeship is a refreshing tonic amid frustration. (Pp. 227, 228)

This spirit of fellowship among the missionaries and their families, however, should not be exclusive. It dare not constitute an enclave that would separate them from contact with the national Christians or with the community in general. This holds true both with regard to public worship and to the area of social contacts. But it is quite possible to enjoy the especially intimate bonds of comradeship within the missionary community without sacrificing any of the valuable features of the broader areas of fellowship.

This fellowship, accordingly, should find warm and deep expression also between the missionaries and the national workers. And this should take place not only at conferences and other "official" occasions but also, and with ever greater frequency, at informal gatherings, social contacts, and the like. After all, missionary and national worker share the closest bond of all — sonship in the same spiritual family. Why should they not cultivate every opportunity to strengthen this bond in its social aspects?

An obvious need in most of the overseas mission areas is for a greater development of the theology and practice of Christian fellowship on the congregational level. The cultivation of *intracongregational* expressions of fellowship should flow naturally from the fact that national Christians are bound together by the special ties of their common allegiance to Christ in the midst of a non-Christian culture. In some

instances the creation of these very ties has resulted in the severance, or at least the loosening, of the ties of family and friendship. A well-rounded program of congregational activity and service, therefore, will contribute much to the spiritual stability of these Christians and will help them feel and cherish an ever closer unity within the body of Christ.

By the same token there should also be a greater measure of *intercongregational* association. It will be of obvious benefit to the whole Christian cause in the overseas mission area, as well as to the spiritual uplift of the individual Christian, if church members from various congregations and communities come together for fellowship and service. Such manifestations of spiritual unity will inevitably strengthen the church. Opportunities for such fellowship may be developed in the form of Bible institutes, summer camps, youth rallies, college student organizations, gatherings of laymen and women, and the like. Whatever form the program may take and whatever group may be involved, such Christian fellowship across congregational lines will do much to weld together the members of the Christian minority and will develop within them a more conscious spirit of unity in the face of the towering obstacles that confront them in the non-Christian world in which they must live.

It naturally follows that the spirit of Christian fellowship should prevail among all those in a given area who bear the Lutheran name. Such manifestations of specific inter-Lutheran fellowship are not merely desirable nor optional. We deem such manifestations *imperative*.

In all of the non-Christian lands in which the church carries on its work the

Christians at best form a small minority. Within this Christian minority the Lutherans—of all branches—constitute a minority within a minority. To say that Lutherans cannot afford the luxury of maintaining their synodical differences and divisions—inherited and transplanted from the American scene—in the face of the overwhelming forces of heathenism is to state what ought to be obvious.

The practical advantages of such inter-Lutheran cooperation are immediately apparent. This cooperation might well involve such areas as the production of Christian, and specifically Lutheran, literature; sponsorship of radio and television programs; comity in the allocation of fields for evangelistic work so as to avoid duplication of effort; administration of a program of social service and Christian welfare; medical mission activity, including the operation of clinics and hospitals; work among college students; establishment of schools and hostels; and—perhaps most important of all—coordination of seminary training. In the latter instance our fellow Lutherans in Japan have already shown the way in the cooperative Lutheran seminary that is currently being developed. A similar approach has been developed among the various Lutheran groups in the Caribbean area, with the establishment of a cooperative theological school in Mexico City.

Important and obvious as are the practical advantages of such inter-Lutheran fellowship in our overseas mission areas, the theological reasons for such fellowship are even more compelling. To our fellow Lutherans in the "younger churches" overseas, most of the controversies that have agitated and divided American Lutheran-

ism in the past are irrelevant to their own local situation and completely foreign to the context of their own experience and traditions.

On the contrary, we need to recognize the common theological and spiritual heritage shared by all Lutherans. This is particularly meaningful in the overseas areas, where Lutheranism forms a tiny minority of the total population. Those who share the same Scriptural and confessional basis—to which all Lutherans adhere—should be able to manifest that unity in a concrete way.

Happily, the appreciation of this common Lutheran heritage is currently assuming tangible form in the increasingly close theological agreement and practical cooperation among the various branches of Lutheranism in America. The doctrinal consensus reached between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church, which presumably will find concretion in the foreseeable future, is a most significant development in Lutheran church history. Not only is this acknowledgment of spiritual unity in manifest obedience to the will of God, but its beneficial effects on the Lutheran missionary enterprise throughout the world are beyond estimation.

Such a demonstration of unity among those who actually possess the bond of spiritual fellowship is imperative for the sake of the *world*, according to the words of our Lord Himself in His high-priestly prayer: "That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. . . . That they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me." (John 17:21, 23)

It must further be recognized that there is a bond of Christian fellowship that unites Lutherans with all others who accept Jesus Christ as God and Savior. This bond again becomes especially significant in the overseas areas, where Christians derive mutual strength and encouragement from one another in the midst of a non-Christian culture.

The present writer became especially conscious of this bond through his participation in the monthly meetings of an ecumenical Christian study group in Tokyo. Although the participants in this group represented various Christian traditions—Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Methodist, and others—it occurred to him that if a Buddhist were to enter their company, the Christians, despite the diversity of their traditions, would immediately sense a spirit of unity among themselves that would differentiate them from the non-Christian visitor. And that unity would be apparent in their common allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ and would be derived from His presence among them as their Head. (Incidentally, through their continued theological encounters and discussions their sense of fellowship in Christ became progressively stronger.)

On the level of practical cooperation there are various areas in which Christians can join forces across the lines of denominational demarcation. These might include such programs as joint Christian service and welfare activities; joint representation in legal matters affecting the Christian churches; cooperation in certain educational projects; participation in national Christian councils, and the like. All these endeavors, indeed, will give evidence of the basic unity that characterizes all those

whom God has brought into the fellowship of His Son.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF FELLOWSHIP

Where Lutheran groups in a given area find themselves in doctrinal agreement, it naturally follows that they should give corporate expression to their spiritual unity by entering into altar and pulpit fellowship. While an organic merger of such groups may ultimately be a desirable outcome, of greater and more immediate importance is the establishment of that measure of official church fellowship which will enable the members to share in the blessings of the Word and sacraments, in the maximum corporate expression of the *koinonia*.*

As previously indicated with reference to the examples of Japan and the Caribbean area, a particularly important expression of fellowship on the organizational level among Lutheran groups in a given country or region is the establishment of cooperative all-Lutheran theological training. There can be little question as to the overriding advantages of such a plan.

Such cooperative seminary training, for one thing, would provide for more efficient and economical use of joint facilities and resources and would make possible larger and more viable classes and more effective programs of student activity.

More important, such inter-Lutheran seminary coordination would provide the setting for mutual and continuing theological discussion among the members of the

* ED NOTE: Since this paper was presented, altar and pulpit fellowship has been established between the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod-related *Nihon Ruteru Kyodan* (May 1966).

faculty, who would be drawn from the several constituent Lutheran bodies. Theological growth and stimulation, as well as the deepening of mutual understanding, would inevitably result from such intra-faculty study of Scripture and the Confessions. The body of Christ would, in consequence, be enriched and edified. It goes without saying that the example of such cooperation, rather than duplication and competition, in the area of Lutheran seminary training would present a unified—and consequently far more effective—witness to the world.

Ultimately, of course, we must view the whole matter of Christian fellowship in its missionary dimension. Christian fellowship and Christian mission are integrally related. Our unremitting and prayerful concern must be to extend the fellowship, through sharing Christ by word and example, with those who are "without." The joy and strength of the Christian fellowship will be incomplete unless we expend every effort to swell the ranks of the fellowship through our missionary outreach. Only in this way will the high-priestly petition of Jesus Himself be fulfilled: "I do not pray for these only but also for those who believe in Me through their word." (John 17:20)

CONCLUSION

To summarize: Our Christian fellowship, *koinonia*, is derived from the Word made flesh, who has made us members of His body. It shapes the whole matrix of Christian theology. The full gamut of Christian doctrine is involved in the matter of fellowship: the doctrine of creation (we are all children of the same heavenly Father); the doctrine of the church (we

are the body of Christ); the doctrine of the Word (we are "striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel," Phil. 1:27); the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (our fellowship in Christ is the Spirit's gift); the doctrine of the sacraments (we share "one baptism" Eph. 4:5; and "we are all partakers of the same loaf," 1 Cor. 10:17); the doctrine of sanctification (our Christian fellowship gives corporate expression

to the Spirit's work in the Christian heart).

Above all, however, Christian fellowship is based on and integrally related to the *doctrine of Christ*. This doctrine is both the source and the capstone of all the rest. "You may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)

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