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Living with the Brothers in the Lord

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

Nov. 11, 1967 — today — is the 49th anniversary of the armistice that initiated the end of the war between the Central Powers and the Allied Powers. It is also the 484th anniversary of the baptism of Martin Luther. On this day I as a Lutheran "brother in the Lord" am greatly pleased to have been asked to address this Roman Catholic diocesan Institute on Ecumenism. The fact that this day is both the anniversary of an armistice and the anniversary of a baptism is not, I hope, without its symbolic significance.

The title of this brief address is an allusion to the words of section 3, chapter 1, of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*: "All those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by the sons of the Catholic Church."

It is as a "brother in the Lord" that I am talking to you. I too regard myself as a "son of the Catholic Church" — although

I probably understand the latter term of the phrase in a slightly different sense from the way in which the bulk of those present do. But it would be unbecoming, presumptuous, and superfluous for me to try to instruct you in either the doctrine or the canons of your church.

What I can do and shall try to do is to sketch for you some of the aspects of the interconfessional ecumenical encounter of which the "brothers in the Lord" may be a little more acutely conscious than the "sons of the Catholic Church."

If I were to try to reduce what I have to say to four sentences, they would be these: (1) The brothers in the Lord are different. (2) Sometimes the brothers in the Lord can be difficult. (3) The dialog calls for penitence, planning, persistence, patience and prayer. (4) We cannot dispense ourselves from it; it is God's work.

The first thing that I should want to emphasize is that there are a great many different kinds of "brothers in the Lord." In my own person I can represent only one of these many kinds. I am a Lutheran, more specifically a theological professor of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. I can speak with the authority of personal commitment about the teaching and the practice of this branch of Christendom. I may at the moment have a certain amount of acquired authority about other denominations because I am currently on leave from Concordia Seminary completing the manuscript of a book tentatively titled

The author is graduate professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This article was originally delivered at Mishawaka, Ind., to the Institute on Ecumenism conducted by the clergy and laity of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend on Nov. 11, 1967, and is here reprinted substantially as it was delivered, with the permission of the Rev. Joseph Fichtner, O.S.C., Fort Wayne, Ind., director of the institute.

The Religious Bodies of the United States and Canada: A Theological Profile. In connection with this project I have written about 2,600 letters, worked through about 15 feet of books and pamphlets, and filled six filing cabinet drawers full of additional material on some 375 or so religious bodies — not all of them Christian — in the United States and Canada.

The point I want especially to stress is the great variety of religion in the United States, something that I do not always find my Roman Catholic friends appreciating, except in a kind of academic and theoretical fashion. Of course, when any of us look from an in-group position at those outside the group, we tend to homogenize the others. We look at them in terms of their differentness from us, and after we have labeled this differentness, we overlook the specific differences among them. The Greeks had a word for it — if you were not a Greek, you were a barbarian, which ultimately meant merely non-Greek. You might be a Scythian or a Cimmerian or a Roman or a Hibernian or a German, but whatever you might be to yourself, to the Greek you were a barbarian. Similarly, the Jewish community from very early times classified all non-Jews as *goyim*, Gentiles, which merely meant non-Jew. Caucasians, as most of us are, have a notoriously difficult time differentiating among Negroes or among Orientals until we get to know some of them personally, simply because their nonwhiteness classifies them for us. (It works in reverse: we have H. Rap Brown's word for it that "all honkies [whites] look alike.") In parallel fashion above his clerical collar a priest tends to become faceless to the laity.

All this has its parallel for our discussion. In precisely the same way the "sons of the Catholic Church" tend to see all non-Roman Catholic Christians as pretty much of a single entity whose common characteristic is their not being Roman Catholics. The common term used for a person exhibiting this difference is "Protestant." But when Roman Catholics so classify all non-Roman Catholics, they tend to forget that there is no objective reality to which the term "Protestant" refers. There is no Protestant Church, no Protestant creed, no Protestant worship, no Protestant theology, no Protestant tradition. About the only true assertion that I could make which has "Protestants" as its subject is "Protestants are not Roman Catholics." Any other sentence would have to be so qualified as to be almost meaningless.

I am not unaware of the fact that the word "Protestant" is probably in our language to stay. But the definition given in the current Merriam-Webster *New Collegiate Dictionary* for "Protestant" is illuminating. "A. Originally, one of those German princes who submitted at the Diet of Spire (1529) a protest against an edict intended to crush the reform movement, and calling upon the emperor to summon a general council." In this sense Lutherans are the only Protestants, since all of the princes concerned subscribed the Augsburg Confession the next year. In passing it might be observed that the verb from which "Protestant" derives does not in its native Latin mean "to protest" but "to affirm solemnly," which is what these princes actually did. "B. During the seventeenth century, an adherent of Lutheranism or Anglicanism — not including, as later,

Puritans, Presbyterians, and other dissenters." This is also a fairly narrow category. "C. Any Christian not of the Roman Catholic Church or the Eastern Church. The designation is rejected by many members of the churches of the Anglican Communion." Someone should tell the authors of the definition that this isn't the half of it. It is not only some Anglicans but a great many Lutherans, a great many Baptists, and very considerable numbers of other Christians who for various reasons are unhappy about being called Protestants.

Let me interject here the observation that the issue of the dialog with Eastern Orthodox Christians cannot be passed by in silence. In favor of such dialog lies the identity of much of the faith and practice of Eastern Orthodoxy with much of the faith and practice of the historic churches of the West. This makes for hope. Yet on the negative side is the residue of centuries of animosity and suspicion that will be most difficult to overcome. Again, the implications of intercommunion between Eastern Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics, even though it has been authorized under certain circumstances by Vatican II, apparently have different dimensions for Eastern Orthodox and for Roman Catholic Christians, and these implications deter the former from too eager a response. Again, coming close to home, the unspeakably tragic division of Eastern Orthodoxy in North America by national rivalries and by political and canonical issues and the attitude of Eastern Orthodox Christians toward Eastern Rite Roman Catholics complicate the dialog at every level. Yet

the very difficulty is a challenge to charity and ingenuity.

Returning to the other "brothers in the Lord," the "real absence" of a homogeneous and unified entity called Protestantism has a number of important implications for structuring interconfessional dialog. For one thing, no so-called Protestant can speak responsibly for more than his own church body. This is not, as is sometimes imagined, because in the 16th century there once was a nicely monolithic Reformation that set itself up in opposition to the unity of Christendom and then proceeded to break up into scores of parts, but primarily because there was no single Reformation but half a dozen Reformations to begin with. This variety among non-Roman Catholic Christians means that, speaking very strictly, one can only with difficulty have a Roman Catholic-"Protestant" dialog, a two-partner conversation. It may be possible to find a few issues on which one might be able to set up two sides, the Roman Catholics on one and the so-called Protestants on the other. But issues like that are very few in number.

One might say then, "Very well, if we can't have a dialog, let's settle for a trialog, or even for a round-table polylog." Here too there is a problem. For the most part, when more than one issue is involved, or when the issue is one of genuine theological or moral importance, a polylog like this turns out to be an exercise in futility. This is so because the lines of demarcation refuse to stay clear and because the unanimity that may exist among the so-called Protestants is predicated on a wide variety of basic assumptions on which they are likely to be in profound disagreement.

While it is unquestionably helpful to carry on dialogs with more than one denominational partner, it is generally better, it seems to me, to carry these on one pair at a time, except possibly in very small circles.

A second implication of this great variety among non-Roman Catholic Christians is the need for Roman Catholic partners to the dialog to be instructed about these differences. This is no easy task. Much of the instruction comes only in the encounter. This is true for professional theologians no less than for lay Christians. The scholastics held that one of the qualities of the resurrection body is interpenetrability, so that in a sense the beholders of the beatific vision will be able to interpenetrate one another. But that happy epoch has not yet dawned. We cannot crawl into one another's skins. We can subscribe to one another's literature, we can read one another's magazines, we can study one another's textbooks—and we can still comprehensively misunderstand one another. Part of the problem is that we use different words for the same spiritual realities and that we use the same words with different denominational nuances or even different denominational meanings. To cite one example out of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialog: One very real problem is the meaning of the word "justification" and the meaning of the word "faith" when we begin to talk about the crucial Reformation issue of "justification through faith." I do not want to suggest that the whole difference on this crucial issue is semantic, but semantic differences do play a mighty role here and in many other places.

You can expect a wide continuum of

attitudes among the "brothers in the Lord" on almost everything under the theological sun. Some of those with whom you will engage in dialog will be much concerned about the organization and structure of the church; for others this will be a minor matter. Some will lay considerable stress on their confessions and their creeds, others will regard all creeds as hardly more than historical milestones in the onward march of the church, and still others will manifest a strong resentment against the very idea of a creed. Some will be very much concerned about doctrine and about achieving agreement in this area, while for others the most important thing is unanimity in attacking moral evils like drinking alcoholic beverages and gambling. Some will be strongly biblicist in their position, while others will regard the Bible as merely a means of validating the church's teaching or as a dated document in man's ongoing search for God. Some will be very much concerned about the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as an actual source of divine grace and as the door to the church and to the other sacraments, while a large body of Christians sees Baptism merely as an act of obedience on the part of an adult believer to a command of the Lord. Some will regard the Holy Eucharist as a symbol primarily of a oneness that has been achieved. Others will think of it primarily as a means to achieve oneness. Some will see the Holy Eucharist as the veritable body and blood of Christ under the species of consecrated bread and wine, while for others the bread and wine—or, more frequently, the unfermented grape juice or some other liquid—are merely the emblems and symbols of the absent body and blood of Christ. All the varieties

of approach that you will encounter are not the result of an inability of non-Roman Christians to make up their minds, but of basic differences that have a deep historical rootage.

There are nontheological differences as well. A very real obstacle to structured dialog is the difference in size and the difference in character of Roman Catholic units of administration and their counterparts in other denominations. It is rare, for instance, that your diocesan lines will be identical with the lines of the parallel unit of administration in another denomination. That means that the Roman Catholics will have to deal with two or more counterparts of dioceses, or a single unit of administration in the other denomination will have to deal with two or more Roman Catholic dioceses.

At the grass roots level of the parish there are parallel difficulties. First of all, there are likely to be a number of non-Roman Catholic churches of different denominations within a given Roman Catholic parish. Second, the very idea of a parish is alien to most American denominations, where personal preference rather than the place of residence determines which church of his denomination a Christian or his family will attend. Third, the ordinary Roman Catholic parish is, in terms of the number of members, rather large by the standards of other denominations, while in terms of the area from which it draws its congregation it is likely to be rather smaller. The result is that the Roman Catholic parish is likely to be more homogeneous and is also likely to be concerned about the immediate community to a greater degree than other churches are. This has important implications when

a Roman Catholic parish proposes to associate itself with another church in community action, particularly in urban communities.

In terms of the quality of leadership, there will be great variations. For many denominations, it is true, what they called a "learned ministry" has always been the ideal—that is, college and seminary training or its rigorously measured equivalent as a condition of ordination. It is also true that in the last generation all the major denominations that did not have this tradition have been veering in that direction, but there are still large segments of the churches that have not overcome their inherent suspicions of a learned ministry, and there are still large numbers of clergymen whose formal training is somewhat limited.

There is a wide variation in the degree of interest in dialog among the different church bodies and within them as well. Even in this day of ecumenical interest there are many Christians who frankly praise the idea of separatism. Side by side with the centripetal ecumenical movement there has also been a parallel centrifugal "dis-ecumenical" movement, especially in denominations that do not traditionally have a strong central authority. Not everyone is desirous of or even ready to enter into dialog. Sometimes this is mere apathy; sometimes it results from a fundamental reluctance to engage in conversation.

In addition to the variety among the "brothers in the Lord" there are other obstacles to interconfessional dialog that need to be taken account of.

It would be well to remember that the organized ecumenical movement has not always been comprehensively ecumenical.

Many of the ultimate sources of the organized ecumenical movement were, at least initially, marked by a fear of, even active antagonism to, Roman Catholicism. Without rehearsing the entire history, we can note that it was not until 1927 that the organized ecumenical movement had finally been brought to the point where the last battle had been fought and where it was really ready on principle to include the Roman Catholic Church within its purview. Under these circumstances it is not wholly a mystery why the encyclical letter *Mortalium animos* — which came out less than five months later — is extremely critical of the ecumenical movement. Some of this reluctance persists at least subconsciously among “brothers in the Lord” down to the present.

Again, the unhappy and deplorable fact of anti-Roman Catholic prejudice among some other Christians is a datum of our problem. This prejudice is not as deep-seated or even as pervasive in North America as it is in Europe, which has a longer history of interdenominational strife than we have, but it is there. To cite only one instance, the official hymnbook of one large church body contained down into the 1940s the militantly literal translation of a 16th-century hymn that began: “Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work, Restrain the murderous Pope and Turk, Who fain would tear from off Thy throne Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son.” The indoctrination produced by a singing commercial like that dies hard! The still current successor to this hymnal in a rubric that classifies the Psalms “with reference to their import” sees Psalms 10, 12, 36, 44, 55, 69, 70, 94, 109, and 120 as suitably prayed “against the Pope and the Papists”!

This endemic prejudice against Roman Catholicism, with its deep historic roots both in religious and in American history, has helped foster the widespread conviction among many members of other churches that Vatican II did not ultimately really change anything basic and that at bottom the only option the Roman Catholic Church offers to non-Roman Catholic Christians is to submit unconditionally to the authority of the Roman See.

A second area of difficulty lies in the actual differences between Roman Catholics and other Christians that are the reason for our attempts to achieve better understanding. At every level of dialog, it seems to me, the idea of a hierarchy of doctrinal verities deserves sober consideration. Although the idea is not new in theological history, the explicit affirmation of Vatican II that “in Catholic teaching there exists an order or ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith” (Decree on Ecumenism, 11) justifies a different kind of approach to one another from the conventional approach in the past. We can properly concentrate on the crucially important teachings of our faith, where there is by definition likely to be a great measure of agreement among Christians who stand committed to the same Sacred Scriptures and, if not all to the same creeds, at least to the same tradition of belief. The decree itself indicates these basic areas of dogma when it calls on all Christians to “profess their faith in God, one and three, in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord,” and in our “common hope” (*ibid.*, 12). One of the most tragic aspects of our past history has been that we have mutually tended

to stress our disagreements to justify our separation rather than recognize the significant areas of agreement on which we can base the hope of further common understanding.

Our conversation with one another must, of course, not shrink from the discussion of the areas in which there is clearly or probably disagreement. Nothing is gained by sweeping theological dust under ecclesiastical rugs. Among the barriers to concord we need to differentiate two kinds of teaching and practice, it seems to me. We need to realize that there are fundamental disagreements and that there is another type of barrier—the one created by the cumulative presence of areas of disagreement that individually and separately hold out prospects for resolution.

Among the fundamental disagreements I see three—even though the number of disguises in which they appear may be greater. The first is the identification of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church of the creed with the empirical Roman Catholic Church. This is a barrier that may conceivably be overcome with the further unfolding of ecclesiological insights that have been germinating for two generations and began to come to flower in the documents of Vatican II. The promise lies in the basic insight that Christians of other churches find grace not merely as individual Christians associated by desire or in some other tenuous way with the true church, but that they find grace in the ecclesial communities in which God has put them, that therefore these communities possess in some degree authentic churchly quality. Since Vatican II there have been important prelates and theologians who have even used the term

"churches" of these ecclesial communities. The famous phrase of Vatican II that has the one true religion *subsist* in the catholic and apostolic church (Declaration on Religious Freedom, 1) could be a clue to an approach that might accord to those communities that achieved autonomy either in the 16th century or subsequently a place and even a voice in the decisions of the church on dogma. Conceivably, although it could hardly be conceded at present by a Roman Catholic theologian, the further development of these insights might someday pave the way for reopening the discussion of issues that the Roman Catholic church undertook to decide for itself when the Christian community no longer spoke with a united voice.

The second issue is intimately related to the first and has to do with the validity of non-Roman Catholic ministries. You are familiar with the rigorous position that even some very ecumenically oriented Roman Catholic theologians feel themselves compelled to hold. This position argues that the competence to transmit valid orders was lost in the 16th century by those parts of the church that were separated from communion with the Roman See. In consequence, this rigorous position holds, the so-called clergymen of other denominations are not priests but only dedicated and conscientious laymen engaged in the full-time service of a Christian society. They cannot, in this rigorous view, give a valid absolution, confer a valid Eucharist, or impart a valid confirmation or valid orders or valid anointing. As a result, in this rigorous view, the communities in which these individuals serve have only the sacraments that laymen can confer—Baptism and

marriage. There are some signs of a possible resolution of the problem. On the one hand, there are those four interesting papal documents out of the 1400s that clearly operate with the competence of simple priests to transmit valid orders and three of which actually authorize this (See Denzinger-Schönmetzer, 1145—1146, 1290, 1435). With these documents one can couple the utterances of the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching of fathers of the church down to the days of St. Jerome and St. John Chrysostom that imply the substantial equality of authority of priests and bishops, the description of the bishop as the "ordinary" minister of ordination in the current canons, and the generous delegation of the episcopal authority to administer confirmation to simple priests. In the light of all this the possibility would seem to lie open for the recognition of the validity of the sacraments and orders of the church that have maintained a presbyterial succession. The other approach that holds out a promise of eventual resolution of this problem is the line of thought of some Roman Catholic theologians who affirm that each ecclesial community develops a ministry competent to administer sacraments that are valid within the scope of that community's sacramental doctrine, so that there is in non-Roman Catholic communions the possibility of a valid if limited sacramental system.

On the third of these basic barriers I see no likelihood of a resolution on the horizon. This barrier is the Roman Catholic position on the infallibility and primacy of jurisdiction of the incumbent of the See of Rome for the time being. Here I can only trust the leading and guidance of

the Holy Spirit of Good Counsel in Christ's holy community.

The second type of barrier is the barrier that could be resolved if taken by itself, but that in the company of other similar barriers participates in a cumulative hindrance to the external oneness of the church. These barriers exist on both sides. Since I speak as a "brother in the Lord" to "sons of the Catholic Church," I could list on the side of my hosts of this morning certain aspects of the veneration of the Mother of God; the merit terminology in which a great deal of Roman Catholic theology and devotion is couched; the exacerbating problems of mixed marriages, of state aid to religious education, and of attitudes on family limitation; priestly celibacy; the values of certain type of ascetic practice and of religious vows; indulgences; certain assumptions of canon law; and vestiges of ancient and medieval imperial and royal court ceremonial. Individually they admit of resolution. Together they combine to erect a formidable roadblock. The elimination of the cumulative effect of these and similar issues will demand great patience and determination.

One problem that we all face is a degree of uncertainty about where we are trying to go in the interconfessional dialog. The dialog is not an end in itself. On the other hand, the ultimately imaginable maximum need not be the practical minimum that justifies the dialog. Ultimately for you and for me the ideal is unquestionably the achievement of the most perfect external union possible. This is not universally the case, however. There are a great many Christians whose reading of history makes them fearful of institutionalism as prejudicial to individual freedom.

This does not mean the end of dialog. The ultimately imaginable maximum lies beyond the horizon of immediately imaginable possibilities. Short of the horizon, however, we can erase ancient animosities through dialog, we can build the bridges of mutual understanding and respect and affection that will enable us to be Christians and "little Christs" to one another and to engage in that mutual conversation and consolation between brothers that is an important way of communicating the Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ for our salvation. We can, it might even be hoped, come to the point where, even with some of our difficulties unresolved, it would be possible to have achieved sufficient agreement in conviction between Roman Catholics and at least some other Christians that in emergency circumstances it would be possible for one to receive the sacraments in the other's house under mutually acceptable conditions.

When it comes to practical measures that can presently be taken, the only limits are those imposed by the canons and by our sanctified imagination. I think the procedure that was first developed between the Roman Catholics and their fellow Christians of Switzerland has much to recommend it. Here each communion collected funds for a charitable project of the other, not in spite of the fact that the charity was run by the other communion but consciously and precisely because of it. In such mutual exchanges, where the command of our Lord to exhibit love for one another is obeyed in a concrete form and where the element of material contribution to heresy is minimized, there is a great opportunity for destroying inveterate prejudices and ancient barriers to mutual confidence, respect, and love.

A perennial problem is the language we use, and we can dedicate ourselves to overcoming this barrier to the maximum extent. It is admittedly difficult to find terms that are inoffensive. "Non-Roman Catholic," for instance, is clumsy. "Protestant," as we have seen, is not precisely descriptive except in a negative and negative-sounding way. "Roman Catholic" does not always sit well; at the same time there are those who feel that to concede the term Catholic exclusively to Roman Catholics is to deny to themselves a predicate to which they deeply believe they are entitled and which they cherish. "Convert" is another word that has needlessly offensive implications when applied to one who for conscience's sake has moved from one Christian community to another, while "apostatize" is even worse to describe the action of one who left our community in order to obey his conscience and his Lord in another Christian community. Here we must all try to hear the words we use as if they were spoken by our counterparts in dialog and refrain from gratuitously offensive language. At the same time we must try not to lose our tempers when the other is unable to accommodate himself to our own convictions about the correct terminology.

Again, we can learn not to draw unwarranted conclusions from a disagreement and not to substitute invective for argument. I know that the tendency to polemics is strong not only in our religious traditions but also in the American tradition. On the other hand, the conclusion that I may draw from another's position may be impeccable in its logic, but it may not be legitimate in the light of the premises with which he is operating. I know the deep hurt of the Roman Catholic when

a Christian of another tradition calls him a bread worshiper, because the devotion that a Roman Catholic pays to the blessed Sacrament is paid not to bread but to Our Blessed Lord Himself. By the same token the individual who may find in the divine revelation a basis for a limited number of reasons for divorce with the privilege of remarriage is not by that fact identified as an advocate of free love, and the individual who may in good conscience favor a limited liberalization of abortion laws is not, at least from his premises, necessarily an aider and abettor of child murder.

One very practical measure that can be undertaken by Christians of all persuasions is to give the parish library and pamphlet rack a careful scrutiny. How do the tracts and books on display represent other Christians? How do they represent their historic leaders? Do they represent the best current thinking and historical research? The same kind of scrutiny can be extended to the textbooks used in elementary and high schools and the lesson plan of the teachers. It could even be applied to the material presented in classes for inquirers and prospective members in the church. If I might cite an example out of my own recent experience, I could point to a letter I received less than two months ago from which it became very clear that a Roman Catholic priest in his membership preparation and inquirers' class was still using in 1967 an item he had prudently clipped and filed back in 1954. In this item a columnist for a nationally read journal of his church had undertaken to document the statement that Martin Luther had taught that our Lord had actually committed adultery with the woman at the well of Sychar who

figures in the fourth chapter of the Fourth Gospel.

One very important aspect is continuity. At every level the participants in dialog need to get to know one another well theologically and religiously if the maximum benefit is to be realized from their encounter with each other. There is no substitute for the confidence that comes only by continuing communication. This implies practically that each working group must be fairly small and that the same people take conscientious part in it. If the number of willing participants is large, more is gained by increasing the number of working groups than by swelling the size of one or two of them.

Certainly one area at which we must all aim is the home. Here a great deal of usually unintentional subversion of the best educational efforts of the church goes on as parents perpetuate with lip and life ancient legends and ancient prejudices so effectively that they become part of the unconscious conviction of their children.

One virtue that will be needed on all sides is patience. I can imagine that the temptation is very keen for Roman Catholics to say to other Christians: Can't you see how we have put ourselves out to accommodate views that you have been defending for four centuries and more? Can't you be satisfied with the changes that we have made and that amount to a veritable 20th-century reformation? Are you really serious in your desire for unity? What more do you want? Every "brother in the Lord" who is aware of what has happened can at least imagine the very real cost of the developments of the last decade in the Roman Catholic community and is profoundly moved by what he sees. If he

still has reservations, you must recognize that he too is guided by conscience. And he too will need patience when he sees attitudes and practices persist in the Roman Catholic church that deeply grieve him.

If you will allow me to adapt the words of that doughty 17th-century English Roman Catholic John Austin, we must learn not to be deterred by the uneven motions of the world about us, and we must not censure our ecumenical journey by the ecclesiastical weather that we meet.

We shall have to expect variations in the ecumenical temperature. The law of action and reaction applies in this area too. Whatever the virtues of celebrating the 450th anniversary of anything may be, the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Reformation this year has had its very real merits for the interconfessional encounter. Two things became obvious more than two years ago: (1) a slowing down of the ecumenical impetus was manifesting itself; (2) in this situation a celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in the traditional fashion could destroy irreparably much of the fruit of the patient effort toward mutual understanding that had been going on. With commendable vision both the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the leadership of

all of the major Lutheran bodies addressed themselves to the task of making the celebration as constructive as it could possibly become for interconfessional understanding. What thus might have been a catastrophe was converted—most successfully, I should say—into an opportunity for genuine progress. We have purchased time by deliberate and purposeful planning. We can all learn from this experience.

We dare never forget that ecumenical effort is a spiritual undertaking, to be approached in a basically different way from the process by which the New York Central and the Pennsylvania railroads may some day be merged. Ultimately what is at stake is the salvation of human beings whom God created and whom He loved to the point of sending His only Son into the world to live and to die and to rise again and to intercede for them at God's right hand. What *we* can do is in the power of the Holy Spirit to be as open to His guiding and His leading as possible, so that He will be able to use us as effective instruments in His work of calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying all of Christendom on earth and keeping it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Since the operation is His, we cannot fail.

St. Louis, Mo.