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Theological Observer

"THE QUESTION OF WOMEN PRIESTS"

A brief article entitled "The Question of Women Priests" appeared in the November 1992 issue of *The Tablet* (pp. 1387-1388), laying down the lines of what was then the forthcoming debate over the Church of England's decision to ordain women. A photocopy was given the undersigned; so he has no precise knowledge of what kind of periodical *The Tablet* is supposed to be. Considering the page numbers in its November issue, it must be extensive. The assured methods and results of form and source criticism can leave no doubt that this religious periodical is intended for laymen of the Church of England with, what for them would be a conservative bent, but willingness to conform to church decisions. How English! Anglicans (Episcopalians) do theology by looking in the side-view mirrors so that they remain in the middle lane between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Their decision in November to ordain women priests has left the Roman Catholics coughing in the dust and Anglicans are moving up fast in the passing (i.e., Protestant) lane. In England that would be inappropriately the right lane. In the U.S.A. that is the left lane. Forward into Protestantism! The Anglicans made a rational, fully informed choice. They knew it was *Arrivederci Roma*. A reprimand from Rome was more gentle ("we can still dialogue") than one given by the occupant of the see of Westminster, the Roman primate in England. The English convocation (synod) also knew that a decision to ordain women priests was "the infiltration of the Christian Church by a secular feminist ideology, so that the real question becomes whether the Church can find the strength to resist." The maiden did not resist and has lost her chastity, though in regard to the Church of England, where the theology of *Honest to God* flourished in the 1960's, such language is markedly ill fitting.

The problem in the Church of England is not precisely the same as the one faced by the LCMS, but it is close enough. No theological problem is exclusively denominationally circumscribed, unless one is content with sectarianism. The English church and her sisters are more ecumenically self-conscious than we are. Whether women may be consecrated as bishops is moot, since the American branch of Anglicanism has already done so, and no one has imposed any interdicts on anyone else, although it would brighten up a dull ecclesiastical landscape to see Henry VIII's church, excommunicated by mother Rome, disinheriting in turn her children. Schism in the twentieth century is sheer historical and impossible romanticism. Besides, there is no stomach for that kind of courageous action. It would be regarded as no more than hysterics. How tolerantly British!

The last paragraph in "The Question of Women Priests" states that, as a result of the decision of the Church of England to ordain women priests, "the question is now posed to Christian churches which do not ordain women: why not?" The Roman and Eastern communities will not even bother with the "why not?" question. After all, their positions are well known, informed, and argued, and the Anglicans went out on this limb without concern for their sensitivities. Regretably and tiresomely, however, the "why not?" question does have to be answered by the LCMS, though the editors of *The Tablet* doubtless know as little about us as we know about them. The word "tiresomely" is used, because the LCMS has already answered the question over and over again for at least twenty years. Though a long period of time to us, it is short in the history of doctrine. Previous answers have not squelched enthusiasm for women clergy. If women can occupy every position which men do in government and society, why not do so in the church? That is the "why not?" question again, but in a different form.

The LCMS position on ordaining women clergy is made more difficult by the facts that we are neither part of a worldwide association of churches opposed to the practice (as are the Eastern Orthodox), nor do we have the advantage of being a mammoth church (as is Rome). The LWF long ago made up its mind on this one; such a singularly courageous person as Peter Brunner was a prophetic voice soon lost among the shouts of the siren voices of feminism. The LCMS does its theology not in response to what Constantinople and Rome think, but in response to what the neighboring Protestant churches around the block do and they have women clergy. Protestantism seeps up through the basement. It is inevitable. Walther's prediction of an English-speaking (viz., Americanized) Lutheran church soon becoming Reformed had more truth than we previously conceded. Among the major Protestant denominations only the LCMS does not allow women pastors. Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, ELCA Lutherans, and Disciples of Christ all have women pastors. Why not we? Charismatic groups by necessity have women ministers, since the Holy Spirit is encouraged to spring up in everyone in the group. Southern Baptists are against female ministry, but their polity (and perhaps inclination as well) keep them from doing anything about reportedly three hundred congregations with women pastors. Here is the sovereignty of the congregation with a vengeance! Most of these Protestants do not recognize the office of the ministry as divine in the sense that Lutherans do; this fact only exacerbates the problem. Without a clearly defined office of the ministry, the question of who occupies the office is

secondary. By ordaining women the ELCA has adjusted its teaching on the office of the ministry by lowering it to an extension of the church, an unanticipated and for some unwelcome side-affect. (One may consult the author's "Augustana V and the Doctrine of the Ministry" [*Lutheran Quarterly* (Winter 1993)] or read the original in *Called and Ordained* [Augsburg Publishing House, 1990].)

Lutherans feel uncomfortable with obtaining theological aid from Rome or the Eastern communions. The reasons for this fact are as varied as they might be contradictory. The Smalcald Articles call the papacy the antichrist, and therefore everything papal is dismissed with a wave of the hand. Overlooked is the commendation given the Roman church in the Augsburg Confession. Eastern Orthodoxy is simply not part of our religious experience as, for example, the Methodist church around the corner is. It is not American. Still it is the Eastern fathers and not the founders of Reformed Protestantism who are cited in our confessions. But we are uncomfortable with the Eastern Church. It is as much an ethnic issue as a religious one. Whatever the reasons are, we are left alone in answering the "why not?" question of why we do not ordain women. Left to our loneliness, we are faced with exhausting our resources, and the troops are less prepared to fight on this issue than some others. The Protestants are always ready to embrace us. LCMS pastors participating in local clergy councils know for themselves the percentages of women ministers in other denominations. As recently as twenty-five years ago, such was not the case. We lost a first line of defense with the decisions of the ALC and LCA (now ELCA) around 1970 to permit women pastors. Although not long enough ago to make a binding tradition, it was a moment to be hailed as historic. Strange as it seems, we lost one more line of defense in the Church of England's decision. Awaiting the queen in parliament to legislate women clergy is only waiting for the other shoe to drop. We are now more alone than ever. "The waters of the river will rise over its channels and go over all its banks; and it will sweep on to Judah; it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck" (adapting Isaiah 8:7-8). We have less breathing space.

Postscript: The Presbyterian Church in Australia, that portion of Australian Presbyterianism not joining the Uniting Church of Australia and thus losing its denomination identity, has rescinded its decision to ordain women. Not known is how many women were already ordained and what role they will now play in the church. The situation would be

worth watching, if we could obtain some information.

David P. Scaer

FEMINISM, THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN,
AND *LUTHERAN FORUM*

The editors of *Forum Letter*, the monthly voice of the quarterly *Lutheran Forum*, have it right when they say that "gnostic feminism [is] pervading and invading the American religious scene" (October 31, 1992, p. 4). They still do not see the ordination of women as part of this "gnostic feminism." There may still be hope, as will be shown below. From time to time we have referred to *Lutheran Forum* and its *Forum Letter* here in the *CTQ*, simply because LCMS readers do not have a readily available avenue into the inner workings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). One weekly periodical never seems to proceed beyond scolding the ELCA on the inerrancy question. On the other hand, official publications are just that—official! Unless the *Lutheran Forum* is reprinted elsewhere, what it offers is simply unavailable to LCMS pastors. It deserves a place in the pastor's study (P.O. Box 327, Delhi, New York 13753).

Lutheran Forum has continued to make a blistering attack on the ELCA quota system. No one has been as critical of anything in the LCMS as *Lutheran Forum* has been of the ELCA system of allotting church positions according to gender, race, and ethnic background. But it is just this approach of equal opportunities to ministry which editors of the *Lutheran Forum* adopt in defending the ordination of women pastors. "If men can be ordained, why not women?"

One can think of any number of less than fully theological reasons for the *Forum* editors to oppose women's ordination. Perhaps the best reason for not ordaining women is that no one has found a theological reason to do so. This fact some women clergy themselves concede. They recognize that the theological answers offered so far are inadequate. Another reason for not ordaining women pastors is the ecumenical one, which the *Forum* editors acknowledge themselves. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, who constitute three quarters of the world's Christians, do not ordain women and are not likely to do so. The ecumenical argument is the same as the catholic one. It looks not only at what other churches are doing, but also at what the church has done historically. This is precisely the way in which the Augsburg Confession argues. Its doctrinal section closes by claiming that the Lutheran teachings do not

differ from the Roman church as it is known from the writings of the fathers. Pope Gelasius is listed as an authority in regard to receiving the sacrament in both kinds. The Catalogue of Testimonies at the end of the Book of Concord anchors Lutheran doctrine in church tradition. Without the catholic argument for doctrine, the church is in danger of sectarianism and becomes schismatic. Since the catholic argument may be seen as a threat to a church which boasts the *sola scriptura*, it is rarely used. But the plain fact is that the ordination of women has no support from church tradition and, accordingly, is not supported by the catholic argument. Without considering biblical prohibitions, the arguments against it could rely on church history alone, unless one wanted to cite gnostic practices.

LCMS Pastor Joel Elowsky took the ecumenical (catholic) issue right over the walls and behind the lines in the 1992 Reformation issue of *Lutheran Forum*. *Lutheran Forum* comes close to being "an equal-opportunity theological journal." The other side was not slow to fire back. ELCA Pastor Mark Chapman, whose home address indicates that he must be a good friend of newly consecrated editor Leonard Klein, responded in the 1993 Lenten issue. Chapman does not address the point that Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians do not ordain women and are unlikely to do so. While Chapman is clearly wounded by Elowsky's quite proper suggestion that a church ordaining women may be guilty of "apostasy and schism," Elowsky is only reflecting how the Roman and Eastern communions think! He cannot change that fact.

More significant is that Chapman answers the accusations of apostasy and schism by elevating the *reformation* principle over the *catholic* one, if it is permissible to speak in these terms. Luther replaced celibate priests with married pastors. The conclusion is that we can replace male pastors with female ones. The reason is *ecclesia semper reformanda est*. Is this really a reformation or catholic principle of theology? It is more likely Reformed. If this were a principle of theology, then everything would be debatable sooner or later. In any event, *Lutheran Forum* is still talking about the issue.

Perhaps the least significant but still a valid reason for ELCA pastors, especially those connected with *Lutheran Forum*, to cease ordaining women is to avoid continuing to give offense to their confessional (and in their view weaker) LCMS brothers and sisters, some of whom recognize that theology is alive on the pages of *Lutheran Forum*. LCMS pastors may differ among themselves on what arguments against women pastors are the most important, but these arguments include biblical

prohibitions, ecumenical practice and catholic tradition, the incarnation, the all male-apostolate, the revelation of God as Father and Son, and the fact that God is Father and Son. Some among us may question some of these arguments, but we are open to some mutual convincing, or at least we should be. The arguments of *Lutheran Forum* against feminine references to God are similar to ours against the ordination of women, at least in the estimation of many, and we have no hesitancy to use their ammunition.

When the *Forum* editors say that feminism is modern gnosticism, they are absolutely right in seeing that we are dealing with the very doctrine of God. The *Forum* editors have rejected the idea of genderless or bisexual references to God because it conflicts with the usage of biblical revelation. We would like them to go one step further in recognizing that this revelation is not arbitrary. Limiting our understanding of God as Father and Son to His revelation of Himself, without being convinced that He *is* Father and Son, does not go far enough. For in Jesus we know God as Father, because He is the Father of Jesus. The issues of using inclusive language in liturgy, Bible translation, and theology and the ordaining of women are interrelated, not because one is the cause or result of the other, but because both result from a gnostic view of God whereby feminine and masculine views of him (or her) are placed side by side.

It is simplistic to suggest that women pastors are gnostics simply because they are women. That idea is absurd and no one has even suggested it, as *Forum Letter* claims (October 31, 1992, p. 4). But we have no intention of retreating from identifying women pastors as evidence of gnosticism and its success. In addition, no one has suggested that male theologians cannot be feminists. In fact, many more men may be feminists than women. This is not an issue of one denomination only, as even in LCMS circles some are promoting the advantage of introducing feministic qualities into the church to improve church life. Such a suggestion is as fraught with feminism as is the actual ordaining of women. We dare not fool ourselves in this regard!

Richard John Neuhaus's *First Things* has played a valuable role in providing a broader evaluation of feminism than that which is coming from Lutheran circles, including the LCMS. An example is furnished by Olivia Vlahos in "The Goddess That Failed" (December 1992). Retired from the Norwalk Community College (Connecticut), she shows that religions of the Mother Goddess were hideously cruel, requiring self-emasculation and sacrifice. Feminism in religion has not historically

delivered utopia. Vlahos's being a woman does not make her a feminist. To the contrary, her awareness that we are confronting a wider problem should be integrated into the theology of those male theologians who oppose the ordination of women but have not related what they believe about God to contemporary theological movements and the even wider-ranging philosophical movements of the day. In the February 1993 issue of *First Things*, Vlahos follows up with "Generic Male, Endangered Gender?" Denominational boundaries can become walls limiting theological squabbles to intramural debates between freshmen and sophomores and keeping us unaware of the massive philosophical movements which are responsible for our predicaments. Unless our own position takes into account these theological and philosophical currents, we will eventually be swept along with them. Our theology will remain superficial. Strange as it may seem, a governmental quota system in hiring (even at the cabinet level), the ELCA quota system, the use of inclusive liturgical language, referring to God in both masculine and feminine terms, and allowing women into the ministry are all branches of the same tree. *Lutheran Forum* does a good job in selective pruning, but does not attack the trunk problem. Limiting our concerns to the one issue of the ordination of women may be the same kind of selective gardening which will allow weeds to spring up in other flower beds. *First Things*, in tracing feminism into pre-Roman paganism, has gone to the root of the problem. Old Testament colleagues, similarly, in the course of evaluating the validity of feminist exegesis and the propriety of inclusive language in biblical translation, have now begun to draw attention to the relevance, *vis-a-vis* the Old Testament, of the worship of Ashteroth (Astarte).

Eastern Orthodox theology has predictably and essentially looked at the issue from the perspective of God. At the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions (in Fort Wayne) in January of 1991 Dr. Thomas Hopko of St. Vladimir's Seminary provided an essay, now appearing in *Speaking the Christian God*, entitled "Apophatic Theology and the Naming of God in Eastern Orthodox Tradition" (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992). Hopko's thesis is that God's revelation as Father and Son has significance for human life. We are now at the heart of the problem. Essays in collections are often lost between the covers, but searching for this one is worth the effort.

Several centuries were needed to resolve the ramifications of Arianism in theology and christology. Feminism will not be easily overcome and no one living today will see the matter resolved. Being right on the ordination of women is not the complete solution, but recognizing that the

practice is aberrant is a step in making the diagnosis. *Lutheran Forum* has made this kind of diagnosis in regard to inclusive language about God. But the point must be made that God is consistent in His revelation. The God who reveals Himself as Father through the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ is the same God who by the Spirit of Jesus inspires Paul to allow only men into the pastoral office. To top off the argument Paul claims the support of the Old Testament and Jesus. The problem generic to all sides of the argument (including the LCMS and *Lutheran Forum*) is the recognition that God, incarnation, apostolicity, apostolic injunctions, language about God, and the ministry are necessarily interrelated. Not being able to see beyond and behind the biblical references to christology and theology (in the narrow sense) suffers from the same fault as not seeing that language about God and the office of the ministry are interrelated.

By placing a picture of a woman pastor on the cover of *Lutheran Forum* (Lent 1993), its editors were making an obvious statement of intransigence. But there is light at the end of this tunnel. Arriving a few days earlier was *Forum Letter*, in which the Reverend Tom Brock (an ELCA pastor) takes exception to "Sexual Diversity," a program topic in *Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters*. Officially produced by the ELCA, it sees homosexuality as being as acceptable as heterosexuality (*Forum Letter* [January 27, 1993], pp. 7-8). This is a mild description of what "Sexual Diversity" really says and of how *Forum Letter* reacts. Pastor Brock relates a conversation with ELCA Bishop Chilstrom in which Brock asked him "if he thought the ELCA would reaffirm the church's teaching that sexual intercourse before marriage and homosexual behavior are wrong. The bishop didn't know. He said he never thought we would change our mind on the ordination of women, but we did." This statement must mean that Bishop Chilstrom was once opposed to the practice of ordaining women, but something changed his mind! The bishop continued, "The same principles that applied to that decision need to be applied to this one." Just what are "the same principles"? Does this statement mean that the prohibition in the sixth commandment is as flexible as the prohibition of women pastors? The article claims that Bishop Chilstrom would not deny the possibility of practicing homosexuals being ordained. Brock finds these words tragic. We are asking *Lutheran Forum* to let us know what the aforesaid principles are when its editors find out.

The deeper theological level at which the issues of how we speak about God and the ministry has been reached. Principles which allow women

to be ordained may also allow open homosexuality in the church and the ministry. Richard John Neuhaus came to the same conclusion. It may have been this point which moved him from the ELCA to Rome. In ordaining women we are going beyond appearances into anthropological and theological depths. The foundations of reality are being shaken. If the ordinations of women and homosexuals proceed from the same theological or philosophical basis, perhaps concerns about homosexuals serving as pastors should raise the question again of whether women should be ordained. The challenge for the LCMS is recognizing that behind the biblical prohibitions rests the fundamental understanding of God as Father and Son. When this understanding is compromised or changed, there will be changes in the occupants of the pastoral office and in the language in which we speak about God. *Forum Letter* is probing beneath the surface. Now comes the question of whether enough of us, even in confessional Lutheran circles, will see that the tentacles of this cancer are derived from the same root system.

David P. Scaer

LOGIA: A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Logia appeared, unheralded as far as I can remember, in the mail-boxes of many Lutheran pastors some time in October or November. The page of credits explains its purpose as promoting orthodox theology. Circulating in the LCMS are any number of official and unofficial periodicals which claim the same goal for themselves. (Would anyone really admit to promoting unorthodox theology?) Among those periodicals claiming to present the confessional Lutheran position, however, none is as impressive as *Logia*.

An explanation is provided for choosing *Logia* as the title, but the periodical would have looked just as well under another title. We all know what *Logia* means anyway. It resembles the word "logomachy," which means a battle of words, although I am sure that logomachy is not the editors' intent. *Logia* is unashamedly Lutheran. Affiliations of the contributing editors include the Lutheran (State) Church of Hanover, the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Lutheran Church-Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Independent Lutheran Church of Germany, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The pan-Lutheran background of the contributors is belied by the list of six editors, who are with one exception all pastors of the LCMS. The exception, Erling Teigen of the ELS, is listed as the coordinating editor, suggesting that this

journal really is a team effort. Strikingly, most of the editors belong to the younger generation of pastors. With the exception of Teigen and John Pless, whom we know from *Forum Letter* and *The Bride of Christ*, the others are unknown to most. Of the five editors in the LCMS Saint Louis graduates have the edge over Fort Wayne graduates. Perhaps the message here is that Lutheran theology of the confessional sort is not the possession of one church body and a younger generation wants to be involved. This is the clear message of the anonymously written "Loeche's Nightmare," the first piece in the *Logia* "Forum" (p. 75.):

Theological inbreeding in smaller Lutheran bodies leaves them defenseless when confronting challenges from groups which can echo quite well their "inerrancy" view of the Scriptures. A myopic parochialism afflicts some of us in Lutheranism. We seem to have convinced ourselves that a particular incarnation of the Lutheran church is the true, visible church on earth—and to the devil with the rest.

Is the reason for this article's anonymity the author's modesty or his fear of repercussions? The clue here is "myopic parochialism." *Logia* will overcome the temptation of answering theological issues from the reservoir of one church body, a disorder recognized by repetitious re quoting of the same sources without engaging the opinions and views of others. This expectation is a tall order.

Unstated in *Logia* is the premise that additional channels are needed to do justice to confessional and, presumably, biblical theology. We shall see how courageous the editors are. "The Universal Priesthood in the Lutheran Confessions" by Erling Teigen shows that a few sacred cows have been taken off the list of endangered species.

Among the contributing editors are five members of the faculty in Fort Wayne and three members of the faculty in Saint Louis. Some who were invited to serve as contributing editors in the spring of 1992 did not accept. I was among those who neither accepted nor declined but, after seeing the impressive format, I am pleased to see my name listed there. Perhaps my silence qualified as the Roman Catholic *obicem non ponere*. Without objection the divine work could proceed.

A cryptic sentence appears in the leading contribution in the "Forum" (p. 75): "Renewal in the Lutheran Church will not come from the seminaries or institutional office buildings." *Logia's* anonymous writer claims that synodical and seminary personnel will not do theology because

"the political pressures brought to bear are simply to [sic!] severe for either academics or bureaucrats to speak with a prophetic voice to the church. Anemic theology will result if the parish pastors of our church do not reclaim the position of leadership in our church bodies." *Logia's* editors are there getting their piece of the theological pie. In any event *Logia* tells us that theology is still alive among the non-professionals.

Logia measures eight and a half inches by eleven, with an Albrecht Durer sketch, dated 1511, depicting the atonement with reference to the persons of the Trinity. That the Father appears with the papal tiara might indicate that an anti-Roman Catholic polemic will be excluded from the pages of *Logia*. (That polemic has, in actuality, been dead for some time.) *Logia's* outward appearance receives a high rating. The first issue is divided, as is the *CTQ*, into three sections: articles, book reviews, and a forum. Articles are of both contemporary and historical characters. Ken Schurb provides contemporary insights, and Martin Wittenberg offers "Church Fellowship and Altar Fellowship in the Light of Church History." Its twenty-five double-columned pages, translated from the German by John Bruss of Mankato, are so exhaustive that they qualify as a book. This article took several sittings to read but was worth the time. Three articles are by living authors. Two contributors are dead. Presented here are two sermons by Luther on the Lord's Supper and an essay by Hermann Sasse, translated by Matthew Harrison, a Sasse scholar in his own right, as is contributing editor Ronald Feuerhahn. Contributing editor John Kleinig of Australia actually had Sasse as a teacher. Books by Lutheran writers are reviewed critically by three Lutheran reviewers. Robert Preus responds to Tietjen's *Memoirs in Exile*; Mark Sell to Becker's *The Foolishness of God*; and John Maxwell to Kolb's *Confessing the Faith*. Preus's treatment of Tietjen is sympathetic. In the ecumenical spirit which *Logia* claims for itself, a sequel from Tietjen or anyone else involved in the turmoils of the early 1970's would be welcome. Maxwell respects the scholarly Kolb, but asks him to reevaluate the claim that the Lutheran Confessions set forth a particular hermeneutic. In the *Logia* "Forum" the undersigned is said to be capable of amusement "at the suggestion that his christology provides a theological framework congenial to Mrs. Meyer's purpose" in *Voices/Visions*. He is flattered, of course, that someone read the book.

After these disconnected comments, some might rummage through their files to find their copies of *Logia*. One missionary on leave complained that he did not receive a copy. Eighteen dollars will solve the problem for the year. The editors are off to a good start, but whether they can

maintain an adequate level of scholarship, enthusiasm, editorial work, and financial support is another matter. Good wishes are not lacking. They come from the editor of *Lutheran Forum* and the president of the seminary of the Wisconsin Synod. Nor is the advertising unimpressive. Advertisers found in the first issue are Eerdmans (with two pages), Gramcord (for exegetes who have abandoned the concordance for computer efficiency), *Lutheran Forum*, and *Touchstone* (self-described as "A Journal of Ecumenical Orthodoxy"). Eerdmans pushes Calvin's commentaries. *Lutheran Forum* receives endorsements from David Benke and Ralph Bohlmann and is available for \$21. *Touchstone* is available for \$13. *Logia* requires \$18 as its annual subscription fee and claims an address at 800 South Military, Dearborn, Michigan, 48124. It is too early to make any predictions of its survival, but *Logia* is a serious scholarly journal, forthrightly addressing pressing theological topics. It has competition from the *Lutheran Quarterly*, *Dialog*, the *Concordia Journal*, and, of course, the *CTQ*. Theology is alive and, if not well, at least increasing in strength. On the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary for the theological symposia of January, the editors claimed that subscriptions had exceeded a thousand. The editor of the *Lutheran Quarterly*, also on campus for the symposia, claimed over two thousand readers and successfully proselyted others for his cause.

David P. Scaer

THE NEW WELS CREED: AGAIN

In a previous "Theological Observer" (*CTQ*, LVI:2-3 [April-July 1992], pp. 201-206) I published a critique of a proposal by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) to change the translation of the Nicene Creed for its new hymnal, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. At issue was the propriety and validity of changing the confession of the Lord's incarnation from "was made man" to "was made fully human." Such is the change intended by the WELS for its worshippers. Readers may refer to my earlier remarks in their entirety, but in brief my arguments concerned two points. Firstly, the language "fully human" is an abstraction and intentionally wishes to eschew gender-specificity. However, for the humanity of Christ to be "full" it must entail the maleness of Christ, which (along with other factors) bespeaks the particularity of His humanity as concrete and individualized. No generic humanity exists; only individualized concretions of humanity exist and, indeed, either male humanity or female humanity. The language of "fully human" allows the interpretation that Christ's humanity was at its most

fundamental level a mere generic humanity, and that fact alone makes such language ill-suited for creedal affirmation. But ironically the desire to eschew gender-specific language with "fully human" renders Christ less than fully human, for it makes of secondary importance the specificity of His humanity apart from which no full humanity exists. My second point was that such wording breaks the organic connection between the Scriptures and the ecumenical creed as a summary of the Scriptures. The language of Christ's incarnation may not be divested of the various significances with which the Bible invests the person of Jesus. In the economy of salvation Jesus is New Adam, Son of Man, Son of God, Bridegroom, and the like. Such language is not mere metaphor but renders the reality of Christ's significance as the person who is Lord and Savior.

As one might have expected, reaction to my critique came largely from WELS people. Not all reaction was equally helpful nor equally charitable. Nor was all of it comprehending. Nonetheless, within the reactions points were raised which deserve response. Especially important is a response by Professor James P. Tiefel, a member of the Joint Hymnal Committee, which appeared in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (XC:1 [1993], pp. 55-58). This is a response which "the Executive Committee of the Hymnal Project felt it wise to publish for the sake of our Synod's members" (p. 55). As such it deserves an honest rejoinder, for it possesses special claims to represent WELS reaction to my comments. I must also add by way of acknowledgement the materials which the Reverend Victor Prange, Chairman of the Commission on Worship, kindly sent to me.¹ All of these responses give me occasion now to pursue this matter a little more.

A Brief Prologue: Before turning to the matter at hand, a brief prologue is perhaps required. Professor Tiefel remarks that it was not so much the appearance of my critique in the *CTQ* which aroused his response as it was its appearance in Herman Otten's *Christian News*, which "has wide readership also in the WELS" (p. 55). Especially troubling, however, was the fact that my remarks appeared under the title "Is the WELS Still Orthodox?" Hence, Tiefel's response "for the sake of our Synod's members." I wish to make it clear that that title was a bit of editorializing by the people of *Christian News* and had no connection with me. I have no doubt that the members of WELS are orthodox Christians and are earnestly desirous to remain so. At the same time I do believe that the proposed change at issue allows false interpretation—indeed in the environment of present-day culture invites false interpretation and is for

that reason alone problematic as creedal phraseology. And I know that the very language suggested by WELS has been used precisely to deny any significance to the male specificity of Christ, and that makes a dogmatic claim about which the church would be wise to reflect more seriously than it has.

Secondly, a number of WELS respondents seemed to receive my remarks as little more than presumption by a big sister. "Stop straining at WELS gnats but swallowing Missouri camels!" wrote one person. To his attitude two remarks are appropriate: (1.) We are dealing here not with Wisconsin's creed nor with Missouri's creed. We are discussing the proper vernacular wording of the most significant ecumenical creed which the church possesses. To treat this matter as of parochial interest is to engage in a severe strain of sectarian hybris. The creed is everyone's business, because by it the baptized confess the one, undivided faith. Furthermore, the selfsame change proposed by the WELS has already been proposed and implemented by others, including some who intentionally and explicitly wish to peripheralize the maleness of Jesus as without meaning. The issue raised by the WELS proposal goes well beyond its new hymnal. It is a truly ecumenical and catholic question, and it is such because it raises acute christological issues.

Finally, for clarity's sake a red herring from Professor Tiefel's article requires comment. Professor Tiefel avers that the real reason for my interest in this question is the question of the ordination of women. He refers to my booklet of 1991, "It Is Not Given to Women to Teach: A Lex in Search of a Ratio," in which I made some of the same arguments as I made in my critique of the proposed creedal change. While Prof. Tiefel obfuscates my intentions in that booklet, he is certainly right in recognizing similarities of argument. I do believe that the masculinity of Jesus is not unrelated to the biblical prohibition of women in the office of the public ministry. Yet the concern about the proper translation of *ἐνανθρωπήσαντα*, *homo factus est*, is quite divisible from the question of the ordination of women. Indeed, the question of the ordination of women is but one—albeit important—practical implication of the great and large issue of the theological meaning of gender-specificity and of the simple but pervasive fact that the biblical language is masculine at most places where gender *inclusivity* is intended and such is the case also and *especially* in the language concerning Him in whom all are included.²

The responses to my critique raised a number of issues and questions,

but the following points appear to encompass most of them.

(1.) The question of translation remains an issue. Tiefel raises the question of a "living language." "For many years the words *man* and *human being* could be used interchangeably by both the church and society. However, in a living language words change meaning. More and more the word *man* is defined, even in dictionaries, as a male person" (p. 55). Hartwig speaks of words becoming "unclear" and language "infelicitous" (p. 202). Another respondent wrote: "The English language, unlike ancient Latin, is a living language, and whether we like it or not I think the English lexicon and usage are changing." In this regard Tiefel points to passages like Luke 2:14 ("peace on earth, good will to *men*") and 1 Timothy 2:4 ("[God] will have all *men* to be saved"). In such passages can we not recognize our changing lexicon and translate "peace on earth to *people* who have His good will" and "[God] wants all *people* to be saved"? Clearly, as Tiefel notes, in both passages "all people" were intended (pp. 55-56). We also have no difficulty with such translations, for the referent is clearly "all individual persons" (noting the plural form of ἄνθρωπος).

The same is also true concerning the phrase "who for us *men* and for our salvation" (τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοῦς ἄνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν) in the Nicene Creed. Hartwig explains the rationale for the omission of the word "men" in the new translation (p. 212). The creed in the new WELS hymnal will now read "who for us and for our salvation." While I am not as positive about the rationale as Hartwig is, the translation without "men" adequately renders the creed's meaning. The referent is all who are confessing the creed, men and women; gender-specificity in itself is in no way part of the meaning. Indeed, the referent and meaning would be the same if *only* women were in fact in mind or *only* men. In these instances we may defer in freedom to the changing lexicon of our day.³

(2.) However, the above argument does *not* work for translating the creedal phrase ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, *homo factus est*, "He became man." Here the referent is not "all people" but the one Lord, Jesus Christ. To talk here about the changing "living language" and the lexical possibilities just will not do. For this creedal phrase renders the incarnation of the eternal Son of the Father which was "for us and for our salvation." Nothing in Tiefel's response leads me to look more kindly on the phrase "He became fully human" as a proper rendering of the above Greek and Latin phrases. Here two points require a brief mention.

(a.) I argued before that "fully human" does not necessarily connote that Jesus was also a male human being. That fact remains true, and as far as I can see Tiefel does not try to assert that in the phrase "fully human" Christ's maleness is necessarily implied. He refers rather to the use of the masculine pronouns elsewhere in the translation and to the phrase "Son of God." These assert "that the fully human Jesus is a male person" (p. 57). The masculine pronouns, however, at most assert the facticity of Christ's maleness (the "Son of God" is more problematic). The worst feminist enthusiast would agree. I do not doubt that the WELS believes that Jesus was a male. The question is whether the maleness of Christ is in any way an important and even constitutive fact in His *significance* or *meaning* for us. That is the reason why I wrote before: "The change in the WELS rendering of the creed simply denigrates the *importance* of Christ as a concrete male human figure and apparently assumes that Christ's gender is confessionally insignificant and without meaning" (p. 204).

Some respondents argued that, were the gender-specificity in any way important in the translation of ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, *homo factus est*, the creed would have used the Greek ἀνὴρ and the Latin *vir*, which specifically denote a male member of humankind (similarly *Mann* instead of *Mensch* in the German). But this argument is simply to miss the point. To use the distinctly male term is exactly *not* what the creed wanted to use, just as the full meaning of the creedal phrase is not properly rendered "fully human." Both err, but at opposite ends. The distinctly male term does not include the female half of the human race. It is precisely ἀνὴρ and *vir* which are gender-exclusive. To say that the Son of God became "male" (*vir factus est*, without guessing what the Greek might be) would implicitly deny Christ's universal significance. Hence, to be sure, along with Tiefel I do indeed wish to confess that Christ was "fully human" (τέλειον ἐν ἀνθρωπότητι, as Chalcedon put it). Nonetheless, the phrase "became fully human" does not clearly render the concrete, particularized humanity of Christ as male humanity and (I repeat again) in the present social climate is often preferred precisely to deny the meaning of Christ having become a male. But Christ's humanity was necessarily a concrete, individualized humanity. The fact remains, whether or not we fear that we offend our culture: the term "man" is capable of rendering both truths at once, that Christ shared that humanity which is the common possession of all human beings, men and women, and that Christ was the individual human person that He was, a male human being. To say that the Son "became man" is a richer translation—

that is, a more truthful translation—than "became fully human."

(b.) Here I must mention again a major argument of mine to which, interestingly, none of the respondents reacted. I refer to my point that the creed is a summary of the prophetic and apostolic narrative which is the Scriptures. Here Tiefel overlooks something important. He writes: "One cannot simply overlook how the phrase ["became fully human"] fits within the body of the creed" (p. 57). He then refers to the symmetry that earlier in the text the creed asserts the "full divinity" of Christ and now in this phrase asserts the "full humanity" of Christ. It is a fair observation. But the creed is not just a dogmatic summary. It is a biblical summary, and that fact means that the phrase must also be considered in what might be called its salvific economical context. The creed says, "who for us and for our salvation . . . was made man." It is impossible, on the Bible's own terms, to understand Christ's salvific significance apart from His role as Second Adam, Son of man, Son of Mary, Priest after the order of Melchizedek, new Moses, and the like. It is precisely *this context* in the creed which demands a language which allows His maleness to be connoted—as well as, again, His common humanity.

That Hartwig in this connection claims that the change to "became fully human" may be counted "as one of the finest improvements in the new translation" (p. 212) is overly self-congratulatory. That the muse of translation suggested this "improvement" also to others is acknowledged. Tiefel and Hartwig mention especially the translation of the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC). However, we must pose again the question concerning the nature of a creed. A creed is a summary of the church's faith, which faith is given by the Triune God to each who is baptized. The creed, therefore, bears eschatological significance. It is the hymn of the redeemed and bespeaks the truth of that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who is the Redeemer. In expressing its faith in a creed the church does not first cast its eye on the "living" language of its surroundings; it takes account of the fullness of the truth entrusted to it and ensures that no falsehood enters into or may enter into the unity and catholicity of its hymn. False hymning is false worship. Intentions here begin to pale. WELS will confess that the Son of God "became fully human." There are others who will confess the same language (real people, whose names are not important here). But these others will understand and explain that confession to mean—and indeed on the basis that *ἄνθρωπος* and *homo* are terms for generic humanity—that in the incarnation God "breaks through the bonds of any and every limitation" and that "if the male/female wall of binary division remains operative

. . . then not all is redeemed." Is this the meaning of the confession which WELS will be making when its good people confess that the divine Son "became fully human"? No, I dare to answer, that will not be their intent. But will the language of their confession allow that meaning? The answer here is no less evident: Yes, it will allow that meaning, and that is the very meaning that many intend by opting for "fully human." I do not believe that churches can responsibly adopt new creedal language without seriously reflecting on the cultural and social intentionality of the new language. I reiterate what I wrote before: "It is the church's task to safeguard the deposit of faith once entrusted to it and to ensure that the expression of its faith through creed does not merely mirror the demands of culture with the attendant erosion of a clearly articulated faith."

(3.) Finally, one other question raised by a couple of thoughtful respondents deserves some answer. While acknowledging my interest in claiming that in the incarnated Christ there subsisted a "whole human nature" common to all humans, yet with and not apart from His becoming also a male individual, they ask this question: "Is all of this the historically intended sense of ἐνανθρωπήσαντα and *homo factus est*?" I take this question to inquire whether the fathers at Nicaea consciously had in mind all of this. It is a fair question. I will give a fair and honest answer: I do not know, but frankly I doubt it. But we do not get very far with this historical question. The fathers were careful to select language for the creed which did not easily allow false understanding. Yet that is not always an easy task, especially when attempting to render succinctly the complex reality that the person of Christ is.

To inquire what the ancient fathers contemporary to the creed actually had foremost in their minds, one must inquire after the doctrinal context which moved their reflections. Briefly, I think it suffices to say that the distinct problems of Arianism, Apollinarianism, and finally Nestorianism surrounded early discussion of what was intended by the creedal language ἐνανθρωπήσαντα which was usually translated in the Latin as *homo factus est*. In their own way both Arius and Apollinarius denied the fullness of Christ's humanity. Arius asserted that Jesus Christ was not the fully divine, eternal Son. Jesus was, however, the created Word who assumed "flesh" but not a human "soul." Apollinarius asserted the full essential deity of Jesus but also denied that Jesus had assumed a human "soul." In both cases the humanity of Christ tended toward a Platonic abstraction which denigrated the humanity of Jesus as a concrete, individualized humanity with its own natural will, intellect, and psychic life. One can see the desire to exclude Arius and Apollinarius in Cyril of

Alexandria's (+444) commentary on the Nicene Creed:

That is why they say: "who for us and for our salvation came down, was incarnate, was made man." Notice how their statement proceeds in the requisite order and with the most apposite sequence! The point of their saying "He came down" is that we should see that it was He, He who transcends all in nature and glory, who descended for us . . . He was, as I said, God in human shape, by taking not inanimate flesh (as some heretics have seen fit to imagine) but flesh endowed with mental life [τὴν σάρκα ἐψυχωμένην δὲ μᾶλλον ψυχῇ νοερά].

In the reference to Christ's transcendence we see Cyril's anti-Arian assertion of Christ's deity, and the "heretics" to which Cyril refers are almost certainly the Apollinarians.

On the other hand, those who opposed Nestorius, like Cyril, often spoke of Christ assuming "flesh." The Nestorians wished to assure the integrity of Christ's humanity but often did this in ways which seemed to imply that one could consider Christ's humanity as an individualized humanity apart from and separate from His divinity. The fathers, in this following Cyril, wished to assert both the universal significance of Christ by virtue of His possessing common humanity (against Nestorius) and the particular reality of Christ's humanity by virtue of His possessing a truly human will and mental life (against Arius and especially Apollinarius). In the face of Apollinarius the interest in Christ's particularity centered in His possessing a rational soul. It may be doubted whether in these discussions the specific question of Christ's gender was uppermost in their minds.

Indeed, in the early sixth century in Italy Dionysius Exiguus was busy translating Greek discussion of the Nestorian crisis into Latin. Dionysius was especially active in translating Cyril's important anti-Nestorian writings. In translating the Nicene Creed into Latin Dionysius Exiguus does not render "became man" as *homo factus est*. Interestingly, he renders the phrase *humanatus est*. Dionysius' great friend, Cassiodorus, apparently also tended to prefer the verb *humanare* in speaking of Christ's incarnation. In his *Ecclesiastical History* Cassiodorus speaks of the Word having been made human (H.E. 6.22: *verbum humanatum*), and in his commentary on the psalms he speak of God being made visually human for the salvation of the believers (*Deum propter salutem credentium visualiter humanandum*). Of course, *homo* and *humanare* are related, but I suspect that the use of *humanare* has an anti-Nestorian intention.

The point is that translation is not merely a lexical matter but also a confessional matter. When the fathers at Chalcedon (451 A.D.) explained why it was necessary for them to be in council to clarify the christological meaning of the Nicene Creed, they referred to the difficulties of Nestorius, on the one hand, and of Eutyches, on the other. New issues demand new reflections on what further meaning lies *within* the words of the creed. A merely lexical and historical investigation does not suffice. At a time when feminist enthusiasms are especially strong and even the language of Scripture and creed is being marginalized or declared irrelevant for the sake of specific social, cultural, and ecclesiastical agendas, the church might find itself performing a distinctly "good work" by unabashedly standing up for the truth once given to it. Significant to that truth is the assertion ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, *homo factus est*, that is, the Son of God "became man."

Endnotes

1. We should refer also to the article by Theodore J. Hartwig, "The Creeds in Contemporary English," which was published in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in the summer of 1989 (pp. 202-214). In this article Hartwig gives the rationale for the new translations of both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. We have no special difficulties with these changes, except, of course, the change under discussion.
2. The word "bride" for the church and "daughter of Zion" for Jerusalem would be examples of feminine imagery which clearly intends to include both men and women. I believe, however, that in biblical usage feminine imagery is the imagery of reception, of faith; while masculine imagery is the imagery of giving, of grace. God is our Father who gives His Son; Mary is our mother who received the Son unto herself and therein became the type of all believers.
3. I do fear, however, that Tiefel, Hartwig, and other respondents are too enamored of ideas such as a "living language" and "changing lexicon"—not that there are not such things and that by and large the changes involved in them are innocuous. However, in the present context we ought be aware that a social, political, and cultural ideology (i.e., feminism) is a major driving force behind the desire to excise "man" as signifying "humanity." What word do we have now which renders humanity *as a whole*

and yet is personal and not an abstraction? Is not in fact our language less a "living" one by this change—that is, less rich, less able to express an important idea? Of course, if "living" means merely what happens to obtain in the common speech as it changes, Tiefel *et alii* have a point. Perhaps, however, the point is not as significant as they think.

William C. Weinrich

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP IN THE LWF

The question has been posed and must be examined theologically as to whether the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK in Germany) too should aspire to associate membership in the LWF (Lutheran World Federation), as the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) intends to do. The following considerations are not a comprehensive statement of a position with reference to this question; and, in particular, they do not refer to earlier decisions of the SELK—for example, on the occasion of the World Federation Assembly in Hanover.

For an accurate answer to the question posed it is indispensable to consider first the constitution of the LWF, together with its bylaws,¹ and, secondly, the reality of the LWF, as it manifests itself in its statements, aims, and actions. A comparison with the old constitution and the interpretative introduction by the chairman of the Constitutional Commission are important here, as is the report of the general secretary at the first session of the Council of the LWF after Curitiba.²

A. Constitution and Bylaws

The assessment of the constitution of the LWF turns especially (1.) on the doctrinal basis, which also the associated churches must accept, (2.) on the self-understanding of the LWF, and (3.) on the meaning of associate membership.

1. Doctrinal Basis

The doctrinal article of the LWF constitution states the formulations customary in the Lutheran church: "The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life, and service" (Article II). It is not stated that Holy Scripture is God's word. This deficit is considerable in view of the fact that the old constitution, now no longer valid, still

spoke of the "infallible" norm, but the new constitution does not. The article still speaks, to be sure, of the Lutheran confessions as a pure exposition of the word of God, but the identification of word of God and Scripture cannot, in view of its general surrender, simply be taken for granted.

Furthermore, the doctrinal basis is no longer merely a doctrinal basis in the previous sense, but a confession. The LWF now "confesses" the Holy Scripture. Correspondingly it "confesses" the one, holy, catholic church (Article III).³ Associate membership presupposes the acceptance of this doctrinal basis, which has the nature of a confession. In view of the fact that the SELK and the LCA both have another position in respect of Scripture, any witness must properly begin by having the doctrinal basis clarified in this regard.

2. *Self-Understanding*

The self-understanding of the LWF is, not in the church-juridical but in the theological sense, unambiguously that of a church. All full members are in church fellowship with one another. As to its nature LWF designates itself as "a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship" (Article III). Thereby the marks of the church of which Augustana VII speaks are claimed, even if in abbreviated form, for the federation itself as a communion of such churches. Correspondingly, the LWF in its new constitution "confesses"⁴ and speaks of "the norm of its doctrine." It also regards mission and service as its task, and knows itself to be deeply committed to ecumenism.⁵ The establishment of the *status confessionis* toward two white African member churches also corresponds to the nature of the church.⁶

Not unimportant in this connexion is what the bylaws state about membership. According to these, churches which include strong non-Lutheran components, and so are Union [*unierte*] churches in some form, may become members and thereby stand in full church fellowship with the churches of the LWF. Also dual membership in other world federations is possible.⁷ An association with the LWF therefore means that we—theologically speaking—associate ourselves with a church, not only with a federation. And that church bears a decidedly "union" character.

But even in the church-juridical sense, in which the LWF understands itself as a communion of churches and not as a church, the new constitution goes beyond the old understanding of a federation. The important

clause, "It shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority," was not taken over into the new constitution.⁸ Evidently such action is now possible and corresponds fundamentally to the theological self-understanding of the LWF. The article on "Scope and Authority" provides, to be sure, that the LWF acts as the instrument of its autonomous member churches in matters committed to it by the member churches; but thereby an autonomous action on the part of the LWF, in the tasks named in the constitution, is by no means ruled out. This understanding fits the fact that the essay which introduced the change of constitution spoke expressly of the assembly and the council as legislative organs. All such things lie well within the tendency recognizable already in Budapest: "The LWF is an expression and *instrument* of this communion. It assists it to become more and more a conciliar, mutually *committed* communion by furthering consultation and exchange among its member churches of the Lutheran tradition . . ."⁹ (italics added). Autonomous action likely would affect especially planning, programmes, and their implementation, whereby the Office for Planning receives an important governing function.¹⁰

3. Associate Membership

In view of the nature of the question posed above, Article V.2 of the constitution is particularly important. It reads: "The Lutheran World Federation may recognize as eligible to participate in the work of the Federation non-member churches, councils, or congregations which accept the doctrinal basis set forth in Article II of this Constitution (Associate Membership). The granting, conditions and continuation of such recognition shall be governed by the bylaws." The following bylaws relate to this point:

2.4.3.1: An associated member church may take part in all activities of the Lutheran World Federation; its representatives to the Assembly have the right to speak, but may not take part in a vote or be elected to an office. The Council determines the membership contributions to be paid by associated member churches, applying the same criteria as with full membership.

2.4.5: The General Secretary at regular intervals reviews, with associated member churches, recognized councils and congregations, their relation to the LWF. One year prior to the Assembly the General Secretary reports on this to the Council.

Associate membership thereby presupposes recognition of the doctrinal

basis in Article II and demands membership contributions according to the same criteria as in the case of full membership. It allows participation in all activities of the LWF and the right to speak at the assembly. The question remains open whether associate membership means a partial acceptance of the constitution beyond the doctrinal basis, perhaps in those points in which one can agree. The report of the General Secretary at the council session in Chicago in 1991 could be understood in this direction, when it says: "The salient point here is that associate membership is open for those who accept the doctrinal basis of the LWF while not necessarily adopting the whole Constitution."¹¹ It also remains an open question whether offices other than elective ones may be occupied by representatives of associate members, but according to previous practice this possibility must be assumed.

Associate membership is, to be sure, not full membership, but it is really membership. That fact comes to expression in the partial acceptance of the constitution and in the membership contributions, but also in the distinction between associate membership, on the one hand, and recognized councils or congregations, on the other. The latter may, indeed, also take part in all activities, but have only observer status at assemblies and no right to speak.

Associate membership may by no means be seen merely as something static. The report of the General Secretary together with the paragraph on supervision (2.4.5) speak a clear language. Going on after the sentence cited above, the General Secretary explains: "While we welcome this opening and see it as a way for our member churches to *grow together* with other churches with whom we have the doctrinal basis in common but also with whom we share a commitment to mission and evangelization, we should beware not to make this an easy way to avoid the burdens and pains of *living in a mutually committed relationship*. By making associate membership possible, the LWF assumes the need for a *continued theological dialogue on what communion implies*. The conversations held in 1986-1989 between LWF and non-member Lutheran churches have contributed to this development"¹² (italics added).

Here the mutually obligating relation is quite clearly underscored and, as a presupposition for making associate membership possible, ongoing conversation about the implications of fellowship [communion] is mentioned.¹³ According to the whole root-orientation of the LWF, this point can only mean that from its side there will be pressure toward full membership and that associate membership is to be regarded only as an

upon the associated members; and it is deeply problematical to decide from the outset not to enter into this communion, and yet to accept associate membership, which is a preliminary step towards it.

B. Statements, Aims, and Actions

For an answer to the question posed above, one must draw not only on the constitution by itself, but also on the theological and churchly reality. Only then does the constitution really become understandable.

1. Realities

One ought not expect the theology of the LWF to be other than that of the churches which essentially support the LWF. A few exceptions aside, the SELK has no church fellowship with them. The reasons for this fact, which have to do essentially with the understanding of confessional obligation and of church unity, need not be rehearsed here. They have not, however, become less compelling with time—on the contrary, they have grown more so. By contrast, the churches of the Lutheran World Federation have church fellowship with each other and base it on unity of faith and confession, in accord with Augustana VII. This reasoning comes to expression also in Article III of the LWF constitution, which means that the understanding of the unity of the church, as it exists in the churches supporting the LWF, also governs the LWF itself. That this approach works itself out also in the understanding of the doctrinal basis in Article II is self-evident.

The SELK's profoundly different understanding of the nature and unity of the church thus refers also to the LWF. This conclusion is confirmed by the initiatives of the LWF itself. The LWF has become the decisive and normative engine for the Leuenberg Agreement and thus for church fellowship between the Lutheran, Reformed, Union, and pre-Reformation churches of Europe. The SELK has declined this concept as a new form of the Union. The LWF energetically promotes bilateral dialogues and pushes towards church fellowship, even when the results are theological compromises. It is deeply rooted in the ecumenical movement. Even if it strives to preserve Lutheran concerns within that movement, it is on the other hand obviously prepared to come together in full communion (fellowship) without theological unification. The General Secretary put this point as follows in Curitiba:

Lutheran ecumenical involvement is not limited to theological dialogues. As reports from the departments amply document and

dialogues. As reports from the departments amply document and as this address repeatedly illustrates, there is ecumenical cooperation in many phases of our work. Sometimes these have become possible because of the trust built between the partners by dialogues. Sometimes they are expressions of common discipleship even before theological issues are raised. Ecumenical awareness and engagement can make congregations come alive spiritually in new ways, discovering new dimensions to their life in the church and their common Christian commitment. Here is the growing edge of the ecumenical movement. We may well have come close to the end of the real possibilities of theological convergence with our dialogue partners. We must be attentive to *other ways* in which God's Spirit may be calling us to unity. And we must recognize that some of our differences will only be resolvable *after* we have come together and lived together in full communion [*italics added*].¹⁴

Here there is talk not only of an end of the possibilities of theological convergence—let alone consensus—but also of bringing about fellowship otherwise than by way of doctrinal unity, and of settling differences only thereafter—perhaps, as one must add. All this is a totally different understanding of the unity of the church and of confessional obligation from that represented by the confessional Lutheran churches.

But also the understandings of central theological matters cleave asunder. Reminders are in order of the doctrine of justification—and the disagreements about it in Helsinki—and of the facts that since the Leuenberg Agreement the Small Catechism's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is no longer required for church fellowship and that Scripture and God's word are not identified in the constitution. Reminders are needed also that with the programme "Peace, Justice, and Protection of the Creation" the distinction between the two kingdoms is set aside and—by no means last—that the LWF promotes the ordination of women with might and main. Furthermore, the doctrinal pluralism of the churches supporting the LWF continues in full cry.¹⁴

2. *Meaning and Results*

In the face of this reality one must now ask what associate membership means and what it can bring. What it means, according to the preceding observations, is this: one acquiesces in the self-understanding of the LWF in view of its doctrinal basis, and takes over, practically, its root-conception of unity, even if one theoretically opposes it. Associate

one's own understanding and a repudiation of the LWF's would not help here. For in foundational matters one would have to overturn the whole self-understanding of the LWF.

As to the question of what associate membership can bring, the possibility of bearing witness is especially emphasized. One must, however, consider that such witnessing always has a double aspect. A clear witness always makes plain the existing disunity. If witnessing is taken seriously, it can only lead to constant disagreements. Such a situation cannot be the purpose of associate membership. Finally one would then fall into the role of a constant theological watchdog and spoilsport. One can hardly do battle against "Reconciled Diversity" and yet join—if only as an associate—the LWF, which represents it. Nor may we leave out of account to what extent our work and strength would be determined no longer by us and our proper tasks, but by others, and to what extent we should be able to resist the pressure of others.

That there are in the Lutheran World Federation churches which value the witness of the confessional Lutheran churches should not be taken lightly. This witness, however, if only it is rendered, can be brought home also in other ways, without letting ourselves be drawn into an overall concept which we must reject. It makes more sense to serve one another at concrete places and in concrete cases.

Endnotes

1. The constitution is to be found in *LWF Report*, no. 28-29 (December 1990), pp. 141-144; the bylaws are to be found in the minutes of the meeting of the LWF Council in Chicago, 30 June-7 July, 1991, attachment 19.1, pp. 1-11.
2. James Crumley, Jr., "On Restructuring and Constitution," *LWF Report*, no. 28-29, pp. 137-140; Gunnar Staalsett, "Church without Frontiers: Responsibility and Tasks of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation," *LWF Documentation*, no. 30 (December 1991), pp. 14-28.
3. The old constitution had "acknowledges" rather than "confesses" in Article II. There was no sentence corresponding to the one cited from Article III.

4. Compare also the comments of General Secretary Staalsett in Curitiba, according to which the LWF is not a "free association," but what binds the member churches together "is essential to their being Lutheran churches—common subscription to a common confession" (*LWF Report*, no. 28-29, p. 16).
5. Ibid.
6. "This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system" (*LWF Documentation*, no. 30, p. 29).
7. "When an amalgamation of one or more Lutheran churches and one or more non-Lutheran churches occurs, then this united church may, after consultation with the respective world communions, apply for membership in the Federation, even if it is a member of another world communion or meets the conditions for such membership" (Bylaw 2.3.1).
8. The same is true of the clause: "nor shall it have power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to limit the autonomy of any member church."
9. *LWF Report*, no. 28-29, p. 138; see also p. 16.
10. "The planning office will monitor the pulse-beat of the world and of the member churches. What is happening? What influence will it have in five years? Ten years? Will there be a change in support patterns? To what should the Federation give greatest emphasis and where should that responsibility be lodged? How can our many programs be seen *together* as meeting the needs of the member churches?" (J. Crumley, *LWF Report*, no. 28-29, p. 139).
11. *LWF Documentation*, no. 30, p. 24.
12. Ibid.

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13. In this connexion one must read also Bylaw 2.4.1.e, according to which an application for associate membership must be accompanied by a declaration of the reasons "why associate membership or recognition rather than full membership is desired."
 14. *LWF Report*, no. 28-29, p. 17.
 15. In view of the practice of "life discipline," the LWF must be asked the question of doctrinal discipline in the light of the "norm of its doctrine." What happens when churches are not in accord with the confession? Doctrinal discipline, however, has always been consistently rejected by the LWF.

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(Translator's Note: Except for the LWF bylaws, the texts of the references made here have followed the official English versions. Since the English text of the bylaws, on the other hand, was not immediately available, translations of bylaw references have been made anew. Kurt Marquart.)