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Contents

PAGE

EDITORIAL

To the Brethren of the Church	3
George Dolak: A Tribute	5
"WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR?"	7
HERMANN SASSE, Immanuel Theological Seminary, North Adelaide, Australia	
THE SUICIDE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN THE SIXTIES AND A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR ITS RESURRECTION	24
JOHN WARWICK MONTGOMERY, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois	
BOOK REVIEWS	44
BOOKS RECEIVED	69

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"What is the Sacrament of the Altar?"

BY HERMANN SASSE

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1.

The Lutheran Church of Australia accepts unanimously and wholeheartedly the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions on the Lord's Supper. It confesses unambiguously, in the sense in which Luther understood the words, concerning the Sacrament of the Altar: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself." It is not conservatism and theological traditionalism which causes us to take this stand. We are fully aware of the problems, exegetical and historical, dogmatical and ecclesiastical, implied in such a confession in our time. We have learned to regard this consensus not only as a great inheritance of our history, but as a gift of divine grace. We are a small church, a minority within a small nation at the fringe of the vast world of the non-Christian nations of Asia. We have grown together out of many traditions. Our early fathers came from Prussia to find a country where they were able to live, without the interference by the state, according to the dictates of their c o n s c i e n c e, and to build up the Lutheran Church. They were later joined by immigrants who for different reasons were seeking a new home but who had a Lutheran background in Germany or Scandinavia. When our church had become English speaking, Christians who came from other denominations joined us. Our first pastors came from Prussia. They were joined by men who had been trained at great mission centres such as Hermannsburg, Basel and Neuendettelsau. Others came from America, partly after years of missionary service in India. The great conservative synods of the American Middle West also exercised a strong influence, such as Missouri, Iowa and Ohio. This variety of backgrounds and theological traditions explains why deep theological differences have often divided us. These differences, however, have not destroyed our loyalty to the Lutheran doctrine of the sacrament. Luther's simple and (as we believe) Biblical doctrine on the Sacrament of the Altar in the words of the Small Catechism, as our children learned them and as they even belonged to the act of confession with which many of our synods were opened, has proved to be one of the great unifying factors in our history, as also men who came from other ecclesiastical traditions, among them Reformed pastors, have accepted it. The common understanding of the sacrament and its meaning for the church has also been a strong bond of spiritual unity with our brethren in the faith abroad. In our long striving for true unity we have learnt to understand what the Seventh Article of the

Augsburg Confession teaches about what is sufficient and necessary for the true unity of the church, namely that "the Gospel be preached with great unanimity in its purity and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine word."¹ If anywhere in the world this great doctrine has been tried out, then it was in Australia. It has proved to be the only means of establishing true unity among Christians and of preserving the Gospel and the sacraments of Christ.

2.

Now we are making the perturbing experience that we are more and more isolated from the rest of the Lutheran world not on account of what we are doing or not doing, but by the fact that the Sacrament of the Altar, as it has been celebrated in our churches, is vanishing in many parts of the Lutheran world and with it the unity of the Church which it has helped to preserve. The Lutheran sacrament is being replaced by semi-Catholic masses or by ecumenical mystery rites, which neither Rome nor the Christian East would recognize, on the one hand, and by Reformed communion rites, on the other. While the Roman mass is today of an almost puritanical simplicity, the liturgical tinsel of ages past finds a place in Lutheran churches. But the clouds of incense which prevent us from seeing exactly what is going on at the altar cannot hide the fact that the nature of the sacrament has changed. If we ask these people what the Sacrament of the Altar is, we no longer get the simple answer of Luther's Catechism, but a long discourse on the representation of the sacrifice of Christ and on our participation in this sacrifice as the true nature of this sacrament. If we ask the question whether the bread is the body and the wine is the blood, we receive various answers. Some would say Yes, others would say "Yes, *but*" which is the fashionable substitute for No, introduced by Karl Barth. In any case they would find the answer of the Catechism too simple, insufficient and in need of a re-interpretation in the light of modern thought. For we are told even today by an over-enlightened Dutch Catholic Professor of Dogmatics: "Every human statement, including that of a dogma is time-conditioned. It is limited by the possibilities of language and style, by the subtleties that can or cannot be adequately expressed . . ." That we have to use human language in theology is a truism. That human language should be unable to express objective truth would mean the end not only of theology, but of all science.

3.

Like every great change in the history of the Church, so also this one began slowly and almost imperceptibly. But now the results are conspicuous in the entire Lutheran world. When the Church of Sweden in 1922 accepted Intercommunion with the Church of England as it had been proposed by the Lambeth Conference of 1920, Söderblom had to defend this against what he called "a narrow Lutheran Institutionalism." But the confessional protest ceased during the following years. When some time ago Sweden estab

lished in the most solemn way Intercommunion with the Church of Scotland, even Bishop Giertz, the leader of the *Kyrkliq Samling* had no objection. None of the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia seems to have been able and willing to maintain the basic requirements of the Augsburg Confession for altar and church fellowship. Consensus concerning the Gospel and the Sacraments is no longer required as a condition of church fellowship. The American Lutherans of Scandinavian background obviously had no objection to raise against the flagrant violation of the Augsburg Confession in their home churches. So the first pillar of the Lutheran Church of the world collapsed. The other churches of Europe followed. The customary intercommunion between the Reformed (Hervormde) and the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands was justified in 1953 by an agreement which leaves the difference between the sacramental doctrines unresolved. The Lutherans "ask" the Reformed whether they can maintain what is taught in question 47 of the Heidelberg Catechism about Christ's human nature being in heaven and not on earth. The Reformed "ask" the Lutherans whether "an omnipresence (ubiquity) of the human nature of Christ does not actually mean an abolition of the incarnation." Obviously the Lutherans were not quite clear about their own doctrine, otherwise they would have answered that the "ubiquity" is not a dogma of the Lutheran Church and that their doctrine that the body of Christ has more ways of being in one place than the local presence, does not deny the reality of the incarnation. But the level of this discussion obviously did not permit an intelligent investigation of the problems. The aim was not to solve the problem, but to have a document which could be used to justify what had been practised through ignorance for so long a time.

4.

Much more serious was the attempt made in Germany in the so-called Arnoldshain Theses." When in 1948 the new "Evangelical Church in Germany" was established which comprises all territorial churches of Germany—Lutheran, Reformed and United—the decisive hour of the churches of the Reformation in the world had struck. These are the Lutheran and the Reformed Presbyterian churches, for Anglicanism ceased to be a Church of the Reformation when it *de facto* abolished the Articles of Religion, and the majority of the Protestant churches of America are only indirectly related to the Reformation or are the descendants of the Radical Reformation in Europe which could not develop in the Old World. It was German-speaking Europe, where Lutheranism and Calvinism had first met in that tragic encounter, which has proved so fateful for the history of the Church. It is understandable that time and again attempts have been made to overcome the great schism of the Reformation. But the theological means of the 16th and 17th centuries were insufficient for a settlement of the great controversy. And the 18th and 19th centuries could find nothing but political solutions, based on the ignorance of the churchmen and the indifference of the

masses in these territorial churches. Nothing is more significant of the tragic situation than the fact that the unions which began in 1817 in Nassau, 1817-36 in Prussia, 1818 in the Palatinate, 1821 in Baden and Waldeck and simultaneously or soon after in other territories, had a merely territorial character. Each of the newly circumscribed states of Germany wanted to have its own church, its confessional character being merely based on the local conditions and not on a real theological consensus. Hence in the middle of the 19th century Germany had about seven different union churches with different theological bases, the largest being the Union Church of Prussia which theoretically did not abolish the authority of the old confessions in the individual congregations, but *de facto* soon became the great unifying factor in Germany, especially since the majority of the universities and their theological faculties was in the hands of the Prussian State. The Lutheran Churches joined forces in 1868 by forming the "General Evangelical Lutheran Conference" in close connection with Sweden and the General Council in the U.S.A. In 1933 Hitler forced all territorial Churches into the "German Evangelical Church" which in 1948 transformed itself into the present EKID after the last attempts of Lutherans in Germany to maintain their identity in a federation between a Lutheran, a Reformed and a United Church had been defeated. The new body with an ambiguous constitution, which could and can be interpreted as a federation or as a unified church, decided that a colloquy on the Lord's Supper should be held with the aim of bringing about a common statement on the sacrament which would justify full intercommunion between all parts of the EKID. Thus the Arnoldshain Theses were written mainly by theologians of the Union Faculties of Heidelberg and Bonn. Among them were outstanding representatives of Lutheranism within the Union, namely, Peter Brunner and Edmund Schlink, the latter, however, being more and more influenced by the Ecumenical Movement. Theologians from Lutheran churches, like W. Elert, declined the invitation because they knew nothing else but a formula of compromise could be the result. The author of this article refused to take part because he could not recognize the right of the EKID to arrange an official colloquy on the sacrament. E. Sommerlath accepted the invitation, but could not accept the result. However, for the majority of the German churches, their leaders, and their theologians, the theses are the sufficient basis for establishing full intercommunion between all parts of the EKID, which then would become the great union church of Germany. While these lines are being written, the bishop and synod of Bavaria, the last of the Lutheran territorial churches in Germany which thus far had officially refused to declare intercommunion with non-Lutherans, decided that henceforth all members of any church within the EKID will be invited to Holy Communion in Bavaria. (They declared that doctrine and order of the sacrament should remain Lutheran. But how can you retain the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar if you declare that people who do not believe they receive the true body

and blood of Christ, and regards this as nonsense, are invited to join in the sacrament?) With this decision the borderline between Lutheran and Reformed Churches within the EKID has been abolished and "The Evangelical Church in Germany" has become the great union church in which the old churches of the Reformation have become one church in the theological sense of the word Church according to Conf. Aug. VII.

5.

What do the theses of Arnoldshain teach? The main thesis which is meant to settle the old controversy is Thesis 4 which reads:

The words which our Lord Jesus Christ speaks when he offers the bread and the cup tell us what he himself gives to all who come to this supper: He, the crucified and risen Lord, permits Himself to be taken in His body and blood given and shed for all, through His word of promise, with the bread and wine, and grants us participation, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, in the victory of His lordship, so that we, believing in His promise, may receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.³

This thesis must be read together with the rejection of certain erroneous views in Thesis 5:

Therefore, what happens in the Lord's Supper is not adequately described,

- (a) when it is taught that, by means of the words of institution, bread and wine are changed into a supernatural substance, thus ceasing to be bread and wine;
- (b) when it is taught that a repetition of the act of salvation takes place in the Lord's Supper;
- (c) when it is taught that in the Lord's Supper either a natural or a supernatural 'matter' is distributed;
- (d) when it is taught that there are two parallel but separate processes, one an eating on the part of the body and the other an eating on the part of the soul;
- (e) when it is taught that the eating on the part of the body as such saves us, or that participation in the body and blood of Christ is a purely mental process.

These theses contain a clear rejection of the Roman and the Zwinglian doctrines. But what about the doctrine of the Lutheran and of the Reformed Churches? The Reformed have given up the idea of two parallel, but separate processes of eating—a bodily and a spiritual one. They admit that what is given in the Lord's Supper is given *with* the bread and wine. The Lutherans have given up the doctrine that the consecrated bread *is* the body of Christ and the consecrated wine *is* the blood of Christ. The words "through his word of promise" cannot hide the fact that the Lutheran doctrine of consecration has been abandoned. For even if by "word of promise" the words of the institution are meant, for Luther and the Lutheran

Church the words of institution are more than that. They are "the Word and institution of our almighty God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, which always remain efficacious in Christendom" (FC, Sol. Decl. VII, 89), "in virtue" of which (Luther in his last offer at Marburg —see below) the body and blood of Christ are present in the Sacrament. The strict denial of the gift of the sacrament being either a natural or supernatural "matter" shows how remote the new theory is from all previous doctrines of the sacrament, Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed. Even Calvin is nearer to Rome and Luther than to this new theory. If the body of Christ is not the body which was born by the Virgin Mary, which hung on the Cross, was raised from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father, what, then is meant by "body" and "blood"? In what sense are these words being used? Would it not be much more honest to replace them by other words? What is meant by the statement Christ "permits himself to be taken in his body and blood . . . with the bread and wine" (German: ". . . lässt sich in seinem für uns alle in den Tod gegebenen Leib und seinem für alle vergossenen Blut durch sein verheissendes Wort mit Brot und Wein von uns nehmen . . .")? What we receive is "He," the person, "in His body and blood." This is obviously a compromise between the view that the gift in the Lord's Supper is the body and blood of Christ and the view that the gift is He Himself, His person. The Arnoldshain Theses belong together with many modern statements on the Lord's Supper which try to substitute the presence of the person for the presence of body and blood. Arnoldshain agrees substantially with the statement in the report of an American Faith and Order Conference of 1957 on "The Table of the Lord" where we read:

- (2) Jesus Christ on the night in which he was betrayed chose bread and wine as the elements of the first Eucharist at the Last Supper. Rejecting any one-sided preoccupation with the elements in isolation, we agree that in the entire eucharist action the whole Christ is personally present as both subject and object, i.e. as the One who is at the same time the Giver and the Gift.
- (3) In view of our belief in Christ's active presence in the whole eucharistic action, we agree that this action is our participation in his risen life and the fulfillment of his promise to his church.
- (4) Christ's presence at his table follows from his promise and command. It is only in repentance and faith that the believer . . . receives the fruits of redemption, including the forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification, newness of life and communion with his brethren . . . The Holy Communion is a means of placing us in the presence of Christ in a total way. In his Presence we are judged as well as forgiven (1 Cor. 11: 17-34).¹

If the American churches and sects which met at Oberlin make

such a statement, this might be understandable because most of them have never taught the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ, though it is neither understandable nor pardonable that the Anglicans and the Lutherans (American Lutheran Church, Augustana Lutheran Church, United Lutheran Church) failed to follow the example of the Quakers who did not take part in the negotiations of this Section, but confessed later in a statement added to the report, their "belief in the non-necessity of the outward elements of bread and wine to mediate the living presence of Christ to the believer in the act of communion with him."⁵

But how is it to be explained that the German theologians with their thorough historical training do not understand the connection between the presence of body and blood of Christ and the presence of the whole divine-human person? Do they not know the Roman doctrine of the concomitance? Do they not know any longer the eucharistic hymns and prayers,—the greatest of which are common to Catholics and Lutherans—in which the presence of body and blood is always understood as including the presence of the person? Does not at least Mozart's (since most of them are Barthians, Mozart must belong to their saints) *Ave verum* ring in their ears: *Ave verum corpus natum/ex Maria Virgine/Vere passum, immolatum in cruce pro homine/ . . . O Jesu dulcis/O Jesu pie/Fili Patris et Mariae*. Or do we no longer remember the German version of Aquinas' *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* which is to be found in every German hymnbook: *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*? The consequence of the Arnoldshain Theses, with their clear rejection of the old Reformed as well as of the Lutheran doctrine, would be that we should have to give up our Catechism. Wilhelm Niesel (*Lehrgespräch*, ed. Niemeier, p. 293) discusses the question whether the acceptance of the Theses with their rejection of the doctrine of question 47 of the Heidelberg Catechism does not necessitate an alteration of this Catechism. The same has to be said concerning Luther's Catechism. Its clear confession of the Real Presence of the true body and blood of Christ, its affirmation of the old "Substantialism" in favor of a mere "Personalism", the reaffirmation of the Lutheran *Est* in the words "It is the true body and blood of Christ" cannot be reconciled with Arnoldshain. Honesty would demand that we give up Luther's Catechism, but theologians have long ago learned to confess with the mouth what they do not believe with their heart. For what is the deepest reason for this new attempt to find a new doctrine of the sacrament? It is not respect for the Word of God. For everybody knows that the literal understanding of "this is my body" is the simplest way of doing justice to the text. It is not possible to deny that according to 1 Cor. 10:15f. the eating and drinking of bread and wine constitutes the participation of the body and blood of the Lord. It cannot be denied that 1 Cor. 11:27ff. has the same realistic meaning. One could argue: This is Paul's view, but what did Jesus mean? Can we really assume that Paul who is so careful in rendering the genuine *paradosis* (11:23, cf. 15:1ff.) should have smuggled in a different, "Hellen-

istic" interpretation of the words of Jesus? Would none of his adversaries have noticed this, even if we could assume that Paul was capable of what amounts to a forgery? But Jesus as a Jew could not have meant that, we are told. Why not? In this most solemn moment he did not speak as a Jew only, but as the God-Man. And if he really meant something different, what did he mean? Up to this very day no one has been able to give another explanation which would be acceptable to all New Testament scholars, to speak only of them. Even the men of Arnoldshain have not found a common explanation. For their theses are differently understood even by their authors. As to the respect for the Word of God: Have we not in Holy Scripture a Word of God which is not only the word of Jesus or the word of Paul or the word of another apostle, but *the* Word which may find its expression in different terminologies (1 Cor. 3:5ff; 4:1ff.), but is essentially one in the whole New Testament? But the scholars of Arnoldshain have obviously lost this Word. Let us be quite frank: behind this chaos of opinions there is not historical "scholarship," but unbelief. In the discussion of the theses it happened that some naive readers understood the words of Thesis 1, "The Lord's Supper which we celebrate is based on its having been instituted and commanded by Jesus Christ," as referring to the institution at the Last Supper. They had to learn that the authors of the thesis were by no means agreed on this. Some find the roots of the sacrament in previous meals, others regard it as instituted by the Risen Lord in the earliest church. What kind of historical scholarship is this? In all churches of Christendom, in every mass, in every celebration of Holy Communion since the Apostolic Age the words occur *qui pridie quam pateretur*, "in the night in which he was betrayed." Must Christendom now stop saying this because some German "scholars" think that this sacrament is an invention of the first church? But the churches will probably not be convinced that for almost 2,000 years in the most solemn worship of the Church they have told a story which is not true. For this statement is the unanimous statement of the New Testament. This is not historical scholarship but a frivolous playing with the Word of God.

No one who knows German church life and German theology would have expected anything better. We know the tragedy of German Protestantism. There are faithful pastors, there are also professors who still take their churchly obligations seriously. There are some bishops whose eyes have not yet been blinded by the brilliant stars in their faculties and by the fireworks of the Ecumenical Movement. And there are, above all, *die Stillen im Lande* who pray for the Church and who sometimes cease to be silent and make a loud public confession. But how Luther's Catechism can again become the confession of the Christian people in Europe nobody can see.

6.

Deeply saddened, though not surprised, by the development of the Lutheran Churches of the Old World we turn to America to ex-

perience our deepest disappointment. If we ask the great Lutheran Churches of America: "What is the Sacrament of the Altar"? we hear confused voices which are tantamount to the answer: We do not know exactly what it is except that it is not quite what Luther believed and what our fathers have confessed it to be. We can no longer express the mystery of this sacrament in the simple words of the Catechism:

"It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." We have seen light, for we have revisited Marburg.

Marburg Revisited is the title of a book which appeared in 1966 at Minneapolis (Augsburg Publishing House), jointly edited by James I. McCord, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, and Paul C. Empie, Executive Director of the National Lutheran Council. It contains the official report (lectures and summary statements with some additional statements) on "conversations between members of the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions" (tradition is the new term for what formerly was called confession) under the auspices of the "North American Area of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian Order" and the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation from 1962 to 1966. Churches outside these two ecumenical organizations, such as the Orthodox Presbyterian, the Christian Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church—Missouria Synod, had been invited and took part. "It was clear from the start that the individuals named to participate would speak for themselves, their conclusions neither necessarily representing nor binding the respective churches which appointed them" (Preface). "During these four meetings we have examined carefully the major issues." At some points it was "discovered that our respective views of each other have been inherited caricatures, initially caused by misunderstanding or polemical zeal." In other instances the differences are in fact complementary. Some difficulties remain, but "we have recognized in each other's teachings a common understanding of the Gospel and have concluded that the issues which divided the two major branches of the Reformation can no longer be regarded as constituting obstacles to mutual understanding and fellowship." This is then confirmed in the final Report to the Sponsoring Confessional Organizations (p. 190) ". . . we see no insuperable obstacles to pulpit and altar fellowship and, therefore, we recommend to our parent bodies that they encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to intercommunion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries."

May it be understood from the outset that, whatever has to be said about this document, we regard the split between the two great churches of the Reformation as one of the major catastrophes of Christendom, in its consequences comparable only to the split between Rome and the East and between the Orthodox and the Monophysitic Churches in the Orient. For this split has been and is still the great obstacle which has prevented the message of the Reformation to penetrate the whole of Christendom. This split was especially

fateful for America. One may well ask whether the absence of *one* great Church of the Reformation has not made America the land of innumerable groups and sects in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the sacraments of the New Testament were bound to be lost. And we must examine ourselves and ask whether this split has not made the Lutheran as well as the Reformed churches in Europe and in America the playground of an unbiblical, sectarian enthusiasm. What would Luther and Calvin say about the claim that the discussion in America has been a "confrontation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" and that God is praised "for the evident working of his Spirit in our midst"? Is it an unbiblical enthusiasm which speaks here and not the Reformation. For to the reformers the Holy Spirit was always an object of faith and not of observation. There may be, and there is indeed, in the world an unrepentant, stubborn confessionalism. But we would not find it in a church which faithfully, and not only nominally, holds the confession of the Reformation, be it the Reformation of Wittenberg or that of Geneva, because these confessions know of the authority of the Word of God which judges us all and reveals to us all the merciful Savior. The word "Lutheran" does not appear in the Book of Concord except in a passage of the Apology where Melancthon makes the complaint that the adversaries call the dear holy Gospel "Lutheran." The Church which we believe and confess is never our denomination, but the one church of Christ which is not identical with any individual denomination. Our Reformers died as ex-communicated members of the Catholic Church, they were not conscious of being members of a new church, although they had to organize their emergency churches. No one would deny the grave sins that have been committed in the polemics between the confessions. But it may well be asked whether they were greater than the sins which are today committed on behalf of ecumenicity: the destruction of the doctrinal substance of the Christian faith by our compromises, the misleading of Christian souls by allowing any kind of false teaching. What is worse, to fight against heresies or to declare that there are no heresies, but only different "traditions"? One advantage the old Geneva had over the Geneva of today: the Fathers of the Reformed Church knew the seriousness of the question: What is truth? The Lutheran Fathers were prepared to die for the doctrine they had confessed in the Augsburg Confession. Who would die for the Theses of Arnoldshain?

7.

What we have to say by way of criticizing the new document is not directed against a serious discussion of the issues that divide our churches, nor against the attempt to find an agreement. The author of this article does not despair of the possibility of reaching unity between the separated churches of the Reformation. What we are criticizing is solely the method. In four sessions the committee was able to solve, or nearly solve, the problems of four centuries. In four sessions they covered all the issues that stood between our

churches: Gospel, Confession and Scripture; Eucharist and Christology and all the problems connected with this topic; Justification and Sanctification; Liturgy and Ethics; Law and Gospel; Creation and Redemption; the problem of the Two Kingdoms. As *donum superadditum* we get in the last part a paper on "Confessional Integrity and Ecumenical Dialogue" by Professor W. A. Quanbeck, who also wrote the opening chapter on "Gospel, Confession and Scripture." We take from this paper one example to illustrate our criticism of the method of these discussions. We read in p. 186:

" . . . we can see clearly that the Nicene Creed uses the theological method and vocabulary of the 4th century to assert the truth about Jesus Christ and to reject misunderstandings of his person and mission which threatened the clarity and power of the Gospel. Those who drew up the Creed were compelled to use non-Biblical language to assert the truth of the Biblical message. The language of the creed is not Biblical language, but that of fourth century philosophy."

This statement is crude dilettantism. The Creed of Nicea was a liturgical formula consisting of Biblical words (e.g. I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1, Hebr. 1, 1: Cor. 15). The Fathers of Nicea added the famous *homoousios*, which is not a philosophical term. It was used to express the Biblical idea that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. Bishop Alexander was no philosopher. His sole interest was to save the church. For if Christ is not God, the entire Christian liturgy which treats him as such becomes a sin against the First Commandment. The Anathematismata which were added to the Creed in its first form said nothing else. And they do not contain philosophy. Professor Quanbeck is obviously a victim of some obsolete books on the history of dogma. If the Nicene Creed uses concepts like *ousia*, substance, it uses words which were used already in the New Testament. Was the author of Hebrews a philosopher? Athanasius did not go from exile to exile because of a love for the word *homoousios*; in fact, he did not like it and used it sparingly, and never in his early writings. But it summarized briefly the Biblical doctrine of the relationship between Father and Son. Quanbeck reveals the deepest reason for his criticism of the allegedly unbiblical language of the Nicene Creed in the sentence: "The problems of theology have a certain consistency from age to age, and yet the shift from substantialist, static thinking to developmental, dynamic categories means that every problem appears in a new light and from a different perspective." (p. 187). This then is the philosophy of Prof. Quanbeck. His developmental, dynamic categories replace what he regards as the substantialist, static thinking of the past. A new philosophy produces a new theology. Every problem appears in a new light and from a different perspective. This, then, applies also to the problem of the Lord's Supper. The old understanding is accused of resting on a substantialist, ontological philosophy. Now we apply the philosophy of our time, Personalism and Existentialism, to the doctrine of the sacra-

ment, in Arnoldshain, in Oberlin, and now in Princeton and Minneapolis. The gift of the Sacrament is not a "substance", but the "person." A new philosophy has freed us from the *skandalon* which the words of our Lord, "This is my Body," must be to our human reason.

Space does not permit us to discuss the entire content of the book. We must be satisfied with the question: How does this theology understand the one and only question of Marburg 1529? The title *Marburg Revisited* is misleading in so far as the discussion covers the whole range of the issues between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches. Instead of travelling to Marburg and listening attentively to what was said there, these theologians have rather made a quick jet flight over the whole area between Wittenberg and Geneva, high up in the air. They have not seen very much of the issue of Marburg. Clouds seems to have sometimes obscured their sight. There are, of course, some good passages, especially in the Reformed contributions. But the articles could not exhaust so many subjects. The question which we have to ask is the question of Marburg: What did Jesus mean when he said, "This is my body" and when he made the corresponding statement on his blood?

The answer is distressingly weak. Christ is present in the Word and in the Sacrament. "The sacrament is a form of visible, enacted word, through which Christ and his saving benefits are effectively offered to men." (p. 104). "The assurance of his presence is given in the self-witness of Christ in the instituting rite: This is my body, this is my blood. The realisation of his presence in the sacrament is effected by the Holy Spirit through the word. "The significance of christology in the Lord's Supper is that it provides assurance that it is the total Christ, the divine-human person who is present in the sacrament, but it does not explain how he is present." This is the answer. The Lutherans who have accepted this document are no longer able to confess with a clear conscience concerning the Sacrament of the Altar: "It is the true body and blood of Christ . . ." Individual persons may believe that. But it is not essential for the Sacrament. It cannot, therefore, be the dogma of the Church. All that the Church can teach is the presence of the person of Christ. "Christology" may give us the assurance that the Christ present is the total Christ. But "Christology" is for Professor Quanbeck and his followers theological speculation. So we are left with the "consolations of philosophy" and have no longer the firm foundation of the Word of the Lord Himself. Luther never based his doctrine of philosophical-theological speculations, nor has the Lutheran Church after him. The one and only basis of the Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ has always been the words in which Christ Himself once and for all gave the definition of this sacrament: "This is my body; this is my blood."

Marburg Revisited with its papers and recommendations is now before the Lutheran churches of America. No church has so far committed itself to it, but only to its study. It will be put into the hands

of all students of theology in the Lutheran and Reformed churches. It will be discussed on all levels of the churches. It will have far-reaching effects. As these discussions will coincide with the discussions which are now going on on a world-wide scale between Lutherans and Reformed, discussions in which the Lutheran churches in Europe have already surrendered the Lutheran doctrine of the Confessions, our brethren in America are facing a tremendous responsibility. It seems that the Lutheran World Federation and the Reformed World Alliance are—as far as their ecclesiastical and theological leadership is concerned—determined to carry out the great union in the spirit of modern ecumenism. So the hour of confession has come for the Lutherans in America. The hour of confession, and not of mere discussion. No one wants to discourage a serious and thorough-going dialogue between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. On the contrary, we regard that as necessary. But this document cannot be the basis for such a dialogue. It can serve as an instrument to stir up churches and theologians, to help them to realize the great task that lies before them. But it cannot do more. It takes up too many problems, each of which needs a much more elaborate treatment than it could receive here. What we need for a real dialogue is, first of all, a clear statement on the issues to be discussed, a frank realization of the existing agreements and disagreements. What we need, further, is thorough research. It is not enough that two men each write a paper and that these papers are then discussed and a few theses set up. The problems of sacramental theology must be more thoroughly studied in Biblical, historical, and dogmatic research. The philosophical aspect, too, must be investigated much more thoroughly. What is the use of basing our discussions and their result on modern Existentialism, if, as every philosopher knows, Existentialist philosophy is already on the way out? There are signs which indicate that the future will belong to a new metaphysics, and this would include a new Ontology. Christian theology can make use of many different philosophical systems, using what truth is contained in each of them. But it should never be married to one system, which happens to be in fashion at the time.

Hence it is our considered opinion that, though *Marburg Revisited* should be read for a start, there should not be a formal discussion of its findings. They have, by the way, no authority whatever. The participants were present as private theologians and not as representatives of their churches. No one knows who is responsible for the results. There is a list of participants and consultants. But we do not know who was present when a certain "summary statement" was accepted nor whether it was accepted unanimously. In the list of the participants we find names of men from very conservative churches with deep dogmatic convictions. Did these men accept the results? If so, in what sense? I cannot imagine that any New Testament scholar is satisfied with the way in which the exegetical problem, which was after all the problem of Marburg, was brushed aside. Whoever may be responsible, documents of this na-

ture have no validity in the Church unless they are signed. This is a rule of the Church of all ages. The creed and the canons of Nicea had to be signed by all members of the Council. Everyone knows what the signatures under the confessions of the Reformation have meant. Only in modern ecumenical conferences are resolutions adopted for which nobody is responsible.

8.

What in our opinion the Lutheran Churches in America which were involved in these negotiations ought to do is to bring the semi-official discussions out of the twilight of non-committal ecumenical conversation between private theologians into the daylight of responsible discussions and negotiations from Church to Church. We are not interested in what this or that professor, president or pastor thinks, but in the doctrine of their churches. Only then can we find out whether there is still a consensus on a basic doctrine such as the dogma *De coena Domini* among the Lutherans and the Reformed respectively. What we want to know is whether the Lutheran Churches in America as churches still confess of the Sacrament of the Altar what our Catechism teaches, or whether the disintegration of the Lutheran doctrine in these churches has reached that degree which we find in European Lutheranism. We are very much concerned. For a document published some years ago by the former United Lutheran Church was indicative of such disintegration. What we hear of the Younger Churches of Lutheran background is alarming. It seems that the Lutherans in India in their negotiations with the United Church of India, a definitely Reformed body which is now being left even by thousands of Anglicans, the Lutheran *Est* has been negotiated away. We ask our brethren in America to understand our deep concern. We refuse to believe that any of the Lutheran Churches in America would endorse the results of *Marburg Revisited*, even if private persons accept them.

Why are we so concerned? It is our deep conviction that in defending the literal meaning of "This is my body", Martin Luther did not defend a theological view of his own or of a theological school, but a basic dogma of the Christian Church. With this *est* stands and falls the Incarnation. And with the reality of the Incarnation stands and falls the Church of Jesus Christ. This is why we are concerned about the development in India. We do not want to make the people of India Lutherans. But we know the the highly spiritualising Indian soul needs the real Christ, not Christ as one of the Avatars, a divine being that for a while descends to the earth later to return to the spiritual and divine world, but Christ Incarnate, the Son of God who accepted real human flesh and who never put aside what he once accepted, Christ who remains our brother in heaven. This is why we are afraid to take away from India the real Sacrament with its full assurance of the Real Presence of the Incarnate One. We are confirmed in our concern when we read that a Lutheran professor in

India has proposed to abolish Christian baptism as a condition of membership in the Church.

A very similar concern causes us to insist on the *est* when we think of our Reformed brethren. We do not want to make them Lutherans, but to help them to regain what in the tragic history of the Reformation they have lost. The present doctrine of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is contained in the "Confession of 1967."⁶

It is certainly nearer to Zwingli than to Calvin and reveals, like all modern substitutes for the old confessions, the loss of the old dogmatic substance. We should ask ourselves whether the rise of unhealthy, unevangelical High Church Movements, the "Catholic" revivals in the once Reformed Church of England, but also in many other Protestant churches, including such as claim to be Reformed or Lutheran, is not the reaction to the loss of a Catholic truth. The Lutheran Church has often been blamed for having retained in its doctrine of the Real Presence a "popish remnant." We should say: what we have retained, or tried to preserve, is a truth which the Catholic Churches in East and West have retained. For with them we are convinced that the Real Presence in the sense that the bread in the Supper is the body of Christ is the doctrine of the New Testament. Whether this is true or not was the issue under discussion at Marburg, the only issue. When Luther's sacramental realism met with Zwingli's spiritualizing, humanistic idealism, it was the realism of the Bible, which met with a spiritualizing and rationalizing Christianity, which had been a latent danger to the old Christian faith for centuries. This "flight into reason" (*fugere ad rationem*) had come to the fore in the 11th century with Berengar. This spiritualizing Christianity found its home later in the Lowlands from where Cornelis Hoen passed on to Zwingli his doctrine of the merely significative character of the sacrament. It is strange to see how in the same country today Roman Catholic theologians try to replace the theory of "transubstantiation" with their theory of "transignification." If our Reformed brethren tried to take in account for a moment the possibility that what happened at Marburg was the encounter of a realistic and an idealistic understanding of God's revelation in Christ, they would get a better understanding of Luther's stand at Marburg, even if they could not approve of it. It was perhaps the greatest moment in the tragic days of the colloquy, when the Lutherans, after the discussions had broken down, made their last offer. Since this offer corresponds exactly to what Luther had repeatedly declared to be his condition for a union in the question of the sacrament, it may be assumed that also here he was the author of the formula. The proposal was that either side should declare: "We confess that by virtue of the words 'This is my body', 'This is my blood' the body and the blood are truly—*substantive et essentialiter non autem quantitative vel qualitative vel localiter*—present and distributed in the Lord's Supper." Neither at Marburg nor later on any other occasion did Lu-

ther demand that his theory on the "ubiquity"—this term was coined by his adversaries,—which he had developed to refute those who denied any possibility of the Presence of Christ's body other than the local one, had to be accepted as dogma of the Church. Even the Formula of Concord did not domesticate it, but only the sentence "that God has and knows more ways to be present at a certain place, not only . . . the one which the philosophers call local or spatial." (Sol. Decl. VII, 97). What he demanded as necessary was the affirmation that the true body of Christ, that means the body that was born of the Virgin hung on the cross and was raised from the grave, was present in virtue of the Words of Institution. This presence was to be understood not as a presence in "quantity" or "quality" and not in the sense of a local presence, as mediaeval theologians had already limited the "in" and "under." In other words, what Luther always demanded was that the words of Christ should be accepted in simple faith, while the How remained God's mystery. Oecolampadius was prepared to accept the proposal, Zwingli could not agree because anything that was called "substance" was unbearable for him—as for the Zwinglians at all times.

It is this last offer of Luther at Marburg which the Lutheran Church has to repeat today in the negotiations and discussions with the Reformed Churches. This does not mean that we only repeat an old formula. We have first to regain the doctrine contained in it for ourselves. We shall never succeed in persuading anyone to accept it because it was Luther's doctrine or by showing its profound philosophical presuppositions and consequences. The contention will be, as it was at Marburg, a contention about the meaning of the sacrament in the New Testament. One does not have to be a Lutheran to believe in the Real Presence. Many a thorough exegete has found in the New Testament the doctrine that bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ. Even modern scholars who reject the doctrine for themselves admit that somewhere in the New Testament this view is present, some find it with Paul, others with John. But since they know only writings and strata of writings in the Bible and no longer the New Testament as a whole, they do not draw the necessary conclusions from their observation. The day may not be far off when the crisis becomes manifest in which modern theology finds itself because it has lost the authority of the Bible as such. Much more promising than the discussions of our dogmaticians might be a thorough investigation of what the New Testament has to say about the Sacrament. The day when we shall have again a great Theology of the New Testament may be nearer than many are inclined to think. And perhaps the time is not far away when Christendom can confess as an ecumenical article of faith concerning the Sacrament of the Altar: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself." In fact, this is already the faith of the majority of all Christians on earth.

FOOTNOTES

1. This is the correct translation of the German text which was not fully understood by the translator in the *Book of Concord* (ed. Tappert), p. 32, who did not understand the word "*einträchtiglich*" which is rendered in the Latin text by *magno consensu*.
2. Quoted by Arnold Lunn in a letter concerning the Dutch Catechism with its ambiguous statement on the Virgin Birth. Lunn replies: "The dogma of the virgin birth is either true or false. If true, it is as true today as when the gospels were written. It is a truth which is in no sense 'time-conditioned' or 'limited by the possibilities of style and language', still less by 'subtleties that can or cannot be adequately expressed,'" (*Herder Correspondence*, May, 1967, p. 161).
3. We quote from the official English translation contained in "Lehrgespräch über das Heilige Abendmahl. Stimmen und Studien zu den Arnoldshainer Thesen der Kommission für das Abendmahlsgespräch der EKID", herausgegeben von Gottfried Niemeier (München, 1961), pp. 332ff.
4. *The Nature of the Unity we Seek*. Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order, Sept. 1957, Oberlin, Ohio (ed. by P. S. Minear, 1958), pp. 199-205; the quotation from p. 202.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
6. Art. 4, "The Lord's Supper": The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the reconciliation of men with God and with one another, in which they joyfully eat and drink together at the table of their Saviour. Jesus Christ gave his church this remembrance of his dying for sinful men so that by participating in it they have communion with him and with all who shall be gathered to him. *Partaking in him as they eat the bread and drink the wine* in accordance with Christ's appointment, they receive *from the risen and living Lord the benefits of his death and resurrection*. They rejoice in the foretaste of the kingdom which he will bring to consummation at his promised coming, and go out from the Lord's Table with courage and hope for the service to which he has called them. *The Proposed Book of Confessions of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 186.
7. See for details H. Sasse: *This is My Body* (1959), pp. 266ff.