

MODERN ECUMENISM AND COOPERATION IN EXTERNALS

By George O. Lillegard

The Christian Church is a Church Militant here on earth and must remain such to the end of time. For it is called upon at all times to wage war, not only against the godless enemies of the church outside its ranks, but also against the traitorous elements within the camp—the wolves in sheep’s clothing who come but to destroy the souls of men. This means that it must contend against every form of error that crops up within the visible church, as well as against heathenism and false religions and philosophies (Acts 20:29ff; II Peter 2:1ff. etc.). True Christians, who would confess the whole truth of God, must, therefore, separate themselves from those who teach and advocate error. For they cannot contend against their error while at the same time recognizing them as Christian brethren and fraternizing with them on equal terms. This is the essential meaning of Romans 16:17 and similar passages. No matter what the error is, whether it be what men regard as small or what they consider important, the directions of Scripture are clear. We are to set the erring teachers right, and if they “consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Tim. 6:3), we are to exclude them from our spiritual fellowship, even though we may admit that they could still be Christian at heart, if the faith of their hearts is better than the confession of their lips. But *we* cannot look into the hearts of men and judge whether they are sincere believers or not. Seeing the sinful acts and false teachings, which the Word of God itself condemns so definitely, we must be guided in our attitude to them by that.

Therefore it is that the attitude of a church toward error and errorists forms the very touchstone of its loyalty to Christ. Many people today ridicule any talk of “unionism” as a sin, and call it “Pharisaism” and “legalism” to take a determined stand against any compromise with error. They tell us to be more “charitable” toward others who call themselves Christians; not to be so sure that only we are right and all others wrong; to recognize “the body of Christ” as it manifests itself in all the various church bodies; and, hence, to cooperate with all churches so far as possible or practicable. To stand apart from other churches is dubbed “separatism,” “isolationism,” etc., and determined efforts are made to gather all churches into one grand organization, which could be expected to make a far greater “impact upon the world” than the contending churches can make in their divided state. There have always, down through history, been those who tried to bring the opposing churches together. But hitherto their program has generally been to find the least common denominator of the various confessions, or to arrive at some compromise or ambiguous formula with which all parties would be satisfied. In recent years, however, the main effort of the unionists has been to bring about cooperation in so-called “externals” of church work. Some mean by this all the activities of the church—its missionary, educational, and charitable work. They believe it possible to cooperate in these fields of work, even though their teachings and confessions differ on many points. Others seek to limit their “cooperation in externals” to such matters as do not affect or concern their teachings or the strictly “spiritual side” of the Christian work. This form of cooperation has captured practically all the churches today and threatens also the peace and unity of the Synodical Conference. For in many parts of our country members of the Synodical Conference are cooperating with errorists in various ways, not only defending this on the ground that it is only the “externals” of their church work that are affected, but also expressing the hope that they in this manner can bring about the long-desired unity of the churches.

Hence, in view of the confusion in Synodical Conference circles in regard to so-called cooperation in externals, we present the following propositions:

- 1) Unionism is joint worship or joint church work with those who do not confess the true faith in all respects. Rom. 16:17; Matt. 7:15; II John 10, 11; Titus 3:10.
- 2) If orthodox Lutherans cooperate or associate with heterodox Lutherans in any phase of the Church’s work such as education, missions, charities, etc., they disregard the fact that joint church work with false teachers is unionism just as much as is joint worship. Ezra 4:1–3; II John 10, 11.
- 3) The test of so-called externals in church work is whether they may properly be carried on with all manner of churches and religious or civic organizations.

4) Since the National Lutheran Council, as well as the Lutheran World Federation, was organized to promote cooperation in church work among all Lutherans, without regard to doctrinal differences, we object to them as unionistic organizations and refuse to take any part in their activities.

I.

“Unionism is joint worship or joint church work with those who do not confess the true faith in all respects.”

It has been a generally accepted principle in all Christendom, and down through all church history, that there could be no cooperation in church work unless there was agreement on the points of doctrine and practice which the various churches or Christians deemed essential, not only to salvation, but also to effective, friendly cooperation. So far from considering the possibility of cooperating with other churches in the “externals” of their work, the respective churches often carried their opposition and enmity into fields quite outside their religion—into politics, business, social life, etc.—even persecuting with fire and sword those who disagreed with them. In America, where the churches were free to organize as they wished, they have split up into several hundred denominations, often for anything but scriptural or doctrinal reasons. It is, no doubt, as a reaction against this extreme sectarianism that so many attempts are being made today to unite all churches in some kind of external organization. The distinctive feature of modern union movements is that they no longer seek to bring about unity in doctrine but allow each church to teach as it pleases and seek only to bring about cooperation in the work of the church. Unity in doctrine, they say, is not only unattainable but undesirable. For, as Williams Adams Brown, of Union Theological Seminary, says in his book, *Toward a United Church*, (1946) with regard to the so-called Ecumenical Movement:

“Those who have united in the Movement have recognized that when finite and imperfect men are dealing with matters as high and deep as those which concern the Christian faith, one cannot expect complete agreement as to their meaning and implications. In any unity worthy of the name, there must be room for honest differences of conviction, not merely in unimportant matters of habit and preference, but even in matters of vital belief... p. 4)—What is new in the present movement is the type of unity to which the churches have committed themselves. This is a unity which has broken once and for all with the ideal of conformity.” (p. 16.)

That is, they do not even want to agree in doctrine but want truth and error, sound doctrine and heresies to have equal rights in the church on the contention that nobody knows what the real truth is anyway!

We received our first impressions of this Ecumenical Movement in China, where we heard Dr. John R. Mott, the recognized leader of the Movement, lecture to the missionaries in Nanking, the spring of 1913. Christian truth, he said, is like a diamond with many facets. One church sees one facet of that truth; another church sees another facet of it; a third church still another facet, and so on. In order to get the whole truth, the whole diamond, we must combine all the churches with all their distinctive teachings into one comprehensive body. Then the “rent and sundered body of Christ,” as they call all visible Christendom, will be made whole again.—As there are said to be 168 facets in a diamond, this makes room for practically all the major sects in the church today, so that everyone should be satisfied!

For 45 years we have heard the changes rung on this theme. We could multiply quotations from leading theologians in all churches, including the Lutherans, to show how they no longer distinguish between truth and error but demand equal rights for the most contradictory theories and beliefs, not excluding Catholic idolatry. Their watch-word is, “not compromise, but comprehension.” That is, the churches are to get together, not on the basis of a compromise formulation of doctrine, but on the assumption that the distinctive teachings of all churches are needed in order to arrive at the whole truth. Thus Dr. A. Nygren, President of the Lutheran World Federation, said in his report to the convention at Lund in 1947:

“The Gospel is so exceedingly rich that no section of Christendom can claim a full and exhaustive grasp of its richness. One Church has grasped more of it, another less. One has penetrated to the central things, while another has remained to a greater degree at peripheral points. One has grasped one side, the other another side. In this respect the churches can learn from each other and help each other to arrive at a simpler, richer, and deeper understanding of the Gospel.” (NLC *News Bureau Release*, June 30, 1947.)

And Dr. Ralph H. Long, formerly Executive Director of the National Lutheran Council, said with regard to Lutheran participation in the “World Council of Churches” which met in Amsterdam, August, 1948:

“We believe that the World Council will be a better balanced organization, if it has strong confessional groups within its ranks, than if it is made up of those who have little regard for confessional positions of all the churches in the ecumenical group, and this can best be accomplished by each denomination presenting a united front. We are definitely in favor of the ecumenical progress that has been made, and we want it to result in the strongest organization possible. This can result only from real honesty and a genuine purpose to cultivate a due respect for the right of each communion to adhere to and propagate its own confession.” (NLC *News Bureau Release*, July 1, 1947.)

The bland assumption all these advocates of the “Ecumenical Movement” make is that the various churches differ from each other because they emphasize different *truths*. The fact is, however, that it is their *errors* the sects emphasize most—the Calvinist his rationalistic predestinarianism, the Baptist his false doctrine of Baptism, the Episcopalian his unapostolic doctrine of “the Apostolic Succession,” the modernist his evolutionary theories, etc. The churches have separated from each other because they at some point or other departed from the standards of true Bible teaching, which is the only truly unifying power in the world. The Lutheran Church alone, in its public Confessions, the Book of Concord, sticks to the whole truth of God’s Word, letting every facet of it shine with the brilliance which belongs to it. Thus, e.g., when the Reformed Churches call the Sacraments mere *signs* of grace, while the Lutheran Church calls them *means* of grace, they are not emphasizing different facets of the same truth; but one denies a Bible doctrine which the other affirms. It is a demonstration of the superficiality and shallowness of modern man in religious matters, that so many people, including prominent theologians and church leaders even in Lutheran circles, should adopt this theory that each church has the right to its distinctive doctrines, no matter how contrary to Scripture they may be. The only unity that counts in the Christian Church is the unity in the faith, which it is the first duty of the Church to maintain, defend, and propagate. When church leaders forget this elementary fact and seek to turn the Church of Christ into a kingdom of this world, exercising the influence of its organizations and numbers on legislation, government, social and international affairs, etc., it is not strange that they should be drawn into such fundamentally anti-Christian movements as the modern “Ecumenical Movement.”

It would shed considerable light on the real character of the World Council and allied union movements today to review the origin and history of the Ecumenical Movement.*

The Movement is rooted in Modernism, Socialism, and Liberalism, and has had as its recognized leaders an international coterie of men who are exponents of the Social Gospel in theology and of International Socialism and Radicalism in politics. This is so obviously the case that Fundamentalist groups in our country have not only refused to join the World Council and its subsidiaries, but have organized an International Council of Christian Churches to counteract the World Council, even as they have organized The American Council of Churches and The National Association of Evangelicals, to counteract the radical Federal Council of Churches, or National Council of Churches with which most Lutherans are connected. In their *International Call*, issued in February, 1948, the officers of the American Council said:

* This has been done by the undersigned in an article published in the *Theological Quarterly of the Wisconsin Synod*, July, 1950.

“The projection of the proposed World Council of Churches has given ample evidence that those who believed in an infallible, inerrant Bible and the whole council of God revealed therein cannot be a party to that body. Its use in its leadership of prominent Christ-rejecting and Bible-contradicting ministers, its championship of the inclusivist church displaying complete doctrinal indifferentism with believers and unbelievers partaking of the communion, its union with the Greek Orthodox churches with their idolatrous mass, superstitious intercession to the Virgin and the Saints, its open invitation to the Roman Catholic Church to join, and its deceptive use of traditional Christian phrases while denying the historical meaning thereof—all combine to project an organization which will be expressive of apostasy and filled with abomination. The untold harm which such a body will do in misleading the nations, in opposing the pure Gospel, in closing doors to faithful missions, and in advancing socialism and political intrigue with the State can hardly be overstated. This situation challenges every Bible-believer throughout the world who desires to lift high the banner of the Cross, and to glory in the precious blood of the Lamb.”

Delegates from a considerable number of conservative groups in different parts of the world met in Amsterdam August 12 to 19, 1949, and organized an “International Council” to “stand against the World Council,” which met in the same place August 22 to September 9.

In spite of the patently modernistic character of the World Council, practically all Lutheran Churches in the world have joined it directly, besides being connected with it through the Lutheran World Federation. The ULC, the ALC, the Augustana Synod, etc., have joined. The ELC (Norwegian Merger) leaders tried to get it to join in 1946. They insisted that membership in the World Council would not involve their church in unionism; that it concerned only cooperation in “externals,” such as relief work in Europe, a “righteous and lasting peace based on Christian principles,” etc. The Church Council of the ELC said, as quoted in *Lutheraneran*, Oct. 1946:

“While the world burns, must we wait two full years before we can decide whether to join hands with fellow-Christians to put out, or at least check, the fire in a planned, organized attempt? Surely we are agreed with our fellow-Christians that a righteous and lasting peace must be based upon Christian principles. But still we must, at a time when every minute counts, wait at least two years before we can contribute our mite toward a united Christian effort to exercise influence on those who are to make the peace! We must wait two years before we can join in with the unanimous testimony of fellow-Christians against oppression of minorities, against the fateful signs of the times pointing to a new increase of the Fascistic spirit! —A frank recognition of the spiritual fellowship which we express in the third article of the Apostles’ Creed, (I believe—the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints) and, on the basis thereof, a presentation of a ‘united Christian front over against the situations that confront the churches all round the world’ is something else” (than unionism).**

Note the utter confusion of thought which identifies “the communion of saints,” the spiritual body of Christ, with all those who call themselves Christians throughout the world, the great majority of whom may be anything but true believers. It is only according as we preach the truth in Jesus Christ and testify against all error that we really build up the Church of Christ. But these “Lutheran” leaders propose to build the Church and make its influence felt in the world by joining hands with a multitude of people who deny, either *every* fundamental of the Christian faith, or at least many of the Biblical, Lutheran teachings, such as that concerning the inspired Word of God and the Holy Sacraments as divine means of grace. We expect our confirmands to know the difference between the visible and the invisible church, but these people do not!

At its convention in 1948, the ELC, as well as the Norwegian Free Church, voted decisively against joining the World Council. However, those who objected to the World Council because of its modernistic, Christ-denying character, have had nothing to say against the Lutheran World Federation, most of whose members belong to the World Council, and which as a unit was represented for some time by Dr. Michelfelder,

** Tr. from the Norwegian by L.

its Executive Secretary, in the World Council. And the Lutheran World Federation, too, has its full share of modernists and critics of the orthodox Lutheran faith. When people join hands to form a ring, they are connected not only with those whose hands they touch directly, but also with all those in the circle. So these ELC Lutherans were connected with the World Council, the National Council of Churches, and other modernistic, socialistic organizations through their membership in the Lutheran World Federation, whether they liked to admit it or not. And now they too have joined the NLC directly. Dr. Nygren, the President of the Lutheran World Federation, has been praised as a conservative Lutheran. Yet he and Bishop Aulén, who lead the so-called “Lundensian School” of theology, take considerable pains in their writings to show that they are “modern” in their outlook and far removed from traditional Lutheran orthodoxy. Thus Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, in summarizing the report of a commission headed by Dr. Nygren to the Lund Convention, says with regard to these Lund theologians:

“They have delivered Lutheran theology from the stale intellectualism which results from an orthodoxy which believed itself capable of preserving the Spirit of God in the bottles of ‘pure’ doctrine. The result is a theology which more than ever throws the church back in the Gospel and gives added meaning to the term ‘Word of God,’ but will not allow itself to be mechanized and materialized by formulas of inspiration so dear to rationalists of both the orthodox and pietist types.” (The *National Lutheran*, Fall, 1947, p. 6.)

It is evident, too, that the Lutheran World Federation will exert its influence toward breaking down the walls between Lutherans and other churches. Dr. Michelfelder said at Lund: “Our provincialism must come to an end. Since our Lutheran Church embraces almost half of Protestantism we must assume the largest share of responsibility. —The Lutheran Church should take its rightful place in the World Council of Churches.”

Thus there are few Lutherans today who take any definite stand against erroristic and heretical churches. They cooperate with them instead in more and more areas of their work, pleading at first, perhaps, that it is only in “externals” that they are cooperating, but very soon adopting the prevailing “ecumenical” view that “externals” means all branches of the work of the church. The Lutheran Church cannot retain its character as “the Church of the pure Word and Sacraments” when it ceases testifying against the errors of the Reformed and Catholic Churches. There is, accordingly, no greater or more important issue before our church today than this, that we not only keep separate from such organizations as the World Council, but also contend against them and fight them with the sword of the Word without ceasing. And this we must do, even if we stand alone or see one after the other of those who formerly took a firm stand against unionism succumbing to its blandishments and compromising with the world.

II.

“If orthodox Lutherans cooperate or associate with heterodox Lutherans in any phase of the Church’s work, such as education, missions, charities, etc., they disregard the fact that joint church work with false teachers is unionism just as much as is joint worship. Ezra 4:1–3; II John 10, 11.”

There are some allegedly conservative Lutherans who would condemn any unionistic activities with the Reformed, but who insist that it is in order to cooperate or associate in the work of the Church with anyone called “Lutheran.” The name, “Lutheran,” seems to cover a multitude of sins for them. The people concerned may be Modernists or Lodge members, who deny the inspiration of Scripture and question every important article of the Christian faith; and yet by some strange alchemy their calling themselves “Lutheran” is supposed to make them fit company for orthodox Lutherans. But the fact of the matter is that the differences which divide Lutherans into opposing camps are just as great as those which separate the Reformed sects from the Lutheran Church. There are even so-called Lutherans who depart from the Bible teachings on more fundamental points than do some of the conservative Reformed groups. It simply is not true that conservative Lutherans have more

in common with all other Lutherans than they have with any Reformed Church. The position of a Presbyterian like Dr. J. Gresham Machen, for example, tallied with our conservative Lutheran position on more points than that of many a Lutheran leader in “anti-Missourian” camps does.

“Liberal Lutherans”—liberal in their tolerance of error—may, indeed, seek to join hands with all other Lutherans. But this does not mean that they are willing to do so on the conservative Lutheran basis, dissociating themselves from all error. The old Hauge’s Synod, for example, consented to join the Merger of Norwegian churches in 1917 only on the condition that it should be allowed to continue its unionistic associations with the Reformed Churches in the Student Volunteer Movement, Laymen’s Missionary Movement, etc. Thus unionism with the Reformed became an integral part of the platform on which the Norwegian Merger was based, and it has grown like a cancer, until now that body has even joined the modernistic World Council of Churches. The United Lutheran Church has repeatedly invited the other Lutheran Churches to join it “on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions.” But it has made no move to break its connections with the radical National Council of Churches or the World Council. The sincerity of its subscription to the Lutheran Confessions can be tested by the simple expedient of asking it, whether it would be willing to give up all its contacts with the Reformed, in order to establish a true Lutheran union. Their answer would be a decided “no”—as anyone knows who reads their journals or has noted their fulminations against “Missourian separatism,” meaning our stand against unionism. They not only refuse to join us on a true Lutheran basis themselves but condemn us outright as “Pharisees” and loveless bigots for objecting to their flirtations with the Reformed, the Lodges, and the Modernists.

And yet there is a growing chorus of voices in our circles in favor of the proposition that all Lutherans can cooperate in various phases of church work where it would not be proper to unite with other Christian churches. Thus “The Lutheran Society, Inc.,” an association of Lutheran men of all synodical groups, in its “Resolutions” of May 12, 1947, said:

“Whereas the evidences of Lutheran unity are constantly increasing; Whereas differences in practice are disappearing among Lutherans and the trend toward a unified, sound confessionalism is growing; Whereas all Lutheran bodies have joined hands in providing service centers for those in the armed forces, in the spiritual care of prisoners of war, in relief work at home and abroad, in planning post-war reconstruction, and in many other ways, thereby doing more effective work without duplication of efforts or waste of funds; and Whereas a world in agony and fear needs the voice and work of a united Lutheranism; now therefore be it

“Resolved, that we express the hope that continued successful cooperation among Lutherans will lead to the solution of the problems of pulpit fellowship, Communion administration, transfer of members, and the holding of joint Lutheran services; and be it further

“Resolved that we prayerfully appeal to all Lutheran bodies to expand their efforts toward cooperation, which, God grant, may finally lead to a Lutheran Church which is truly united.”

“Lutheran Men and Women in America,” another of the hybrid organizations now afflicting our Lutheran Zion, advertises as its “Aims and Objects”:

“1. To develop better understanding among all Lutherans, and to encourage fellowship and cooperation in externals among Lutherans.

“2. To better acquaint the world at large, and the community in which this organization operates in particular, with the Lutheran Church and its activities.

“3. To help meet the great challenge which has come to all Christendom—and to create a voice in Hollywood to check juvenile delinquency.

“4. To encourage cooperation and joint action in projects and activities not contrary to synodical regulations.”

The “Federation of Lutheran Clubs” has a similar program, and has a considerable number of Synodical Conference Lutherans as members. There are also several organizations working in the field of social welfare and charities which unite Lutherans of all groups, e.g. “Associated Lutheran Welfare,” Seattle, Washington. According to its Executive Secretary, a Missouri Synod pastor, Rev. R. Spannaus, this “agency is considered an

outstanding experiment in Lutheran cooperation and an example of a timely program by leading Lutheran social workers" (*Inasmuch*, Feb. 1946). And it says that its most significant and important contribution to social welfare work is the "spiritual care" it alone can give. Apparently, then, it does not pretend to limit itself to "the externals" of charity work. In Washington, D.C., the "Lutheran Inner Mission Society," composed of members of Lutheran congregations regardless of their synodical affiliations, has as its aim to "inspire to a fuller ministry the Lutheran Churches in meeting the social and spiritual needs in their respective parishes and in the community." (*Luth. Witness*, March 9, 1948.)

Other cooperative endeavors in the field of education are the Theological Professors' Conferences, the "Luther Academy" of the ALC in which Missouri Synod members have taken regular part, and the Boy Scout Movement. We need not analyze them in detail, as all have this in common that they claim to deal only with the "externals" of church work and hence are said not to involve unionism, although they at the same time aim to bring about "Lutheran unity." Thus we read that the conference of Lutheran Theological Professors dealt, among other things, with "the contributions which the seminaries can make to Lutheran unity." The Theological Professors' Conference also arranged for the publication of a book entitled "What Lutherans are Thinking." According to the reviewer in *The Christian Century*, (Sept. 3, 1947), "it is remarkable in its unity."—Yet it contains both "a labored defense of biblical literalism and a cogent denial of it quite frequently repeated, a stultifying and mechanistic use of the debt-paying conception of atonement and a particular effective repudiation of it (pp. 308–309) when pressed beyond its validity. Here is the wooden kind of Lutheranism which takes its rise from the systematizers of the century after Luther and the vigorous criticism of it at the hands of those who have renewed the dynamic of their Lutheranism under a 'Luther renaissance.' "

But according to Dr. Paul H. Buehring of the ALC this book shows that "twenty-eight different writers representing seven different synods today can and do think alike and in harmony with the basic principles of the Lutheran Church." (*Theol. Quarterly*, Oct. 1947, p. 298). Evidently the contrary teachings referred to in *The Christian Century* are looked upon as merely "divergent opinions of various writers" (*The Preface*), none of which are "in conflict with the basic confession." The Missouri Synod members who wrote several chapters in this book may have presented Lutheran doctrine correctly in their particular essays, but they are still tarred with the unionistic sentiments and modernistic heresies which the book as a whole presents, so that it can be praised even by the ultra-radical writers of *The Christian Century* staff.

As for the Boy Scouts—Dr. Theo. Graebner in his later years defended that organization as "an external in which the Christian boy may participate without thereby giving up any part of his religious convictions and principles or entering into a spiritual fellowship." (*Toward Lutheran Union*, p. 235.) Some years earlier, Dr. Graebner published a tract on *Religion and Boy Scout Morality*, in which he criticized the Boy Scout Movement severely. It is notable that practically all of the weaknesses and dangers of that movement to which he pointed then exist in equal measure today, as the Wisconsin Synod has repeatedly shown. Yet some "Missourians" would apparently rather sacrifice their fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod than give up their Boy Scout troops and the connection with liberal Lutherans which they have established through the "Lutheran Boy Scout Movement."

The number of contacts which many Synodical Conference members are making with "Anti-Missourian" Lutherans today is almost beyond computation. There are Historical Societies, Liturgical Associations, Seminars, Theological Conferences, Lutheran Editors' Conventions, Chaplains' Associations, etc. The agreement drawn up by representatives of the National Lutheran Council and of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with regard to spiritual welfare work among the Service Men not only opened the door for unionistic practices in general, but even provided for "a unionistic administration of the Lord's Supper," as the Wisconsin Synod characterized it. The agreement states:

"3. When there is a chaplain or pastor of only one of the groups available, and members of the other group seek admission to the Lord's Supper, then Synodical membership is not a required condition.

"4. Chaplains or pastors in these cases may commune such as are 'conscious of the need of repentance and hold the essence of faith, including the doctrine of the Real Presence and of the Lord's

Supper as a means of grace, and profess acceptance thereof.’ ” (*The Lutheran Chaplain*, Christmas, 1956, p. 12.)

In the field of missions, too, there has been considerable cooperation or “coordination of effort,” as some like to call it. Here belongs “the spiritual care of prisoners of war;” much of the work done in “Service Centers” during the war, and in “post-war reconstruction.” There are Home Mission fields where agreements have been reached to leave certain areas to the NLC churches, other areas to the Missouri Synod. It is, of course, necessary to avoid all “sheep-stealing,” or encroachment upon the work of other Christian churches, whether Lutheran or Reformed. The true Lutheran does not proselytize. But by the same token it is wrong to turn our “sheep” over to the care of strangers to the flock.

Similarly in the work of Student Missions, there are places where the “Lutheran pastor in charge of student work is recognized on the campus as the Lutheran pastor representing all Lutheran groups,” both National Lutheran Council and Missouri Synod.

It is clear that the program of “cooperation in externals” has in many instances gone far beyond anything that can legitimately be called “externals.” This is, no doubt, because there has been a great deal of confusion as to just what was meant by “externals of church work.” For some mean by that all the activities of the church in the field of missions, education, and charities, while others mean only such activities as do not involve the “spiritual program” of the church, that is, the preaching of the Word, the “cure of souls,” and the administration of the Sacraments. Some defend all the organizations and cooperative efforts referred to above, while others condemn many of them. We need, then, to become clear on the principle that joint church *work* involves unionism just as much as joint *worship* does, when there is no agreement in doctrine. For the essential thing is to avoid fellowship with those who teach error in any phase of the work of the church, since its activities properly concern at all times and only the furtherance of the Gospel. In general, churches, *as churches*, should not concern themselves with things external to their “spiritual program” but should leave them to the civic associations that are so plentiful in this country and which Christians, *as individuals*, are free to join wherever their objectives are in harmony with the law of the land and Christian principles.

The returned Jews who set about to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem were told by their Samaritan neighbors: “Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.” The Jews did not accept their offer on the plea that it was only a matter of joint church *work*, which did not necessarily imply joint *worship*. They said: “Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel.” (Ezra 4:2–3.) So the true Lutheran will want to do all his church work without mingling in syncretistic, unionistic fashion with the many heterodox people who claim to be “seeking our God” but who actually depart from the revealed Word of God on one point after another.

One touchstone by which we can determine whether a certain activity concerns the “spiritual program” of the church or not may be found in this: Does it involve “prayer fellowship?” The cases referred to above, and many others like them, would do so. Hence, those who insist on practicing what they call “cooperation in externals” with heterodox Lutherans will be found defending “prayer-fellowship” with them also. Through some strange mental processes that it is hard to analyze they find it wrong to practice “pulpit and altar fellowship” with errorists but see nothing wrong in practicing “prayer-fellowship” with them. Scripture has nothing on which to base this distinction. It condemns all “spiritual fellowship” with errorists, while allowing Christians, indeed, to associate with them on the civic, business, and social plane. (I Cor. 5) We can be friendly toward Jews, Turks and heathens, but can no more *pray* with them than we can *worship* with them or *work together* with them in religious matters.

Prayer, if it is worthy of the name, surely should be regarded as “a spiritual exercise.” It is, of course, an act of man, something “external” in so far as it involves an activity of man, rather than the spiritual activity of God and His Spirit in the heart of man. But to distinguish between prayer fellowship and pulpit or altar fellowship in the manner that has become so popular, even in our circles today, is to involve oneself in sophisticated reasoning such as should be anathema in the church. All kinds of church work, all kinds of worship

should be carried on strictly in accordance with the Word of God, which is our one authority in all matters of both faith and life. “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. —And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness” (Isa. 8:20–22). The darkness that has fallen over such a large part of Christendom today—with whole continents that once were called “Christian” now under the brutal sway of Christ-hating Communists, and other large areas in the visible church groping in the dim light of Christ-denying Modernism, idolatrous Catholicism and a confused Protestantism—can be called a direct result of the indifference to pure doctrine and the tolerance of all sorts of heretical sects that has been so characteristic of the Church during the past century. There can be no hope for better things till Christians are willing to suffer persecution and want for the sake of the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” (Jude 3), without changing one jot or tittle of it. Not by building great church organizations to “make an impact on the world,” but by faithfully and diligently using the Word of God in its truth and purity shall we further the cause of God’s kingdom and fulfill our duties as “the salt of the earth,” preserving it from utter corruption.

III.

“The test of so-called externals in church work is whether they may properly be carried on with all manner of churches and religious or civic organizations.”

We have stated that “joint church work with false teachers is unionism just as much as is joint worship,” and have maintained that it is wrong to label any legitimate phase of the work of the Christian church as “externals,” in contrast with the public preaching of the word and the administration of the Sacraments as the only “internals.” There is no basis either in logic or in Scripture for the distinction that so many make between “pulpit and altar fellowship” with errorists—this, they concede is unionism—and the fellowship that is created by the more irregular or incidental contacts with errorists in the many cooperative endeavors of today.

This is not to say, however, that there are not cases where we in our church work may come in contact with other churches in such a way as to cooperate with them to an extent without any unionism being involved. There are, for example, questions concerning our relation to the State, where we may make common cause with other Protestants, or even with Catholics and Jews, without prejudice to our Lutheran Confessions. Thus when the Child Labor Amendment was debated in Massachusetts and other states, we appeared at the hearings in the State House as representing the Pastoral Conference of the Synodical Conference churches in Boston, alongside of an aggressive group of Catholic leaders; our opposition to that Amendment was based on concern for our parochial schools, as was the Catholic opposition. Other Lutheran groups gave us no support in this matter whatever. Many Socialistic Protestant groups were against us. It was obvious that we were not working together with Catholics because we felt that they were our brethren in the faith; we happened only to share the same position on a legislative measure which affected the work of the church. Neither was there any ‘prayer-fellowship’ involved, as there always is in the type of “cooperation in externals” to which we object.

Similarly, a Lutheran congregation may rent the church building of another denomination, or a Lodge Hall, without thereby becoming guilty of unionism. The connection with the sect or lodge is truly “external.” We may also furnish other churches with our statistics and procure copies of their statistics for our own use, “cooperating” with them to that extent, without thereby “fellowshipping” them in any manner. We could do the same for the State or for any secular organization. There may be instances in connection with the work of charities or missions where we have to deal with the State, and where our interests would be identical with those of all other churches, so that we could consult with them or “cooperate” with them in deciding upon our course.

We read in *Toward Lutheran Union*, p. 225:

“Efforts along the same lines (charities, etc.)—have all proved the need of cooperation of Lutherans rather than cooperation with all Protestant denominations even in external matters related to the welfare

field, education, the gathering of statistics, etc. Not only their doctrine, but their entire church life is different from that of the Lutheran Church.”

If cooperation with other Lutherans is encouraged on the plea that “their entire church life” is like ours while that of other churches is “different,” then it is clear that we are not dealing with “externals” at all, but with that which is the distinctive, spiritual work of the church. Such arguments are an admission that this “cooperation in externals” is really “joint church work” with errorists, as much to be condemned as “joint church worship.” For that matter, it is not true that “the entire church life” of all other Lutheran bodies outside of the Synodical Conference is so “different” from that of the Reformed Churches, or more like our own church life than the church life in those bodies is. We have in earlier years associated with various Lutherans who were definitely pietistic, Methodistic, and un-Lutheran in their whole church life; and, on the other hand, we have become intimately acquainted with Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and others whose “church life” was much more like that of the conservative Lutheran Church than is that of many called Lutheran. “What’s in a name?” A Lutheran errorist smells no sweeter for bearing the name “Lutheran.” And we should remember that the name Lutheran belongs properly only to those who subscribe to “God’s word and Luther’s doctrine pure” without addition or subtraction.

Therefore we say that the “test of externals in church work is whether they may properly be carried on with all manner of churches and religious or civic organizations.” If the matter at issue is actually an “external,” which does not involve the confession of the church or its spiritual program, then there could be no objection to joining in with Catholics, Jews, Masons, or any other organization that might happen to be concerned. And if the term, “cooperation in externals,” is properly defined and limited, it will not form the “back door” to unionism such as is being practiced to an increasing extent in our own circles today. We should, then, take a definite stand against those who regard as unionism only a formal exchange of pulpits and indiscriminate altar fellowship, and who regard as a mere “external” everything else—membership in the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council of Churches, the World Council, or any of the other unionistic movements and organizations of our day. It is high time that we faced the issue squarely, making the principle, *principiis obsta*, —“resist the beginnings”—our slogan and purging out the leaven of false doctrine ere it corrupt the whole lump.

IV.

“Since the National Lutheran Council, as well as the Lutheran World Federation, was organized to promote cooperation in church work between all Lutherans, without regard to doctrinal differences, we object to them as unionistic organizations and refuse to take any part in their activities.”

The ground was prepared for the formation of the World Council by a considerable number of unionistic organizations and movements, many of which were guided by the same men. The National Lutheran Council has a similar history. In New York City, The Lutheran Society, representing all groups of Lutherans, decided in 1916 to create an agency “to give wide publicity to the Lutheran Quadri-centennial and to call attention to the profound influence of the Reformation on modern history.” (O. Hauge, *Lutherans Working Together*, p. 23.) This agency became in January 1918, *The Lutheran Bureau*, with Dr. O. H. Pannkoek as director. Mr. Hauge says, (op. cit. p. 23–4):

“The Bureau is of importance in the historical record because it represents the pioneer effort of American Lutherans to cooperate in the development of a practical program relating to the external functions of the Church. It not only played a fundamental role in rallying Lutheran forces behind the war effort, but constituted a notable attempt to achieve mutual understanding and to lay the foundation for still closer cooperation.”

In 1917, “The Lutheran Brotherhood of America,” an organization of laymen representing most of the Lutheran churches, was formed to “further the religious, moral, and social well-being of the soldiers of the United States at the different camps,” by setting up recreation centers, etc. At the same time, “The National Lutheran Commission for Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Welfare” was organized to carry on religious work among the armed forces. Practically all the Lutheran bodies outside of the Synodical Conference belonged to this organization, and the Missouri Synod also agreed to “coordinate its efforts with the program of the Commission.” The Lutheran Bureau, under Dr. Pannkoke, was assigned the task of promoting the campaign to raise funds for the work of the commission.

It was this “Army and Navy Commission” that was directly responsible for the organization of the National Lutheran Council, “to carry on certain phases of its work and to give form to the process of integration apparent in the historical development of American Lutheranism.” Meetings were held in Harrisburg, Pa., on July 17, 1918, in Pittsburgh, Pa., on August 1, and in Chicago on September 6, 1918. Thirty men, representing eight Lutheran groups and the Army and Navy Commission, attended the last meeting, where the National Council was formally organized, with Dr. H. G. Stub as the first president.

Dr. Stub sought to define the purpose of this new organization in an address to the Executive Board, saying:

“The National Lutheran Council will have a far-reaching scope, involving functions of a character which as far as possible must be clearly defined in order that no misunderstanding may arise and the impression be created that by the organization of the National Lutheran Council already a federation of the different Lutheran synods has been effected. —At this stage we must be very careful not to give the impression that the Council is to be the exponent or spokesman of a United Church, in matters of doctrine, but only an organization dealing with matters of a more external character. It is my earnest hope that the Council may be a great help in bringing the different Lutheran Church bodies together in a great American Lutheran Church, but we must go slowly.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 38–39.)

Thus, instead of first seeking agreement in doctrine in order that all churches might work together effectively, the program was to work together in the hope that doctrinal agreement and eventually one united Church would result. Social contacts, mutual interests in the practical work of the Church, the alleged economy and greater efficiency in carrying out the work that would result from pooling their resources—these were relied upon to unite the churches rather than the doctrines of the Bible. It is not too much to say that many Lutherans have had more faith in the efficacy of the coffee cup as a unifying agency than in the Means of Grace! The emphasis on cooperation in externals has led, and is bound to lead, to a complete externalization of the Church and its work accordingly.

To begin with, the following “statements of purpose” were adopted by the NLC to stress the fact that cooperation would be in externals only:

“1. To speak for the Lutheran Church and give publicity to its utterances on all matters which require an expression of the common conviction and sentiment of the Church.

“2. To be the representative of the Lutheran Church in America in its attitude toward or relations to organized bodies outside of itself.

“3. To bring to the attention of the Church all such matters as require common utterance or action.

“4. To further the work of recognized agencies of the Church that deal with problems arising out of war and other emergencies; to coordinate, harmonize, and unify their activities; and to create new agencies to meet circumstances which require action.

“5. To coordinate the activities of the Church and its agencies for the solution of new problems which affect the religious life and consciousness of the people, eg., social, economic, and educational conditions.

“6. To foster true Christian loyalty to the State, and to labor for the maintenance of the right relation between Church and State as distinct, divine institutions.

“7. To promote the gathering and publication of true and uniform statistical information concerning the Lutheran Church in America.”

In *Toward Lutheran Union* (p. 226) Dr. Theo. Graebner says, after listing the “externals” quoted above:

“The Missouri Synod has never passed judgment on this program and these principles as contrary to our views on church fellowship. It is cooperating at this writing (1943) with the National Lutheran Council in the maintenance and management of Lutheran Centers for men in the armed forces. Efforts to coordinate the work of our Emergency Planning Council in the problems arising through the migration of workers in the war industries are now under way.”

But the Missouri Synod *did* “pass judgment on this program.” For *The Lutheran Witness* for Nov. 12, 1918, contains a strong indictment of *The Lutheran Bureau*, of which Rev. Pannkoke was the director, and says with regard to its activities on behalf of all Lutherans including those in the newly formed National Lutheran Council:

“To unite for church work all who call themselves ‘Lutherans’ though they differ in many points, is bald unionism. —The Editors would be justly accused of hypocrisy if they fail at this time to protest against this most regrettable attempt to give unionism domicile in our own Synod” (p. 360).

And in the same issue, Dr. Graebner had this to say about “Christian Fellowship”:

“Christian fellowship exists where the members of one Christian body worship jointly with those of another church-body, or kneel together with them at the same altar, exchange pulpits, accept members upon letters of membership from the other body, extend ministerial calls to pastors in the other body, engage in joint mission-work and charitywork, join their efforts in establishing colleges, in publishing books and periodicals, or in organized work along other lines of church activity.

“According to the principle on which the Lutheran Church is built, there must be Christian fellowship with those only who maintain, by public profession, the same form of doctrine; testifying their obedience to the words of Christ, not only in positive statement, but also in negative, that is to say, by testifying against error as well as by teaching the truth” (p. 359).

In this connection, he quotes I Tim. 6:3–5; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10; I Tim. 5:22; and Rev. 2:14f., 20. The phrase “organized work along other lines of church activity,” in the above, would seem to include also such “externals” as those listed in the NLC program. Furthermore, the Missouri Synod refused to join the NLC on the ground that its whole program was unionistic, and in that manner certainly “passed judgment” upon it. *The Lutheran Witness* for March 16, 1920, calls attention to “the wisdom of standing aloof from inter-synodical movements,” stating:

“Unless agreement in doctrine and in the application of doctrine to church-life and church-work is first reached, federated movements are premature, and will only lead to new and most unpleasant embroilment, unless, indeed, the more conservative element, through a mistaken sense of honor, remains in an alliance which oppresses conscience since it involves a denial of the truth” (p. 86).

The simple fact is that the NLC was a thoroughly unionistic organization from its inception, and that the program limiting its activities to *res externae* was but the bait, in effect if not in intent, by which it lured unsuspecting Lutherans into its trap and disarmed suspicious Lutherans, so that they would not attack it before it was firmly established. Hence it began almost at once with activities which even some members regarded as *res internae*. It helped to establish a Lutheran Home Missions Council, as well as a Foreign Missions Council, to coordinate the work on the Home and Foreign Missions field. And it carried on relief work for European churches and missions, which went far beyond mere “physical relief.” At the meeting of the whole Council in November, 1919, the representatives of the various Lutheran bodies discussed doctrinal matters, but could arrive at no agreement.

However, as Mr. Hauge wrote:

“All who were present manifested an eagerness for concord. A sense of urgency was lent to these deliberations by the generally accepted conviction that the Council program would necessarily require some sort of cooperation involving more than *res externae*. As Dr. Stub explained: ‘The reconstruction work in different countries of Europe could not be limited to giving physical relief. It would go much further. The same may be said of the work in industrial centers, not to speak of the adjustments that in specific cases would have to be made on the home mission fields in order to avoid friction, division, and the organization of new congregations where there already were one or more Lutheran churches.’ ” (op. cit. p. 46f.)

The Iowa Synod protested against this extension of the work of the Council to *res internae*, and withdrew when its protests went unheeded in 1920. Mr. Hauge says, (op. cit. p. 47):

“This withdrawal and subsequent attacks by the editors of *The Lutheran Witness* and others created a situation which almost finished the Council. It did survive, and perhaps in the end was strengthened by tribulation—but those were anxious days.”

During the next few years the NLC devoted itself in the main to relief in Europe and in the mission fields where European Societies had labored. Largely as a result of this work, it became instrumental in arranging for the first “Lutheran World Convention,” held in Eisenach, Germany, August 19–26, 1923. Mr. Hauge says (op. cit. p; 49), with regard to this gathering:

“One hundred and sixty-five delegates were present, representing the 65,000,000 Lutherans of twenty-two nations. —All Lutherans of the world except the one and a half million members of the Synodical Conference in the United States were represented there.

“In the course of that historic meeting it became apparent that the Church possessed a true ecumenical character, a unity of spirit and inner life, a genuine internationalism. As a tangible expression of this unity the Convention adopted the following doctrinal statement: ‘The Lutheran World Convention acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and infallible norm of all church teaching and practice, and sees in the Lutheran Confessions, especially the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther’s Small Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God.’ ”

Here it was obvious that the American Lutheran churches were establishing fraternal relations with many nominal Lutheran churches in Europe, which were not only thoroughly unionistic and indifferentistic in their own doctrine and practice, but were also honeycombed with modernism and rationalism. Their adoption of the Lutheran Confessions meant no more than the recital of the Apostles’ Creed does to the modernist, who puts something entirely different into it than what the words historically and legitimately convey. Therefore Dr. M. Reu, whom none could justly accuse of holding rigoristic views regarding “unionism,” felt it incumbent upon him to explain how he and his church could take part in the Lutheran World Convention, as well as in the National Lutheran Council, which they joined again in 1930. He says in his lecture on “Unionism,” after admitting that it would be unionism to “establish church fellowship with the United Lutheran Church under such circumstances,” (referring to its Modernism, Lodgery, etc.):

“If membership in the Lutheran World Convention were to involve church fellowship in the narrower sense of that term, then our participation would actually be unionism because in that case we would have church fellowship with those who teach destructive errors or to say the least, refrain from exercising and requesting doctrinal discipline against such errorists.

“The situation, however, assumes an entirely different aspect when it is remembered that the Lutheran World Convention is no more than a free conference, which may express itself on points of faith and life but has no power to pass binding resolutions” (p. 26).

He admits that to the majority of the Convention members, the Confessional paragraph quoted above was “no more than an empty form.” But he calls attention to the fact that he himself had brought “testimonies of Lutheran truth in distinction and opposition to the views of the majority” (p. 26), not only at Eisenach, but also at the Conventions held in Copenhagen in 1929 and in Paris in 1935. Then he says:

“We opposed the attempts to modify the nature of the Lutheran World Convention as a free conference so energetically that they were nipped in the bud. Every form of union with the Reformed was successfully combated, even merely permitting Reformed Christians to partake of the Lord’s Supper as visitors. —To date we have been successful in preventing both of these innovations, (viz., the ever recurring attempts to change the free-conference nature of the World Convention, and on the other hand, the repeated suggestion to place a communion celebration on the program of the meeting), and on my motion the American Lutheran Church resolved at Sandusky to instruct its delegates to prevent such departures also in the future. It is obvious that membership in the Lutheran World Convention does not involve unionism—unless prayer fellowship with those who confess the second article of our Catechism as sincerely as we do, but otherwise retain associations which we must reject, be defined as unionism” (p. 29f.).

With regard to the National Lutheran Council, Dr. Reu says in the same essay:

“There was, indeed, a period when membership in the National Lutheran Council entailed the danger of unionism, since the Council did not sufficiently confine its activities to the sphere known as *res externae*. This was one reason why the former Synod of Iowa for a number of years did not hold membership in the Council. But when the Council itself was clearly defined as an agency which represents the various constituent church bodies within accurately circumscribed limits in certain external matters, this danger was reduced to a minimum. We do not deny that this danger still exists; but it does not lie within the constitution but in the lack of vigilance on the part of those who should strictly observe the constitution. Of course here too we are in prayer fellowship with Lutherans with whom we have not established church fellowship.” (op. cit. p. 30.)

Since Dr. Reu wrote this, (1940), both the Lutheran World Convention and the National Lutheran Council have changed radically, so that, in accordance with the above statements, he would condemn them today as definitely unionistic organizations and would refuse to be identified with them in any way. For the Lutheran World Convention has lost its “free conference character” entirely, since it at Lund, Sweden, in 1947, adopted a Constitution and organized permanently as “The Lutheran World Federation.” A communion service marked the opening of the assembly, June 30, 1947. The *National Lutheran* (Fall, 1949, p. 15) says:

“When we knelt with the representatives from all the world before the altar to receive the sacrament, it was the symbol of a new beginning. Out of the loosely organized Lutheran World Convention came the firm organization of the Lutheran World Federation. Thus organized, World Lutheranism will appear at the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948.”

Thus those who have joined the Lutheran World Federation have established full pulpit- and altar-fellowship with the many modernistic Lutherans in the world and can no longer say that they practice only “prayer-fellowship” and cooperation in externals.

As for the National Lutheran Council—it may be said that it in the early ’30’s limited itself more to its official program than it had done before, since the relief work for European churches and missions was by that time turned over to the Lutheran World Convention and the “depression” forced it to lead a struggling existence. But under the leadership of Dr. Long it soon expanded its work and took more and more responsibilities for church activities that were anything but *res externae*. Thus in the “depression years” it arranged for the appointment of chaplains and pastors to “minister to the spiritual needs of young men in

Civilian Conservation Corps Camps.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 65.) When it in 1936 sought to work out an agreement with the Missouri Synod for more such workers, the Missouri Synod’s Home Mission Board answered:

“There are certain principles involved touching our doctrinal position which causes us not to favor the conference which you suggest.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 65.)

In 1939 the Council established, in consultation with the American Lutheran Conference Commission on Inner Missions and the National Lutheran Inner Missions Conference, a “Lutheran Welfare Agency” “to further the development of real Christian welfare service through the Churches and to coordinate the inner mission, charitable, and social welfare work of the constituent bodies.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 69.)

When the war broke out in Europe, the National Lutheran Council again undertook the support of orphaned Foreign Missions and other relief work. In Canada it organized the “Canadian Lutheran Commission” “to provide religious service for civilian internes, to provide literature and a spiritual ministry to the Lutheran men in the army, navy, and air corps, to minister to Lutheran prisoners of war in Canadian camps, and to serve as the agency through which Lutheran Chaplains might be appointed to the Canadian armed forces.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 75.)

In 1941 it organized “Lutheran World Action” to raise the funds required for its relief work and the growing work for the armed forces of our country. This same year it also concluded arrangements with the Army and Navy Commission of the Missouri Synod for “the co-ordination of the Service Commission’s work with a similar program sponsored by” the Missouri Synod.

Mr. Hauge says with regard to this:

“It was explained that this was simply an effort to coordinate the work sponsored by the two groups, that it was not cooperative in the strict sense of the word. Whatever the proper description of the new relationship, it was a mutually beneficial arrangement that provided for the joint maintenance of service centers in several of the largest camp communities with resulting economies” (p. 70).

Encouraged by this cooperative spirit in the Missouri Synod, the other Lutherans made an effort in 1942 to establish an “All-American Lutheran Convention,” in which the Missouri Synod might take part, its “participation, naturally, to be confined to externals” (p. 82). But the Missouri Synod decided to remain apart and to work with the Council only in certain specific tasks. The same year the Council established a new department, “The Commission on American Missions,” to “correlate the activities of Home Missions under the National Lutheran Council,” and to carry on mission work particularly in the new war industrial centers.

Thus at the end of its first 25 years the National Lutheran Council could issue a statement which reads in part:

“We thank Him for those impulses of love flowing from our most holy faith, which have broadened their scope till mutual approach and cooperative endeavor in missions and in works of mercy are inevitable. —We entreat ever anew His Mercy and Grace—to keep the unity of spirit thus engendered in the bonds of peace” (op. cit. 98–9).

In 1944 the Council was reorganized under a new Constitution (formally adopted in 1945), which no longer made any pretense of confining itself to such externals as it had emphasized before. Among the “Purposes and Objectives” of the Council, according to this new Constitution, we find these:

“To witness for the Lutheran Church on matters which require an expression of faith, ideals, and program.

“To further the interest and the work of the Lutheran churches in America.

“To undertake and carry on such work as may be authorized by the participating bodies in fields where coordination or joint activity may be desirable and feasible, such as publicity, statistics, welfare work, missions, education, student work, and other fields.”

This seems to cover the whole field of church work and leaves little to the imagination. Since the members of the Council are no closer to each other doctrinally than they were before, we have here naked, unashamed unionism—no longer behind the fig-leaf called “cooperation in externals.” Thus there is now full-fledged cooperation in the field of student service. Dr. Long says:

“One of the first advances taken by the Council under the new Constitution was the favorable response to proposals from the United Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Conference to take over their student service in a united ministry. The functions of this service as outlined include the following: To conserve the faith, to develop the loyalty, and to cultivate the spiritual life of Christian students; to discover, develop, and direct future leaders of the Church; and to win students for Christ and His Church.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 108.)

Dr. Ralph H. Long summarizes the case for the National Lutheran Council, in *Lutherans Working Together*, as follows:

“The exigencies of the first World War created specific problems which made it imperative for the Lutheran Churches in America to organize the National Lutheran Council as their common agency for united action. After more than a quarter century of service, another critical situation arose which demanded even greater cooperation. Moreover, during these years, mutual confidence was quickened to such a degree that a genuine desire was at hand to enlarge the scope of joint endeavor.

“Meanwhile efforts made during the thirties and early forties to bring about greater unity and unification by theological formulas were somewhat disappointing. It now appears that through the process of an ever-widening cooperation in the work of the Church through the National Lutheran Council, the desired goal may ultimately be reached. The future will no doubt demonstrate the wisdom of this approach and indicate still other fields for united endeavor. For the participating churches and for the National Lutheran Council a new era has dawned.” (Hauge, op. cit. p. 114.)

It is obvious that Dr. Reu would condemn the Council today as a unionistic organization, if he were still here and of the same mind as to what constitutes unionism as he was in 1940. And yet some Missourians are far more ready to cooperate with it now than they were years ago when its program was much less boldly unionistic. Dr. Theo. Graebner, writing on “Lutherans move toward Union,” in *United Evangelical Action* for March, 1944, (the organ of the “National Association of Evangelicals”) says:

“A number of significant arrangements have resulted from the religious implications of the war effort. The National Lutheran Council has been able to coordinate its work for the spiritual care of the armed forces with similar efforts of the Missouri Synod. For the first time, the Missouri Synod has entered into coordination with other Lutherans in a joint task. Service centers similar to the U.S.O., but emphasizing religion as well as recreation, have been established in 58 cities and of these, 27 are under joint National Lutheran Council—Missouri Synod management. —In the Lutheran Centers, service pastors from all Lutheran bodies labor in comity side by side.

“More recently, a Commission has been established jointly by the National Lutheran Council and the Missouri Synod for the spiritual care of German prisoners distributed over a large number of camps in the United States. —Conferences are being held at this writing for the inauguration of an all-Lutheran effort for post-war work in Europe and in the mission fields once administered by German and Scandinavian Lutherans. For the care of Lutheran youth in the nation’s capital, a joint National Lutheran Council and Missouri Synod office has been established in Washington.”

In the same paper, he reports with evident approval the formation of a Federation of all Lutherans in the “Quad Cities” (Rock Island, etc.), which, he claims, “marked a significant turn in the relationship of the four Lutheran bodies which represent more than 80% of the membership of that denomination in the United States.”

A determined effort was made at the Chicago Convention of the Missouri Synod in 1947 to have it join the National Lutheran Council. An overture by Dr. L. Meyer illustrates the confused state of mind which has found lodging in some areas of the Missouri Synod with regard to the whole union program of today. First he presents a number of *wrong* reasons for joining the Council:

“The over-all picture of Christianity in the world today demands that the Church present a united front against its enemies of materialism, humanism, and atheism. The next decades will decide whether or not a large part of the world will continue to live under the moral code of Christianity or of paganism.

“The next decades will also determine whether or not Lutheranism will continue to survive as the largest Protestant church body in the world or whether it will shrink into a subordinate position. For that reason, Lutheranism should be concerned about its survival, and present a world-united front.

“Lutheranism in America should present a united front because it owes the interest on the pounds which it has received from God to the rest of Christianity in America.”

He finds also nothing seriously wrong with the new Constitution of the National Lutheran Council. Yet he argues against any full participation in the Council, because it, as he shows in detail, does carry on unionistic activities:

“The following fields, which we believe to constitute major portions of the National Lutheran Council’s planning and work, namely, student welfare work, missions among Jews, Negroes, and other minority groups, home missions, the publication of *The Lutheran Outlook*, youth work, postgraduate seminary work, are fields in which we cannot cooperate unless we are ready to change our whole definition of what constitutes unionistic practice.”

All these unionistic activities are provided for by the Constitution which Dr. Meyer finds satisfactory; yet he argues against joining the Council. The result of all this confusion was that the Missouri Synod decided to cooperate with the Council “in matters agreeing with Synod’s principles.” The trouble in the Missouri Synod seems to be that it is trying to hold together two elements that are pulling in opposite directions—to ride two horses at the same time, though one goes right and the other left. The result is bound to be a split sooner or later.

The Missouri Synod has also taken a more friendly attitude to the Lutheran World Federation than before, in spite of the obvious fact that this Federation is far more unionistic than ever and has lost whatever “free conference” characteristics it once possessed. For the first time it sent, officially, several “observers,” who according to reports took active part in the Lurid Convention—one even acting as “official interpreter.” They came away from the Convention apparently very favorably impressed by its alleged conservatism. Many leaders in other Lutheran churches have “expressed great joy that the Missouri Synod came in as observers” and are sure that it will soon be a full-fledged member. A number of prominent Missourians took part in making propaganda for the Lund Convention and the Lutheran World Federation in the so-called “Seminars” sponsored by the ALC through the year 1947–1948. *The American Lutheran*, of course, made propaganda for this unionistic cause also. We are told that World Lutheranism needs “the tone and timbre” of conservative and evangelical Missourians to complete the harmony. The same argument is used for joining the World Council of Churches. Thus Bishop Fjellbue of Norway in his speech at Boston under the auspices of the World Council expressed the conviction that “the Lutheran instruments were needed to complete the orchestra of Christ’s Kingdom.” He voiced no fear of finding the other instruments out of tune with the Lutheran; his concern was only that the Lutheran instruments might play false, which would be too bad! It is a part of the broad-mindedness and false charitableness of our day to be very modest and humble about assuming that our Lutheran Confessions are the true Bible doctrine and that we can be sure of possessing the whole truth of God’s Word. No, we must admit that the man who holds opposite beliefs may be more right than we are! Thus even the *Lutheran Witness* “senses a danger to the future of our synod as an evangelical body” in the claim that we “of the Missouri Synod more consistently than others proclaim the truths which we confess with all who subscribe

to the Lutheran Confessions and make them operative in the life of the Church.” (May 4, 1948, p. 150.) It finds “a note of arrogance” in such claims.

It is, indeed, possible to be “arrogant” even about such a holy matter as the true Christian faith. But arrogance is much more likely to be found among those who hold and advocate false doctrine than it is among those who “contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” Note, e.g. the arrogant manner in which those who seek to live up to the old established Lutheran principles regarding unionism have been charged of late with “separatism,” “lovelessness,” and other sins and vices. There is true love and charity only where divine truth is first of all maintained and defended against all adversaries. The “love” and “humility” which surrenders even one iota of that truth is of the devil and will in God’s own time be unmasked as the hypocrisy it is.

In 1919 Dr. Theo. Graebner writing in the *Lutheran Witness* (p. 180ff.) on “Two Types of Lutheranism” said:

“How shall we strengthen those American Lutherans—let me say, also those Merger Lutherans (for there are such)—who are aware of the ‘life-and-death struggle’ which is going on, and who come out openly on the side of the right? Surely, by maintaining in our own body an unbroken front against the incursion of the lodge-evil and of unionism. Let synodical officials perform their duty; but, above all, let us all be awake to our responsibilities. Better a thousand times a Missouri Synod of only 10,000 souls, but faithful, than a body of a million, honey-combed with the lodge-spirit and infected with unionism—that lethal leprosy of the Church. Let us stand firm—no matter what losses in membership and outward influences our stand may entail; the Lord must look out for that, it is none of our business. A Missouri Synod growing lax in practice, refusing to see the stealthy influence at work, afraid to testify, afraid to bring offenders to book, afraid to lose a congregation here or there, which dispenses itself from obedience to the Word of God, —a Missouri Synod growing effete, smug, and spineless, boasting of numbers while it permits dry rot to destroy its inner life, would not only be the kind of Church which Christ shall spew out from His mouth, but would bring down others into ruin and prove a traitor to all Lutheranism. This is the plain lesson of the facts...”

As a result of the activities of a considerable number of prominent Missourians, the days may not be far distant when there will, indeed, be only some “10,000 souls” standing on the old ground that Missouri held so bravely for a century. The signs of “dry rot” are multiplying about us. It is not enough for us to *talk* about the evils of these latter days. We must *do* something, even at the cost of being labeled as “separatists,” “isolationists,” “disturbers of the peace of Zion,” and other such opprobrious terms in the unionists’ well-stocked vocabulary of abuse. We must testify openly and publicly against every form of unionism so long as there is opportunity for us to do so with some hope of gaining the erring brother. We must separate ourselves from him as soon as it is evident that he no longer will accept rebuke, but sets himself up instead as a judge over us, impugning our motives, repudiating our Scripture-based teachings, flaunting his sin openly and proudly and “calling the evil good.” If we do not do this, we will lay ourselves open to the charge of being just as unionistic as those whom we criticize, since we too will be maintaining fraternal relations with such as set aside the authority of Scripture and insist on teachings and practices contrary to the word of God. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” There is no guarantee that we will not go the way of better men before us into unionism and modernism, unless we seek daily to be faithful to the Word God has given us and by daily repentance and renewal keep the humility and meekness of spirit which alone will enable us to walk the narrow way that leads to life.