

11. Ecumenical Concern and Communion Fellowship in Luther's Day and in Ours

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1. *Historical introduction.*

There's a lot of talk today about the Ecumenical Movement. If a person is interested in ecumenical matters, this simply means that he's concerned about his Christian brethren throughout the world, in various countries and in other churches. Some of the most prominent leaders in the Ecumenical Movement have been scholars in Reformation history and theologians of the Lutheran Confessions. Among the most notable of these have been Werner Elert, Hermann Sasse, and Ernst Sommerlath, each of whom has been marked by his readiness to enter ecumenical encounter, while remaining steadfastly loyal to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.¹

This uniting of ecumenical concern and confessional integrity should not surprise us. After all, both Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon were keenly interested in ecumenical meetings, as were most of the other reformers, while those who avoided such confrontation were the defensive leaders of the Roman Church. Notable examples of these dialogues were the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, the Augsburg Diet of 1530, the Wittenberg Concordat of 1536, and the unsuccessful discussions with the Roman Catholics at Hagenaу, Worms, and Regensburg in 1540 and 1541.

The Marburg Colloquy was one of the most important religious discussions of the 16th Century, even if it ended in the permanent division of Protestants into the Lutheran and Reformed groups. While Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss leader, was concerned that Luther's position seemed to conflict with human reason, Luther insisted that Scripture must over-ride human wisdom in case of a conflict, and based his case upon the word of Christ, "This is my Body." The story is told that Luther even wrote these words on the table with chalk, and that whenever his opponent tried to offer reasons for not taking Christ's words literally, Luther would draw aside the tablecloth, and say, "Yes, but Christ himself says, 'This is my Body!'" Melanchthon was every bit as insistent upon the Real Presence.² Still, recent studies show that it was not the Wittenberg but the Swiss theologians who rejected a compromise.³

This same concern for doctrinal purity together with Christian unity manifested itself in the discussions with the Roman Catholics. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 is a masterly document which demonstrates that the church of Luther was not a separatist movement, but one which stood in the best Catholic tradition. Since its catholicity was officially recognized in the Diet of Augsburg of 1555, even those who have rejected the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper have tried to claim themselves as adherents of this Confession. This is a tribute to the scholarship of its author, Philipp Melanchthon.⁴

Melanchthon also drafted the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, later incorporated into the Formula of Concord (1577), this document established communion fellowship with the churches of Upper Germany, as they were represented by Martin Bucer of Strassburg.⁵ This was an important step in

Reformation history. Previously, the Upper German cities, such as Augsburg, Ulm, and Strassburg, had been strongly influenced by the great Reformed theologians, especially Zwingli and Oecolampadius. Bucer enjoyed the role of a mediator⁶, and, in spite of the fact that he was not always completely candid in such relationships, he did in fact do much to draw southern Germany away from the Reformed circle and into the Lutheran camp. While these leaders of the southern German cities were likely motivated more by considerations of political expediency in uniting forces with the Lutherans to their north than they were anxious to accept the Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament, nevertheless the Wittenberg Concord succeeded. While some statesmen and churchmen were half-hearted in professing the Real Presence view,⁷ during succeeding decades these same south German churches became bulwarks of Lutheran doctrine when Luther's homeland in Saxony was under the power of Crypto-Calvinists. Luther himself was somewhat mistrustful of Bucer and the whole arrangement — he once called Bucer a *Klapper-Maul* (a chatterbox). Nevertheless, he felt duty-bound to accept Bucer's proposal at face-value and to extend the requested church fellowship, in spite of the risks involved. In fact, Luther made important doctrinal concessions in order to reach this agreement.⁸ Subsequent events proved the wisdom of Luther's moderation. This ought to teach us something if we are tempted to demand improper doctrinal *perfectionism* before we are willing to grant Communion fellowship to the other side.

Luther placed great hopes in the Wittenberg Concord, in spite of its watered-down terminology. Like Bucer, he thought it would conciliate the Swiss Reformed churches, and make possible the establishment of church fellowship with them. However, the Reformed leaders refused the efforts of Luther and Bucer, just as they had refused Luther's offer of a compromise at Marburg. Perhaps they were right. While the Wittenberg Concord was conciliatory almost to a fault, it refused to give up the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament. At any rate, it was not the Lutherans but the Reformed who broke up this second attempt at reconciliation.⁹

Although Melanchthon's doctrine of the Eucharist varied somewhat from Luther's position, it seems that he held to the Real Presence as long as he lived. Luther, who noticed the difference, refused to break with the younger colleague. However, there were times when the tension was great, such as when the Church Order for the Reformation of Cologne was published in 1543.¹⁰ Melanchthon as well as Bucer had had a hand in its writing. Luther strongly disliked the statement on the Lord's Supper; his friend, Nicholas von Amsdorf, Evangelical Bishop of Naumburg, incited Luther to further hostility. With much justification, Luther complained: "It carries out a laborious jabbering about the usefulness, fruit, and glory of the Sacrament, but concerning its substance it mumbles uncertainly . . ."¹¹ It is clear that Luther, who was always ready to extend the right hand of fellowship where there was an honest regard for the teaching of Scripture, strongly opposed union formulations that were drawn up to disguise the differences. Luther made his meaning unmistakably clear when in 1544 he published his "Short Confession of the Holy Sacrament,"¹² his last work on the Lord's Supper. In spite of his dissatisfaction with them, however, Luther did not attack Melanchthon or Bucer, but only levelled his polemics against the "Seven Holy Ghosts" who had raised their own teaching above the clear voice of Scripture — men like Schwenkfeld, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and Carlstadt.

Determined attempts have been made to manipulate history in order to remove the clear distinctions between the Lutheran and Reformed positions. According to one report, Luther called for Melanchthon before his last journey to Eisleben and said: "Dear Philipp, I must confess that we have gone too far in the matter of the Lord's Supper," and advised Melanchthon to rectify his mistakes after his death. This story does not seem probable, since Melanchthon did not mention it, and, in spite of subsequent attacks upon his doctrine of the Supper, Melanchthon did not utilize it to relieve

pressure. When we further note that the story has come to us only through the hands of Albert Hardenberg, who had deserted to the Zwinglian fold and bitterly fought against his former Lutheran colleagues, we shall do well to doubt this legend.¹³

Another attempt concerns a remark Luther is alleged to have made about Calvin. Having come across a tract on the Eucharist by Calvin in 1545, Luther is said to have remarked that, had the Swiss spoken thus before, the whole sacramental controversy could have been avoided.¹⁴ Now, this statement does not harmonize with some better attested remarks about Calvin which were highly critical. Furthermore, this anecdote is handed down through Pezel, a Crypto-Calvinist, and Hospinian, a Reformed clergyman, both of whom fought against Luther's doctrine. Besides, Pezel was only 6 years old, and Hospinian not yet born, when this conversation is supposed to have taken place, so we cannot accept their testimony as sufficient.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the legend has been revived. A respected Reformation scholar, Joseph McLelland, retells the tale, and then asks: "Was this, too, hyperbole? Or was Luther sincere . . .?"¹⁵ Since McLelland made this assertion without giving any sources, I wondered whether he had formed better support for this story, and I wrote to ask him whether he could document his contro-matters of interpretation of every individual passage of Scripture, particularly versial statement. He could not find his source. Since McLelland is sarcastic with Luther but lenient with Zwingli, it is fortunate that his reputation does not rest upon his essay in *Marburg Revisited*.

2. Some doctrinal problems.

The Church of the Lutheran Reformation held that the Bible was the ultimate source and norm for all doctrines. However, she did not go to the extremes of the Reformed doctrine of the *sola Scriptura*. She recognized the hand of God in history, and therefore took a more positive attitude toward creeds, liturgies, confessions, and tradition in general. However, unlike the Roman Church, she held that not tradition was the norm for judging the Scriptures, but the Scriptures were the norm for judging tradition. Hence, while the Lutheran theologian today regards the Scriptures alone as authoritative, he eagerly consults the Confessions and other testimonies out of history for guidance, and thereby avoids the dangers of a shallow Biblicism. This shall be our approach as we briefly survey several problems in the discussions about Communion fellowship in our day.

One of the greatest perils is that American Lutherans will fall into the pit of subordinating the Lord's Supper by placing it under some general category which robs it of its uniqueness. A common mistake is to follow Karl Barth and others who call the Eucharist merely another form of the Word of God. This approach was much used by the Lutheran and Reformed essayists who contributed to the paperback volume, *Marburg Revisited*.¹⁶ It has the dubious merit of suppressing the elements that are most distinctive in the Lutheran Confessions and thereby offensive to the Reformed partners, but it does this at the expense of the uniqueness of the Sacrament. A similar way in which the Lord's Supper is lost in some dogmatics filing cabinet is when it is filed under the general rubric of "Sacrament." The word *sacrament* is not found in the Bible; nevertheless, it is a useful word, and, as such, is used in the Lutheran Confessions and in the writings of good theologians. But these have avoided constructing a system from the abstract concept of "sacrament" or even "means of grace". However, this can become a "game" by which attention is diverted from the basic question whether the Body and Blood of Christ are actually given under the consecrated bread and wine.¹⁷

Another manner in which the question of the Real Presence is avoided is the insertion of the Holy Ghost into the doctrine. It sounds pious to agree that the Spirit, after all, must play a role, too! But, we ask, why? Scripture mentions only Christ. Yes, but if Christ in his Ascension has entered a well-deserved retirement, as some think, then he will not be truly present in the Eucharist. How convenient at this point to press the Holy Ghost into service, who can be said to "mediate" the presence of an absent

Christ! Thus, one of the contributors to the book, *Marburg Revisited*, assures us, we no longer need the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, i.e., that Christ's divinity empowers his human Body and Blood to be present in the Lord's Supper; he has discovered that instead one can appoint the Spirit as Christ's substitute, who will impart the "communication of grace", so that we no longer need bother about the nature of presence of Christ's Body and Blood, nor the *communicatio idiomatum*.¹⁸

It is curious how the opponents of the Lutheran doctrine, from age to age, accuse their partners of being too realistic and at the same time of not being realistic enough. The spiritual descendants of Luther are blamed, on the one hand, for stressing Christ's humanity too much in the Sacrament, and on the other hand, for not stressing his humanity enough in the doctrine of Christ. What they have failed to grasp is the dynamic relation between the doctrine of Christ and the Eucharist as the Sacrament of his continuing presence. At any rate, it shows that the divergence between the two Protestant groups is more than a question of the Sacrament. Werner Elert has stressed repeatedly that Luther's faith stood or fell with the proposition that God was fully present in his incarnate Son. One dared not face the God of wrath (*Deus absconditus*), who was a consuming fire; only the God who revealed himself as love in Jesus Christ (*Deus revelatus*) could be believed in. It was this God who drew near in the Eucharist and gave himself. Thus Luther's position at Marburg was described by an eye-witness: "He knew nor honored any God other than he who became man; aside from him, he would have none other. For none other could save. Therefore he could not stand it that the humanity of Christ was treated so condescendingly and slightly."¹⁹ The close relation between Incarnation and Eucharist has been developed by Ernst Sommerlath²⁰, just as Theodore Suss has stressed Luther's principle that all sound theology starts not with the Hidden God but with God revealed in the birth of his Son.²¹

The accusation that Luther and his followers were too realistic in their doctrine was accompanied by charges of materialism, a physical understanding of the Sacrament²², the enclosing of God in bread, or even cannibalism — a charge levelled also against the theologians of the Ancient Church!²³ How can one avoid such accusations? It's easy! Speak no longer about the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, but speak simply of the presence of the "whole person" of Christ.²⁴ As a matter of fact, certain Lutherans in America have decided to follow just this course. But it is a deceptive course. Naturally, one will no longer find the Calvinists in disagreement, since the idea of a personal presence of Christ is too vague. But from our Lutheran forefathers we might learn the way to unmask those who speak of a personal presence in order to conceal their denial of a Real Presence, the way to determine whether an objective presence of Christ is accepted quite aside from human attitudes, or whether merely a subjective presence is intended. That test is the doctrine of the *communio indignorum*: the teaching, based on I Cor. 11, 27-29, that Christ is indeed so objectively present that he who eats and drinks bread and wine without discerning the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ ". . . eats and drinks condemnation to himself. . ." This doctrine is the point which uncovers the Crypto-Calvinists. Of course, they protest, insisting that the Body of Christ of which unworthy participants are guilty is not the true Body of Christ, but the spiritual body, i.e., the Church. However, recent New Testament scholars have tended to confirm the Lutheran position.²⁵ After all, the warning about eating and drinking unworthily is connected with the doctrine of the Eucharist, and only indirectly, of the Church. This means that it is false "love" to issue a general invitation to all people present to come to the Lord's Table. Since those who come "unworthy and unprepared" become "guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord," the Lutheran Church must cling to her historic practice of admitting only those who are prepared.²⁶

3. *Toward a practical solution.*

A Lutheran pastor in the east once remarked that, as he practiced Open

Communion, it was embarrassing to give the Sacrament to children of other denominations, but to have to discriminate against Lutheran youth, since they were not yet confirmed. Perhaps the solution will be to reduce the age for Communion so low that Lutheran children can partake at an early age, too. Doctrinally, it is hard to see any serious objection to the proposal of the commission of the three Lutheran general bodies that confirmation be delayed until high school, and the Lord's Supper be moved earlier to grammar school age. Many churchmen, however, will question whether it is expedient to make such a change at this time. It would be untrue to say that American Lutheranism has never before stood at such a low level in this country, either in its attitude toward the infallible Word of God, or toward the Lutheran Symbols. This situation was far worse at the turn of the 19th Century. But we still must admit that our Church is not spiritually or theologically strong at this time.

There are undoubtedly several reasons for this. For one thing, all church bodies have been deeply troubled by the intellectual currents of the past 250 years. This is sometimes called, rather inaccurately, the conflict between religion and science. At any rate, church colleges and seminaries have been torn by dissension over the question of how much ought to be accepted from the newer tendencies, especially in theology. The question of the authority of the Holy Scriptures has been divisive, with vociferous extremists on the right hand and on the left. Some misguided conservatives have sought unholy alliances with other Protestants of conservative inclination; this however has only complicated matters by introducing needless ballast uncritically taken over from the arguments of the Fundamentalists. In the process, there is grave danger of being led away from the pure teaching of God's Word and into the snares of legalism.

Developments since World War II have been disappointing. The synods which formed the Lutheran Church in America have for the most part found a deterioration of confessional awareness in their new body. In the former American Lutheran Church, there was a strong group of confessionally-minded men. But the negotiations with the Missouri Synod had a disastrous effect. After doctrinal agreement had apparently been reached, the Missouri Synod, evidently placing too much reliance upon the small Wisconsin Synod, refused fellowship with the ALC. This was a serious set-back for men in the ALC who had worked for harmony between the two synods and had struggled for a stronger commitment to the Lutheran Confessions. The ALC was now driven into the merger of 1960. The doctrinal statement prepared for the new The American Lutheran Church reflects the rapid decline of the sounder theologians after 1950.²⁷ Since the merger of 1960, there has been a steady deterioration of doctrinal integrity. As was to be expected, the first help for confessional Lutherans in TALC was the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship between The ALC and the Missouri Synod. It remains to be seen whether this step has come too late.

In closing, several principles should be proposed by which ecumenical concern and communion fellowship might both be safe-guarded in our day.

(1) The starting point is the fearless renunciation of false doctrine, the overcoming of theological indifference, and the search for a new sense of conviction in the faithful study of God's Word and the Lutheran symbols, together with other scholarly adjuncts.²⁸ American Lutheranism has been dominated by an obsession for an imagined Americanization and the assumption of the activist programs of other groups. This has led to a severe depression of doctrinal integrity. A new allegiance to Christ as Lord of the Church and to his Word is the only way out. This involves repentance and renewed commitment to the truth.

(2) Certainty of our convictions will guard us against false tolerance for error in our ecumenical relations. There have been two general approaches toward the ecumenical movement: (a) doctrinal indifference, calling for a speedy proclamation of church fellowship in spite of divergencies, with total unity as soon as possible; (b) the Lutheran emphasis instead has

been upon the ecumenical movement as an opportunity to confess Gospel truths, and to be used by God to achieve true unity by leading our erring brethren closer to Christ, the Lord of the Church. The first avenue, which appears to be the more loving approach, is actually a selfish attitude, just as the practice of gross open communion is really a lack of Christian concern for one's neighbor. The latter emphasis, while it is often criticized by the "ecumaniacs", is truly evangelical, and is in accord with God's Word: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (I Pet. 3, 15)

(3) ". . . With meekness and fear . . ." This leads us to the third aspect of our ecumenical witness. We believe that our Church is founded upon Christ the Rock, and that, like no other Church, our proclamation represents the true teachings of the Holy Scriptures. We believe that the seven Lutheran symbols in our *Book of Concord* are totally grounded in the infallible Scriptures. But now the spectre of spiritual pride raises its ugly head. Too often we Lutherans, convinced of our doctrinal superiority, have been infected by the worst sin of all, and have said with the accursed Pharisee: "God, we thank thee that we are not like the others!" We note in that parable that the simon-pure Pharisee didn't return to his house justified. (Lk 18, 11:14) With repentant hearts we must confess that our pride, in that which ought to have made us humblest, has caused us to show a haughty spirit not only to other Christian denominations but even to other Lutheran synods. With shame-filled hearts, we must grant that we have thereby brought reproach upon the Gospel and made of the Lutheran confessions a cause of stumbling for our weaker brethren. We Lutherans resent being told that at times we have been guilty of doctrinal perfectionism not unlike the moral perfectionism of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Yet we must listen humbly. This is the Law of God, speaking to us, and accusing us of our sin of pride, which too often we have let becloud our Gospel message. Perhaps we as a Church should regard the doctrinal indifference pervading our ranks as the duly deserved consequence of our sins. Paul says: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (I Cor. 13, 1) That's God's Word. Too often, the pure doctrine has been proclaimed by sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.²⁹ May God's Spirit call us to new repentance through his Law and Gospel.

(4) Finally, let us face the task ahead as one assigned to us not by a blind fate, but by God's loving providence.³⁰ It takes a lot of faith and courage to believe that God is still working among us. But it is to this that we have been called. Yes, literally, called! *Vocatio*, vocation! Perhaps you and I are too good for the place to which God has called us. Perhaps God wills to be dissatisfied with our situation, or even to bring about a schism in American Lutheranism to provide a more suitable spot for us. But let's leave that up to God's Spirit, which alone is to guide the Church. Meanwhile, let us not complain or find fault. Let us not put the pound that the Lord has committed to us in a napkin and bury it, safe from other Lutherans and the world. But let us use it in such a way that it will bring forth the highest possible yield. For it's not our Church, but Christ's; it's not our Word, but God's Word. Let's find strength in the Means of Grace and in the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren,"³¹ as we pray, "Even so, Lord, come quickly!"

FOOTNOTES

²⁹Ernst Sommerlath, noted confessional Lutheran systematician at the Leipzig University, met for ten years with the commission that later published its conclusions in the Arnoldshain Theses (1958); however, he found that the Theses glossed over the question of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament, and refused to subscribe to them. See Ernst Sommerlath, "Auf dem Wege zur Einheit? Kritische Anmerkungen zu den Arnoldshainer Abendmahlthesen," *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959), pp. 33-38.

³⁰For a convenient text and discussion of the Arnoldshain Theses, as well as a favorable opinion of them, see Eugene M. Skibbe, *Protestant Agreement on the Lord's Supper* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968), esp. p. 90 ff.

³¹For another vigorous affirmation of the Lutheran position, strengthened by solid research into the history

- of the Early Church, see Werner Elert, *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten Kirche hauptsächlich des Ostens* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954). Eng. tr. by N. E. Nagel, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966).
- ²A useful English summary of the Marburg Colloquy as well as the Sacramental controversy in its larger context is given in the excellent monograph of Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body. Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), 420 pp. Sasse refers frequently to the German classic on this subject by Walther Köhler, *Zwingli und Luther. Ihr Streit über das Abendmahl nach seinen politischen und religiösen Beziehungen*, Vol. II (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1953), 534 pp. Two other important German monographs are Ernst Bizer, *Studien zur Geschichte des Abendmahlstreits im 16. Jahrhundert* (*ibid.*, 1940), and Hans Grass, *Die Abendmahllehre bei Luther und Calvin. Eine Kritische Untersuchung* (*ibid.*, 1954).
- A significant essay on the Marburg Colloquy alone is given in Werner Elert, "Luther in Marburg. Eine Sakularbetrachtung," originally published in *Zeitung* 1929, 10. Heft, p. 315ff., and recently reprinted in *Ein Lehrer der Kirche. Kirchlich-theologische Aufsätze und Vorträge von Werner Elert*, ed. Max Keller-Hüschemenger (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1967), pp. 11-18.
- ³Luther is traditionally blamed for the failure to reach an agreement at Marburg, and for the consequent lack of fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed churches. This is no longer tenable. Luther proposed a formula of agreement which Zwingli summarily rejected, thus terminating the attempt. In spite of this, both sides subscribed to The Marburg Articles. See especially Sasse, *op. cit.*, p. 217 f. and pp. 266-272.
- ⁴The most complete monograph on the Augustana, together with collection of valuable parallel sources, is that by Johann Michael Reu, *The Augsburg Confession. A Collection of Sources with An Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), 258 pp. plus 528 pp. While this book is out of print, a partial reprint is available at the bookstore of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.
- ⁵Reprinted in *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle: Schwetschke, 1834ff.), hereafter abbreviated as CR, Vol. 3, pp. 75-77.
- ⁶No doubt, some unkind historian will someday dub Bucer a busy-body. His talents ranged all the way from church unions to marriage unions. For a rather amusing portrait of Bucer in his prowess at arranging romances, see Ricardo Huch, *Das Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung* (Munich and Hamburg: Siebenstern, 1964), p. 216 ff.
- ⁷See Bizer, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-228, and Köhler, *op. cit.*, pp. 456-518.
- ⁸At Bucer's request, Luther was willing to modify the important term of the *communio impiorum* (oral reception of Christ's Body by the godless) to the *communio indignorum* (reception by the unworthy). While this was not a substantive change, it helped achieve the agreement.
- ⁹See Sasse, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-311. It might be added that the use of the mediaeval phraseology of two substances in the Sacrament occurs in the Wittenberg Concord: . . . *duobus rebus, terrena et coelesti*. This is in spite of some scholars who claim these terms were first introduced in later Orthodoxy.
- ¹⁰The Cologne Church Order is not easily obtainable, having not been reprinted since 1544. Portions of this crucial document which relate to education have been reprinted in Reinhold Vormbaum, *Die evangelischen Schulordnungen des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1860), pp. 403-411. Excerpts are also given in A. L. Richter, *Die Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Weimar, 1846), Vol. II, p. 30 ff., which was not available to me as I wrote these lines. The Cologne Reformation fell through when Archbishop Herman von Wied, who was promoting it, faced unsurpassable opposition from the Cathedral Chapter, and was deposed.
- ¹¹From letter of Luther to Chancellor Gregory Brück, August 1544, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883ff.), hereafter abbreviated WA, *Briefe*, Vol. 10, p. 618.
- ¹²"Kurzes Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament," WA 54, pp. 141-167. See also the important introduction by Ferdinand Cohrs, pp. 119-140, upon which I have largely depended for information on the Cologne Reformation.
- ¹³This episode is critically evaluated by Sasse, *op. cit.*, p. 319, n. 37.
- ¹⁴Grass regards the story as questionable, *op. cit.*, p. 194f. The report of Pezel and Hospinian is related by Bizer without comment, *op. cit.*, 246.
- ¹⁵*Marburg Revisited*, ed. Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), p. 44.
- ¹⁶*ibid.*
- ¹⁷Ernst Sommerlath warns against this in his excellent orientating article, "Lord's Supper," *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius H. Bodensieck (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), Vol. II, pp. 1336-1342. This danger of emasculating the Eucharist by over-systematisation is discussed emphatically by Werner Elert, *Der christliche Glaube* (Hamburg: Furche, 1956), p. 356, who notes that among writers like Barth it is a sort of escape hatch. That the Confessions avoided this trap is developed in his masterly way by Friedrich Brunstäd, *Theologie der Lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951), p. 134 f. Regin Prenter also expresses his concern in an essay, "Die Realpräsenz als die Mitte des christlichen Gottesdienstes," *Gedenkschrift für D. Werner Elert. Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Theologie*, ed. Friedrich Hübner (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1955), pp. 307-319, and esp. p. 311.
- ¹⁸William O. Fennell, "The Nature and Manner of the Impartation of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," *Marburg Revisited*, esp. pp. 76-78. In contrast to Fennell, Luther declared that he wasn't interested in *how* Christ was present, but concerned only *that* he was truly present. Luther preferred the simple statement that the bread is the Body.
- ¹⁹Elert, "Luther in Marburg," *op. cit.*, p. 13. Cf. his *Morphologie des Luthertums*, Vol. I (Munich: Beck, 1952), esp. p. 31 ff., p. 93 ff., and p. 263 ff. Eng. tr. by Walter A. Hansen, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), p. 35 ff., p. 106 ff., and p. 300 ff.
- ²⁰See "Lord's Supper," *op. cit.*, and "Auf dem Wege zur Einheit?" *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- ²¹Theodore Süss, "Non a summo, sed ab imo," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 82 (1957), pp. 731-742. The essay is a study of Luther's exposition of Gal. 1,3 in the Galatians Commentary of 1531/1535. Luther says: "Theology which is Christian moreover and true, as I have often warned, does not press upon God in his majesty, like Moses and other teachers, but upon Christ born of the Virgin, our mediator and highpriest." (WA 40 I, 77, 10ff.) Luther proceeds to warn against scrutinizing the abscondite God, insisting that we can know him only in the incarnate, humiliated Son. "Paul always connects Jesus Christ with God the Father, that he may teach the Christian religion, which does not, like other religions, start at the summit, but at the depths. [*quae incipit non a summo, ut omnes aliae religiones, sed ab imo.*] One must scale the ladder of Jacob, on which God also supported himself, the feet of which touched the earth at the head of Jacob. Wherefore when you want to do anything for your salvation, or ponder it, then lay aside all speculations of his majesty, all considerations of works, traditions, all teachings of philosophy and the divine law, and hasten to the manger and the bosom of the Mother; there lay hold of that Infant and behold the dear little son of the Virgin—how he is born, how he suckles at her breast, grows, moves among men, teaches them, dies, resurrects, rises above the heavens, and holds power over all . . . And this sight will hold you on the right way, so that where Christ himself has gone, you will also follow." (WA 40 I, p. 79-80)
- ²²Since the Lutheran theologians avoided the term "physical", it is not the best methodology to introduce the word today, as several contemporary Reformed historians have tried to do. Cf. Williston Walker, *John Calvin. The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism 1509-1564* (reprint New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 184, 396, 423. Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon The Quiet Reformer* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), p. 229, p. 240 ff.
- ²³It is generally known that early Christians were persecuted for "cannibalism", an obvious outgrowth of the belief in the Real Presence; since non-members were not even allowed to remain in the room during the Communion, let alone partake, the pagans concocted dreadful contortions. The Apostolic Fathers saw the notion of a merely "spiritual presence" of Christ in the Sacrament as related to the heresy of Docetism, i.e., that Christ was not truly come in the flesh, but was a phantom. Hence Ignatius blames heretics who ". . . abstain from Eucharist and prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ . . ." (Ep. to Smyrna VII, 1). For more on Close Communion in the Ancient Church, see Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship* . . . , esp. p. 75 ff.

²⁴Calvin taught the "personal presence"; Melancthon used similar terms, but also spoke of the Body and Blood. (Late example: CR 9, 99). Hence Sasse is too severe in his criticism of Melancthon, *op. cit.*, p. 331 ff. Cf. my article on Melancthon, *Ency. of the Luth. Ch., op. cit.*, p. 1524f. — The problem of the "personal presence" is discussed in Julius Schniewind and Ernst Sommerlath, *Abendmahlsgespräch* (Berlin: Topelmann, 1952), pp. 16-18 (Schniewind) and p. 21 (Sommerlath).

²⁵Although we may not follow all Ernst Käsemann's views, we can only rejoice that his findings so often corroborate the Lutheran position. He states, "To me, it doesn't seem possible to connect to *soma* [the Body] with anything other than the earthly element in the Lord's Supper." *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Vol. I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 27. The unworthy participant joins the foes of Christ who failed to discern that he was the Son of God and crucified him. *Ibid.*, p. 24. See a similar position in Julius Schniewind, *op. cit.*, p. 14. The same, Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1954), p. 144 f.

²⁶The problem of Close Communion in the United States has been occluded by historical inaccuracy regarding the so-called Galesburg Rule. Actually, this document was rejected by the conservative Lutherans because of its unionism. A century ago, the Iowa Synod was trying to work together with the General Council, the most confessional group of the later ULCA. Iowa Synod sent observers to conventions, money was contributed toward General Council missions, the *Kirchenbuch* was published as a joint hymnal, and the move was toward unity. But this was disrupted by unionistic practices within the Council. At its Akron, Ohio, convention in 1872, the Council attempted to satisfy Iowa by promulgating the "Akron Rule", commonly confused with the "Galesburg Rule." Paragraph 1 contained the famous statement, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only." Iowa rejected this Rule because Paragraph 2 and 3 recognized exceptions where unionism was permitted. Three years later, the Council sought to appease Iowa at the Galesburg convention by nullifying the second and third paragraphs. However, Iowa's confidence had been shaken, and the bodies did not grow closer. The attitude of Iowa Synod is described by its historian, Johannes Deindörfer, *Geschichte der Evangel.-Luth. Synode von Iowa und anderen Staaten. Abgefasst im Auftrag des Synodal-Ausschusses* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1897), pp. 237-241. The documents were published by another Iowa Synod scholar in a remarkable volume, Christian Otto Kraushaar, *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1911), pp. 473-475, together with Kraushaar's interpretation of events. The ALC officially accepts the Minneapolis Theses of 1930, which recognize only the Galesburg form (*Handbook of The American Lutheran Church*, Edition of 1969, p. 136), but in the United Testimony of Faith and Life of 1952, the unionist exceptions excluded by the "Galesburg Rule" are reintroduced from the Akron Rule (*ibid.*, p. 134).

It is refreshing to note Martin J. Heineken's frank statements in *Marburg Revisited*. He inexorably exposes the fallacy of attempting to express the oneness of the church by an "open Communion". "The Lord's Supper is not to be used as a device to create unity but to give expression to an existing unity. Therefore, as long as separate confessions are held to be justified, there is no greater scandal involved in a separate Communion than in a separate denomination." (*Ibid.*, p. 102-103)

²⁷Although promises had been given to the contrary, when the report of the Joint Union Committee for the 1960 merger first appeared, dissension was hardly permitted. Several who questioned the doctrinal statement in Article IV of the proposed constitution later found themselves the objects of recriminations. Several members of the JUC were offended by my discussion in the article, "Toward an Evangelical Understanding of the Lutheran Confessions," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. IX (1957), p. 234 ff.

²⁸When the theological languages of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and German are neglected in the schools, genuine Lutheran doctrine suffers greatly. In the former ALC, scholarship began to lag after the closing of Wartburg College at Clinton, Iowa, with its emphasis upon classics. Today, in contrast to a generation ago, there are comparatively few students for the ministry who are able to do independent study in the *Book of Concord*, since most do not have a reading knowledge of Latin and German. This is no doubt a large part of the reason for the declining interest in the symbols.

It would appear that genuinely relevant theology in this area is being carried on only in the institutions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Therefore it is regrettable that similar forces are leading that body to a retreat in language requirements. Perhaps comparatively few of a total class of seminary graduates will become experts in the Confessions, but, unless the languages are maintained, the Missouri Synod will follow the same fate as the ALC. See Luther's famous plea for retention of the theological languages. — "So dearly as we love the Gospel, so hard let us cling to the languages." WA 15, 37 *et passim*. See also Lowell C. Green, "The Renaissance in Lutheran Theology," *The Mature Luther* (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1959), pp. 171-174.

²⁹In our time, when the expression "pure doctrine" is found amusing even by our own theologians, an incisive voice is needed pointing a better way. Nevertheless, one is troubled by the voices of several conservative publications. Too often, the negative attitude is thought to insure orthodoxy and pure doctrine, but one wonders. Certainly, this was not the approach of the Formula of Concord, which dealt mercifully even with some unfortunate statements of Melancthon and his followers. One is instinctively attracted to the firm Lutheran position of a man like Ernst Sommerlath because of the kindly way in which he addresses his opponents, making clear that he is not seeking for personal laurels; while one must regret that a more famous contemporary of Sommerlath often repelled university students by his brusque manner, so that impressionable youth were attracted to the bland theologies of more gracious professors. The Lutheran Confessions teach that the Gospel must predominate in the voice of the Church. Cf. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1897), esp. Thesis XXV and p. 403 ff. Ought not he who claims to be a spokesman for this Church temper even his polemics with the conviction that only the Gospel can heal? Or, is such a spokesman not concerned about the winning of his opponent for Christ's truth?

³⁰When will the Lutheran Church take seriously Luther's conviction expressed in *De servo arbitrio* (WA 18, 600 ff.), that God is at work in her midst, using even human imperfection and sin to accomplish his final purpose?

³¹Luther: "Wir wollen nu wieder zum Evangelio kommen, welchs gibt nicht einerleiwise Rat und Hulf wider die Sunde; denn Gott ist reich in seiner Gnade: erstlich durchs mundlich Wort, darin gepredigt wird Vergebung der Sunde in alle Welt, welchs ist das eigentliche Ampt des Evangelii, zum andern durch die Taufe, zum dritten durchs heilig Sakrament des Altars, zum vierden durch die Kraft der Schlüssel und auch *per mutuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum*" with reference to Mt. 18,20. A.S., Part Three, IV, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), p. 449.