
The Ecclesiological Self-Understanding of the Lutheran World Federation

From “Free Association”
to “Communion of Churches”

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1. The fundamental problem

One of the most disputed questions at the eighth general assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), held in Curitiba, Brazil, January-February 1990, was the proposal to change its constitution so that the LWF would be redefined as a “communion of churches” rather than “a free association of churches”. The proposal was ultimately adopted with the necessary two-thirds majority — with neither one vote more nor less — thus putting a full stop not only to an intense debate, but also to a harrowing lobbying activity which seemed in strong contrast to the concept of *communio*.

In most cases, the vigorous opposition of the minority to a change in the constitution was determined by an at least equally strong opposition to the executive committee’s proposal to revise the Federation’s structure. This proposal (which was also adopted) was judged by the opponents to involve an alarming centralization, with the consequence that the secretariat in Geneva, and thereby the general secretary, received far too much power. When the motion concerning the new structure was justified in terms of the new self-understanding which the LWF received through the ecclesiology of *communio*, this was seen as an unacceptable coupling of the ecclesiol-

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ogy of *communio* and the debate about structure, as if the *communio* ecclesiology must necessarily imply the structural changes which the executive committee had proposed. This was maintained above all by Germans and Finns, who led the struggle against the new structure and against any change in the constitution. The Danes, on the other hand, went even further in their criticism and posed the question of principle whether LWF can have any church mandate at all. Against this background, they claimed that the entire future of LWF was called into question and that they themselves must consider whether the Church of Denmark could continue as a member of the Federation. The Danes, however, were rather isolated in such a radical point of view, and there is no doubt that there is a connection here with the somewhat special Danish ecclesiology, where there is no place for central bodies with authority.¹

There is no space here to present in detail the historical process which led to the resolution in Curitiba, nor shall I discuss the material from biblical theology and church history which is at the basis of the *communio* ecclesiology, nor the ecumenical context to which this concept is linked.² I shall rather concentrate on the LWF's self-understanding, and attempt to portray the development which led to the resolution at Curitiba.

It was claimed, in the debate before and during the general assembly, that the transition from "free association" to "communion of churches" involves a clear break with the earlier mandate. Does this mean that we are faced with a wholly different LWF from that which was set up in 1947? What motivated the proposal to change the constitution: was it the wish to legitimize a centralized apparatus of power, and does this mean a break with Lutheran ecclesiology? Or is it the case, quite to the contrary, that the concept of *communio* promotes an ecclesiological reflection that takes seriously both the confessional inheritance, and the challenges facing the Lutheran world family in our age? In other words, is it the case that a new context demands new thinking in ecclesiology, and thereby also a revision of the terminology which is used to express the self-understanding?

In addressing these issues I have concentrated on critical periods in the LWF's history, where many questions were raised with the consequence that the Federation's self-understanding became a problem anew.

My chief thesis is that the development of the LWF's self-understanding from "free association" to a "communion of churches" is connected to a significant change of the context within which ecclesiological reflection is occurring. First, there is a geographic widening from a North-Atlantic to a worldwide ecclesiastical reality. Second, there is a shift from a narrow perspective of ecclesiastical law to a holistic perspective where the celebration of worship, witness and service have become elements that share in determining the self-understanding. Third, there is the change from an internal ecclesiastical sphere to a wider nexus of social, cultural, economic and political conditions as the context for understanding the church's nature and mission.

Thus the ecclesiological reflection in the LWF has not taken place in a vacuum, but is determined by praxis and by new challenges which demand new reflection. This context has, in part, a non-theological character and is connected with trends in the development of society where internationalization is a keyword. But one must also take account of important changes in the ecclesiastical sphere: ecumenical work, mission and international diakonia have furnished new experiences, and above all a stronger experience of belonging together in a worldwide context, with the sharing

which this brings in each other's faith and life. Within the framework of the LWF this has made it not only possible but necessary to rethink the essence and the mandate of the Federation, together with the ecclesiological implications which it has received.

I am not the first to point out this understanding of the close connection between praxis and reflection. In a lecture for the executive committee of LWF in Turku (Finland) in 1981 — at a time when a new discussion about the LWF's self-understanding was just beginning — Günther Gassmann emphasized that “the reflection on the self-understanding of the LWF arises from a certain context and at the same time it is oriented towards it. It is not a question of perpetual institutional self-reflection, not an introverted defensive self-justification. A fellowship such as the LWF must know from what it draws its sustenance, what holds it together and supports it, and what it is called by God to do...” It is the same understanding of the connection between context and reflection that leads Gassmann to conclude that “the Lutheran communion, in ecclesiological terms, has moved far beyond what the LWF in its constitution says about itself”.³

This said, we must add that it is precisely the question about self-understanding that has been a constant dilemma for the LWF throughout its whole history. From the time it was set up in 1947, the dilemma has been linked to a discussion about whether the Federation is to understand itself as an association of a secular character, or whether it also has ecclesial characteristics. During the first decades the context was such that this dilemma was discussed primarily on the basis of reflections arising from church law. Through the new contextual orientation of the 1970s, and thanks to the vocabulary which the *communio* ecclesiology developed in the course of the 1980s, a new position became possible in relation to this dilemma, which ended at the general assembly in Curitiba with a change of the constitution such that the LWF now understands itself as “a communion of churches”.

2. The original context

The original context for the ecclesiological self-understanding in LWF is linked, naturally enough, to the first general assembly at Lund in 1947. In the constitution adopted there we read: “The LWF shall be a free association of Lutheran churches. It shall have no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it.” The very tone in these formulations discloses that the mandate is clearly demarcated. The LWF is not to be understood as a “superchurch” with formal authority over its member churches.

There were several reasons for this reservation. Despite the earlier Lutheran World Convention (LWC) and other actions common to Lutherans from the period before the second world war, the leaders tended to have few experiences of international church cooperation. A common understanding of belonging to a Lutheran fellowship that went beyond national and cultural boundaries was something that existed only to a small degree. It is true that the Luther renaissance had given important stimuli, along with the jubilees in 1917 and 1939, but it was only in the USA that the Lutheran churches, despite their different ethnical and cultural roots, had developed a common self-understanding as a Lutheran church fellowship, with the consequent needs for common church structures both locally and regionally and also, gradually, globally. In the German area, the scepticism about a “superchurch” was still linked to negative

experiences from the last century, when the Prussian royal power attempted to force the churches to accept an overarching ecclesiastical structure. In the Scandinavian countries, the church had had a national and territorial order from the Reformation onwards, and there was little understanding for a supranational Lutheran organization with its own ecclesiastical mandate. To the extent that there was any commitment to church contacts beyond the boundaries of one's own country, it was more natural to link one's expectations to the World Council of Churches, which was also established at this time.⁴

Eugene Brand claims that the restrictive formulation in the constitution is a concession made by LWC "from a time when the LWC executive committee had been obliged to use it to allay the anxieties of those who feared any sort of established worldwide Lutheran organization".⁵ But it was also pointed out within the LWC that the Lutheran churches formed a worldwide church fellowship, as the Danish theologian Alfred Th. Jorgensen expressed at the LWC's second great meeting in Copenhagen in 1929: "The Lutheran church in 1929 is... not a collection of stones that we now want to try to bring together to form a mosaic. The modern Lutheran church — to the extent that its members are true to their confession — is a *unity*. It is *one* church."⁶ This implies a fundamental principle which has been a pillar in the development of the *communio* ecclesiology, a principle that Brand describes as the *cantus firmus* in the discussion, viz. that confessional communion is ecclesial communion.⁷

Nevertheless, as we have seen, it was reservation that marked the constitution adopted at the meeting in Lund. The external political and social situation in Europe after the war called more for practical measures of help in the short term than for reflections on ecclesiological principles. Seen in this way, the formulation can also be determined by a pragmatism that was more concerned to establish a common Lutheran organization than to discuss all the theological questions which this implied. This provisional character was also linked to the church-political strategy which was chosen in the endeavour to give the LWF such a broad platform that even the conservative North American Missouri Synod could seek membership. In the first twenty years of the LWF's history, this unclarified relationship to the Missouri Synod came to determine much of the discussion about self-understanding, and the tendency was to avoid statements and positions that could have the effect of giving offence to the Missouri Lutherans. This slowed down the ecclesiological reflection; only when it was accepted at the beginning of the 1970s that this membership was not a relevant question, did it become possible for the questions to be raised anew with full weight.

3. A new ecumenical context

The discussion was started by Peter Brunner with an early 1960s article in the *Lutherische Rundschau* in which he demonstrated the self-contradiction in the LWF's constitution, which speaks of the doctrinal basis of the Federation in ecclesial categories (art. II), while at the same time laying down that the LWF is a "free association of churches". For Brunner, this is not only a problem of principles of church law, but is also linked to the LWF's praxis, because the Federation "thanks to its doctrinal basis, which binds it, acts *in concreto* again and again as a church, and makes decisions through its action which lie within the horizon of ecclesial doctrinal decisions".⁸ Brunner does not describe more precisely what kind of praxis and decisions he is speaking of here; in general terms, he points out that the world has

become one, and that the church can no longer limit its self-understanding to national or regional boundaries. As an example of such a challenge, Brunner points to the pope's summoning of the Second Vatican Council. How could the worldwide Lutheran church answer if it were to receive an invitation to an ecumenical council? On the basis of its constitution, the LWF would no more be able to represent the Lutheran church than would one individual church. But Brunner also indicates internal challenges. When tasks in mission and ecumenism are tackled in fellowship, the LWF's praxis will necessarily have to become more and more the praxis of a church. In other words, it is the process itself that creates the ecclesial character, or, as Brunner concludes: "The World Federation is not an *esse*, but a *fieri*. It is on the way to realizing more and more the church fellowship that exists between the individual Lutheran churches and to become an organ of the one worldwide Lutheran church."⁹

Even if Peter Brunner was successful in initiating a debate, the LWF's general assembly at Helsinki in 1963 showed that there was as yet little openness in the member churches for this new context. The debate continued to be linked to church law premisses, and ended with the following addition to the article in the constitution of which we have been speaking: "... it (LWF) shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority nor shall it have power to legislate for the churches belonging to it or to limit the autonomy of any member church".

The resolution shows that fear of a Lutheran "superchurch" continued in force. Nevertheless, the LWF was given the green light to become involved in bilateral doctrinal discussions with other churches, above all with the Roman Catholic Church, a praxis which ultimately had to break through the restrictive mandate which the addition to the constitution had laid down for the Federation, since it was inevitable that these discussions gave the LWF an authority that could not be linked in every instance to resolutions adopted in the member churches; and it was precisely because of the contents of these discussions that the LWF also took on ecclesiological weight, just as Brunner had prophesied. There is therefore no reason to be surprised that it was the theologians who were centrally involved in these discussions who criticized most strongly the untenability in the LWF's constitutional self-understanding. One of them, Harding Meyer, claimed before the LWF's executive committee at Joinville in Brazil in 1979 that the development involving the bilateral doctrinal discussions in recent years had led to the point where the LWF now appeared on the scene as "a real *communion* of churches, which share pulpit and altar fellowship; without wanting to be a 'church' in the full sense, it possesses a high degree of 'ecclesial density'".¹⁰

The bilateral doctrinal discussions were one of the contextual processes that finally compelled a new discussion of the LWF's self-understanding. But there was also another such contextual process. This became more and more noticeable after the general assembly at Evian in 1970, and is characterized by a new understanding of the connection between church and society. This meant inter alia that the entire activity carried out by the LWF in the diaconal, social and political sphere took on ecclesiological implications, again as Brunner had predicted in his article of 1961. Now the department of studies in the LWF carried out a controversial ecclesiological study called "Die Identität der Kirche und ihr Dienst am ganzen Menschen" ("The identity of the church and its service to the whole human being"), in which a contextual method was applied that ensured that the questions about identity and mandate were elevated above the traditional confessionalist positions.¹¹ The dispute about this study pro-

gramme did not, however, prevent it from preparing the way for a whole new awareness of the significance of belonging to a global church fellowship. This emerged with particular clarity at the general assembly in Dar-es-Salaam in 1977, when this understanding became decisive in the discussion about the relationship to the white member churches in South Africa and Namibia, and it was established that confessionality is more than the adherence to doctrinal statements, but is also a question of the celebration of worship and of praxis related to society. This was the background for the general assembly's resolution to make the relationship to apartheid a *status confessionis*. In this way, the two contextual processes were brought together, and by means of the general assembly's resolution, a decision about a socio-political question was taken on behalf of the member churches and with reference to the doctrinal basis of the Federation. Thus the general assembly acted "in a magisterial fashion", as Dan Martensen observes.¹²

But had the LWF itself and its general assembly the authority to define something as a *status confessionis*? When the executive committee wished to clarify this question more precisely, it chose to consult the member churches through a questionnaire, so that it could find out how they evaluated the situation and the LWF's ecumenical role.¹³ The actual formulation of the questions was still primarily determined by North Atlantic problems and thus by the first context, that of the bilateral discussions. But it was also possible to discern a certain link to the other process, when it was asked whether a widening of the LWF's confessionality was desirable.

4. The Budapest meeting and the breakthrough of the *communio* ecclesiology

Among the documents which were sent in advance to the delegates to the LWF's seventh general assembly at Budapest in 1984 was a report from the study department with an analysis of the answers that had been received from the member churches.¹⁴ While it was noted that there were considerable reservations against giving the LWF ecclesial status as a federation, it emerged clearly that the context now was completely different from that in which the LWF's self-understanding had last been discussed; and this was linked especially to the recognition of solidarity within the fellowship of Lutheran churches. "The Lutheran communion, which does find its full and only expression in the LWF, nevertheless becomes visible in the common life and calling of the member churches of the LWF and is served by its organizational structures and resources. Thereby the LWF participates in the ecclesial nature of the Lutheran communion, but does not have such a nature in itself. The LWF becomes, therefore, the expression and instrument of the Lutheran communion. It serves as such an instrument both for the upbuilding of the communion of the Lutheran churches and for the realization of their commitment within the wider ecumenical context".¹⁵

Against the background of this document, the general assembly in Budapest adopted a "Statement on the Self-Understanding and Task of the LWF".¹⁶ As in the report from the study department, the *communio* ecclesiology is given here a key role in the definition of the LWF's self-understanding and mandate. The starting-point is that the worldwide fellowship of Lutheran churches, as a confessional fellowship, forms a communion. Thus the *cantus firmus* that fellowship in communion is church fellowship is maintained, and since this is a church fellowship, it has an "ecclesial nature". The LWF is not identical with this communion, but is its "expression and instrument". This implies that the Federation has not merely an instrumental character:

it is also the expression of the qualities that characterize the fellowship of Lutheran churches and are made visible through “pulpit and altar fellowship, in common witness and service, in the joint fulfilment of the missionary task, and in openness to ecumenical cooperation, dialogue, and community”.

The reference to the worldwide Lutheran fellowship means that the LWF is understood as more than the sum of the member churches, and this gives the Federation an authority of its own as a fellowship that imposes obligations. Precisely this question remained unclarified at Budapest, and it is not difficult to sense the ambiguity which finds expression in the “Statement”: “The kind of authority the LWF possesses is a delegated authority entrusted to the Federation by its member churches for particular purposes. It is also a moral authority, which is lodged in the inner persuasive power of decisions that are submitted to the member churches for their reception.” On the one hand, this contains a reservation through the reference to the member churches, in order to guard against a top-down structure where the degree of authority increases in proportion to the level on the pyramid of power. But on the other hand, the statement that the authority is delegated can also be interpreted as an acknowledgment that it is participatory, within the framework of an organic fellowship. In other words, what we have here is not merely a one-sided movement upwards from the base. It is only in this way that it is possible to speak of a fellowship that imposes obligations, and when the “Statement” speaks of the LWF’s moral authority, this too must be seen as a continuation of, and in connection with, the authority which one or more member churches exercise through the LWF in the name of the fellowship. This does not mean that the LWF is reduced to the role of mouthpiece for its member churches; in the very exercise of its office as expression and instrument for the fellowship lies an implied authority, but this authority must stand in a dialectical relation to the individual churches through a process of reception, so that it does not become authoritarian.

This authority is not based on what Harding Meyer described in 1979 as the LWF’s “ecclesial density”. Not only is this expression imprecise; it can also be interpreted to mean that this “ecclesial density” exists independently of, or without, the intimate dialectic with the church in its local context. And the *communio* ecclesiology is much better suited to bring out the idea, on the other side, that the LWF is more than the sum of the member churches.

It must also be mentioned that the meeting in Budapest likewise adopted another important document, namely a “Statement on ‘The Unity We Seek’”.¹⁷ Here it is made clear that the Lutheran communion understands itself within the context of “the one universal church”. In other words, the development of a *communio* ecclesiology is not meant to serve a Lutheran confessionalism, but is to contribute, on the contrary, to making it clear that the Lutheran communion is an “expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” and consequently “committed to work for the manifestation of the unity of the church given in Jesus Christ”.

Thus the Budapest meeting was a turning-point as far as the self-understanding of the LWF was concerned, and the *communio* ecclesiology was a breakthrough because it enabled the LWF to adapt ecclesologically to the new context in which it found itself. As a natural consequence, article III,1 in the constitution was expanded as follows: “the member churches... understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other”. The formulation expresses what had been the *cantus*

firmus the whole time, viz. that recognition had been finally given to a fellowship which existed *de facto*. Thus it is not the case that the member churches resolved to enter such a fellowship with one another. Since there is no lack of agreement about preaching and the doctrine of the sacraments, as *Confessio Augustana* (CA) 7 defines the basis for church fellowship, this fellowship already exists, and it is only up to the individual churches to recognize it.

5. The further development of the *communio* ecclesiology

After the Budapest meeting it was necessary to give more content to the *communio* ecclesiology. It was above all the new general secretary, Gunnar Staalsett, who undertook this task.

As early as the first meeting of the executive committee after his nomination, at Munich in 1986, Staalsett expressed "a strong personal commitment to an understanding of the LWF as the communion of Lutheran churches, dedicated to a strong ecumenical partnership and to mission understood as the proclamation of the gospel and service for justice, peace and human rights".¹⁸ Staalsett indicated three chief points under the heading "a theology of communion": first, that communion is "participation in the Holy Spirit", something that reveals its eschatological reality; second, that "communion is bodied forth in the visible fellowship which is the church"; and third, "as an ontic reality in this world, the Christian communion has an organizational or institutional aspect". With this starting-point Staalsett maintained that it was necessary to come one step further in the question about the mandate and authority in the LWF. "We must raise the question of doctrinal and disciplinary standards. The LWF has not been able to avoid acting like a world church on occasion. Sooner or later we must decide whether we should regularize what we have done *ad hoc*. We need to speak openly about the authority proper to a world communion and how it should be exercised in a manner consistent with our evangelical orientation."¹⁹

Staalsett's statements aroused strong reactions, although they stood in a clear continuity with the resolutions agreed at Budapest. There are several possible reasons for this. In the German area, there was already considerable irritation over the LWF's investigation of their links to the German churches in Southern Africa, and bitterness was also caused by the fact that Staalsett was not willing to give a particular national committee the leading role which it had earlier had in the LWF. But others too reacted against Staalsett's open assertions that there was a nexus between ecclesiology and organization, and the opposition became even more intense as this idea gradually took the form of proposals for a new LWF structure. This opposition was based both on a general reservation vis-a-vis the *communio* ecclesiology, and on a reservation about what was understood as an attempt to use a particular ecclesiological model to build up a centralized apparatus of power in Geneva.

There is no space to go into the whole of this conflict here. But it must be noted that it was primarily representatives of the member churches in Northern Europe who were critical of general secretary Staalsett's position, and the argumentation seems to have been determined as much by their own church-political context as by the concrete challenges which faced the LWF after the resolutions in Budapest. The attitude was much more positive among the representatives from the member churches in the South, both with regard to the *communio* ecclesiology and with regard to the proposals about the changes to the constitution and the structure which were launched by

Staalsett. At the general assembly in Curitiba, for example, this was expressed by the South African church leader Manas Buthelezi, who wished that the LWF could change its name to the Lutheran World Communion because “communion” is a biblical concept, whereas “federation” is a legal, constitutional concept. Buthelezi maintained particularly that communion makes visible the organic context in which the Lutheran fellowship stands, while at the same time opening the way to a recognition of a common standpoint under the cross: “the viability of any communion depends on the willingness of the members to adopt the cross as a life-style”.²⁰

There is a clear link between these points of view and the substance of general secretary Staalsett’s presentation of the LWF as “a communion of churches”. At the executive committee meeting in Munich in 1986 and at Viborg the following year Staalsett urged that there is a nexus between spirituality, witness and service in the realization of the fellowship. At the meeting in Munich, he referred to Luther’s statement that the one who receives Christ receives all the members of his body, thereby paving the way for an understanding of the LWF as a fellowship of service where “Christian communion has to be incarnated in the human community”.²¹ At Viborg he maintained that “spirituality is at the heart of communion and communion is the visible expression of shared spirituality”.²² By speaking in this way of communion as a goal and as a life-style, Staalsett located the ecclesiological reflection within the total context of the challenges facing LWF, in a way that allowed praxis to generate theological insight.²³

The discussion preceding the general assembly at Curitiba brought Staalsett to define his own position more precisely. At the last executive committee meeting before the general assembly, at Geneva in 1989, he confirmed that the *communio* ecclesiology is not to be understood as if it could dictate a particular structure; on the contrary, it serves to assess critically every structure. If the expression “free association” no longer serves, this is because it is incapable of maintaining the understanding of “interdependence among autonomous churches”. But Staalsett also warned those who wish to use “the vocabulary of *communio*” without a willingness to “translate it into structures, programmes and institutions which reflect a readiness to regard all the member churches of the Federation as equal. Communion must be seen in relation to established realities of dependence and domination by churches of history, wealth, size, culture and power.”²⁴ Without this concretization in the everyday life of the global church, *communio* ecclesiology can quickly develop triumphalistic traits.

As I noted at the beginning, the proposal to change the constitution and to give a new structure was adopted with the necessary two-thirds majority at the general assembly in Curitiba. The new article III,1 of the constitution lays down that: “The LWF is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.” The message from the general assembly contains five qualifications of this communion in which the Lutheran churches now understand themselves to be: first, it is “a spiritual communion bound together in the Holy Spirit...”; second, “a sacramental communion, called by the gospel, united in one baptism and gathered around the same table”; third, “a confessional communion”; fourth, “a witnessing communion”; and fifth, “a serving communion”. This synthesis shows that the contextual processes have now been brought together, and an ecclesiological terminology shaped which maintains both the

confessional identity and the challenges facing the Lutheran fellowship at the beginning of the 1990s.

A weakness of Lutheran ecclesiology has been that all attention has been focussed on the statement in CA.7 about the constitutive significance which the administration of the means of grace has for the church. This tends to a static ecclesiology, without an appreciation of the church both as a continuity and as marked by a shifting context. In our century many important contributions have been made to the renewal of ecclesiological reflection. One such is the Second Vatican Council's understanding of the church as the people of God. In the Lutheran context, the *communio* ecclesiology is an equally creative contribution. This does not mean that it is a magic formula that would exclude the possibility of "going off the rails" ecclesiologically. A new terminology is no automatic guarantee of such a development, nor is it the case that the *communio* ecclesiology alone can give a satisfactory answer to all the questions about the church's identity and task. In many fields, we still need to make use of other ecclesiological terms. But as the *communio* ecclesiology has been developed within the LWF it contains, in my view, the potential for serious reflection on what it means to be the church in our age.

This means that the resolution in Curitiba must not be understood as the final point in this process. When the new executive committee met at Geneva in June 1990, the newly-elected president, Gottfried Brakemeier, emphasized that "communion is something we need to learn". He referred here not only to the bitter debate at Curitiba, which could call into question the credibility of the *communio* concept, but also to the totality of the ethical implications of being a church fellowship in a world full of conflict. For Brakemeier, diakonia understood here as "the attempt, through settling of conflicts and a show of solidarity, to bring about those changes that make the praise of God easier for human beings",²⁵ remains a primary task on the road ahead.

The *communio* ecclesiology enables a continued elaboration of this diaconal perspective, in the interface between ecclesiology and context. Indeed it is precisely this perspective that has marked the Lutheran fellowship from the meeting in Eisenach in 1923 onwards, when diakonia (or *Bruderliebe*, as it was then called in the German text) was the theme of one of the first common resolutions. The same perspective emerged in the keynote address by the North American church historian E. Clifford Nelson at the general assembly in Helsinki in 1963. On the question of how a worldwide church can be organized, he concluded that it must find a form that corresponds to its essential being, which is "a servant's being".²⁶

NOTES

¹ We see what strong reactions this provoked before the meeting at Curitiba in a letter which the Council for Interchurch Affairs of the Danish national church sent to the LWF's executive committee on 4 January 1989. This gave commentaries on the proposal about the structure which had been sent out at that time for consultation in the member churches. In this letter it is stated: "We are directly opposed to the 11th paragraph, saying that 'The LWF is no longer a "free association" which delegates certain activities to a joint agency.' This is exactly what the LWF is for us: a free association of *churches* (which word is omitted in paragraph 11). If the autonomy and independence of the member churches is violated through a superficial use of the 'theology of communion' giving the theological background of the new structure, the future membership of the Church of Denmark would be severely questioned by us... As strongly as we

can, we appeal to the executive committee to state clearly that the LWF is a free association, exercising no authority over the member churches. In our view, the whole future of the LWF is at stake.”

² An introduction to the concept of *communio* is found in *Communio/Koinonia. A New Testament-Early Christian Concept and its Contemporary Appropriation and Significance. A Study by the Institute for Ecumenical Research*, Strasbourg, 1990.

³ LWF executive committee meeting minutes, Turku, 1981, exhibit 10.2, §§34 and 36.

⁴ It is only in 1923, when the LWC met for the first time at Eisenach, that one can speak of a worldwide meeting of Lutherans. Eugene Brand notes that if the establishment of the AELK (Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Konferenz) in 1868 “marks the initial step in developing a self-conscious world Lutheranism, then Eisenach marks its emergence”. Cf. *Towards a Lutheran Communion: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship*, LWF Report 26, Geneva, LWF, 1988, p.34. There have always been voices within the LWF critical of a Lutheran confessionalism. Ulrich Duchrow claims that the neo-confessionalism that emerged in the nineteenth century is a deviation from the Reformation position in that particular confessions of faith are made constitutive of the church and of its unity. He concludes therefore that the LWF’s ecclesiological dilemma can be resolved only within the framework of *una sancta*; cf. *Konflikt um die Ökumene: Christusbekennntnis – in welcher Gestalt der ökumenischen Bewegung*, Munich, 1980, p.224.

⁵ Brand, *op. cit.*, p.41.

⁶ Quotation from Peter Brunner, “Der Lutherische Weltbund als ekklesiologisches Problem”, *Lutherische Rundschau*, vol. 10/2, 1960/61, pp.279-300, esp. pp.279-280. Bengt Wadensjö, who deals with the development until 1929 in his dissertation *Towards a World Lutheran Communion* (Uppsala, 1970), likewise demonstrates that a clear understanding of the Lutheran churches as *communio* already existed at that time; G. Staalseth has referred to this many times, when it has been claimed that *communio* ecclesiology is something new and alien in a Lutheran context.

⁷ Brand, *op. cit.*, p.36.

⁸ Brunner, *op. cit.*, p.294.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.299.

¹⁰ Harding Meyer, “A Theological Commentary on the Lutheran World Federation”, minutes LWF executive committee, Joinville, 1979, exhibit 10.2.1.1., §35.

¹¹ The contextual methodology which was launched at this time both in the LWF and in the WCC brought the Norwegian Theological Committee to adopt the document “Ökumenisk metodologi” in 1974, expressing “deep unease about the development”, with the conclusion that the “doctrinal dialogue must be given objective priority”; text in *TTK 2/1975*, pp.103-120. In this document, and even more in Bernt T. Oftestad’s article “Den kontekstuelle metode og kirkens katolisitet” (in T. Austad & T. Wigen eds, *Tro og norm. Festskrift til John Nome*, Oslo, 1974, pp.75-98), the view is presented that doctrinal consensus is a presupposition for ecclesial unity, in other words, the confessionalism which the Missouri Synod has upheld in the discussion with the LWF. The LWF’s ecclesiological study is dealt with thoroughly by Günter Krusche, *Bekennntnis und Weltverantwortung. Die Ekklesiologiestudie des Lutherischen Weltbundes. Ein Beitrag zur ökumenischen Sozialethik*, Berlin, 1986.

¹² Daniel F. Martensen, *A Call to Consensus. Preliminary Discussion of Lutheran and Other Responses to the WCC Commission on Faith and Order Statement on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Accra 1974)*, LWF Report 8, Geneva, LWF, 1980, p.56.

¹³ The following four questions were put to the member churches: “(1) Does your church welcome the possibility that the ecclesial nature of the LWF is becoming more pronounced? (2) Does your church see any difficulties with the apparent broadening of the understanding of the confessionality in the LWF? (3) Would your church like to see world Lutheranism as a confessional community become more visible and influential in the life of the World Council of Churches? (4) In concrete terms, what would your church like to see the LWF do or do differently to help facilitate ecumenical work in your locality or region?” Quoted in Brand, *op. cit.*, pp.60-61.

¹⁴ *Self-understanding and Ecumenical Role of the Lutheran World Federation. Report on a Study Process 1979-1982*, Geneva, Department of Studies, LWF, 1984.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §46.

¹⁶ Published in *Budapest 1984*, LWF Report No. 19/20, Geneva, LWF, 1985, pp.176-177.

¹⁷ LWF Report No. 19/20, p.175. The basis for this document is found in the *Consultation on Relations between the WCC and the LWF*, Bossey, 11-14 May 1981.

¹⁸ LWF executive committee meeting, Munich, 1986, exhibit 7, §1.

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §35.

²⁰ M. Buthelezi, "Life in Communion", LWF general assembly, Curitiba, 1990, exhibit 5.1.1., cf. esp. §§15 and 66.

²¹ LWF executive committee meeting, Viborg, 1987, exhibit 7, Munich, 1986, exhibit 7, §§28 and 46.

²² LWF executive committee meeting, Viborg, 1987, exhibit 7, §14.

²³ This view is expressed in Staalset's assessment of the Budapest meeting, "a history which reveals how praxis can bring alive theological conviction", LWF assembly, Curitiba, 1990, exhibit 3.2, §60.

²⁴ LWF executive committee meeting, Geneva, 1989, exhibit 7, §§56 and 62.

²⁵ Gottfried Brakemeier, "Communion and the Resolution of Conflict: Reflections on the Mandate of the Lutheran World Federation", *LWF Documentation*, no. 29, December 1990, pp.5-14, esp. p.14.

²⁶ E. Clifford Nelson, "Die eine Kirche und die lutherischen Kirchen", in *Helsinki 1963*, Berlin & Hamburg, 1964, pp.384-416, cf. p.416.