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News of the Centro Pro Unione: In this issue of our bi-annual *Bulletin* we are presenting the text of an address given at the Centro by Dr. Harding Meyer, Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research of Strasbourg, which formed part of our observance of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. Earlier in the year, Fr. Daniel Olivier, A.A., of the Institut Catholique de Paris, gave a complimentary paper, which appeared in the last spring issue of our Italian language bi-annual publication, *Conversazioni*.

In November of 1980, the Centro will present a program entitled "Confessio Fidei", in cooperation with the Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo di Roma, and the Institute for Ecumenical Research of Strasbourg. Speakers will discuss the motives of Christian confession in the ancient Church, the continuity of apostolic belief in the process of confession shaping, and various contemporary challenges to a common confession. Among those who will present papers at the Centro are Fr. Tillard and Dr. Lukas Vischer.

The Centro has recently published in the spring *Bulletin* the second supplement to its *Continuing Bibliography of Bilateral Interchurch Dialogues*. A complete, new edition, including all material published to date, will be issued in 1982. The Centro has also just published *A Provisional International Directory of Ecumenical Research Centers and Publications*, which has been sent to interested institutes, publications and individuals for further correction before a more complete edition is published. In the fall of 1980, Paulist Press in New York will publish *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Interconfessional Conversations on the World Level*, edited and introduced by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer. This work is a joint publication of the Commission on Faith and Order, the Institute for Ecumenical Research of Strasbourg, and the Centro Pro Unione of Rome. Editions in French, German, Italian and Spanish are in preparation.

During the fall, 1980 semester, the Director of the Centro will offer, in cooperation with Prof. Remy Hoeckman, O.P. and the Pontifical Angelicum University of Rome a doctoral seminar on bi-lateral interchurch dialogues, stressing the areas of eucharist, ministry, authority, consensus and reception of the results of the dialogues within the churches.

The *Centro Pro Unione* is a center for ecumenical formation: for study and research, for the exchange of information, and for encounter. To achieve these ends, the Centro runs a series of conferences each year studying various aspects of the ecumenical movement from the pastoral, theological, social and practical points of view. The library has 8,000 titles in 5 languages and more than 200 current reviews.

The *Centro Pro Unione* is staffed by the Atonement Friars, a religious community in the Franciscan tradition, existing especially to help fulfil the Church's mission of Christian Unity, to witness to the Gospel among Christians and non-Christians and to bring all men to the fullness of unity with the People of God.

This *Bulletin* is distributed, free of charge, to about one thousand ecumenical institutes, centers, publications and selected individuals. Our library is most grateful to those institutes and publications which have exchanged publications with us. Those requesting this *Bulletin* are asked to enclose postage and specify regular or airmail.

CHARLES ANGELL, S.A.
Director

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AS A CATHOLIC AND LUTHERAN CONFESSION OF FAITH: A WAY TOWARDS CHRISTIAN UNITY?

An address given at the Centro Pro Unione of Rome,
November 22nd, 1979

By Harding Meyer, Director, Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute

In the last five years one subject has played a particularly fascinating role in the relationship between Lutherans and Catholics and that is the question as to whether the Catholic Church can "acknowledge" the basic confession of the Lutheran Church - the *Confessio Augustana* - as a specific but genuine and legitimate expression of the common Christian faith. This is a recurrent theme of discussion at meetings between Catholics and Protestants. Seminars, consultations and countless lectures and addresses are devoted to this question. By the beginning of 1978 the number of publications dealing with this subject in ecclesiastical newspapers and theological magazines had exceeded 600 and I would not be in the least surprised if a really exhaustive bibliography for the forthcoming anniversary of the Augsburg Confession were to list more than 1,000 titles.

Where did this idea originate?

In the course of the last 4 centuries repeated attempts have been made which aimed at something like a "recognition" of the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic Church. I am thinking, for instance, of the Roman Catholic auxiliary Bishop of Basel, Thomas Henrici, former professor of theology in Freiburg, who, in the 17th century published a voluminous book entitled "*Anatomia Confessionis Augustanae*" in which he tried to prove that the Augsburg Confession is in all essential points in basic accordance with the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and therefore could serve as a basis for reunion. Historically more important were the attempts made by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz who, towards the end of the 17th century, exchanged many letters with the Austrian Bishop Spinola and afterwards with the famous French Bishop Bossuet on a possible reunion between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches proposing the Augsburg Confession as the basic document. In more recent times, there have been German protestant theologians such as Friedrich Heiler in 1930 - at the 400th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession - and Max Lackmann in 1959 (*Katholische Einheit und Augsburgischer Bekenntnis*) who made similar attempts although, at that time, they did not have broader repercussion. In order to give a very last example from the French town where I come from: In the 17th century two interesting and rather big publications appeared, one by the Lutheran theologian Johann Georg Dorsch entitled: "*Thomas Aquinas dictus Doctor Angelicus exhibitus Confessor Veritatis evangelicae Augustana Confessione repetitae*" (1656; Thomas Aquinas the so-called Doctor Angelicus confessor of the evangelical truth as expressed in the Augsburg Confession), the other by a French Jesuit, Jean Dez, entitled: "*La Réunion des Protestants de Strasbourg à l'Eglise Romaine, également nécessaire pour leur salut, et facile selon leurs principes*" (1687; The Reunion of the Protestants in Strasbourg with the Roman Church, necessary for their salvation and easy according to their principles) which also tries to demonstrate the basic accordance between the Augsburg Confession and the Roman Catholic doctrine.

All this shows how the idea of a Roman Catholic "recognition" of the Augsburg Confession, so lively debated and advocated during the last three years, has, indeed, a long and venerable history. In the final analysis it is as old as the Augsburg Confession itself, which will celebrate its 450th anniversary next year on June 25th, since - and with this I am coming to the first part of my lecture - the Augsburg Confession has been written and submitted

with the explicit purpose of proving that the faith of the churches of the Reformation is nothing else than the catholic and apostolic faith and that, therefore, the Lutheran confession is, indeed, a "catholica confessio", as Melanchthon put it in his Apology of the Augsburg Confession. (1)

I. THE CATHOLIC INTENTION OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION

The invitation of the Emperor Charles Vth to the Diet in Augsburg addressed to Elector Johann von Sachsen (John of Saxony) stated the aims of the Diet in the following terms:

"We should all listen to each other's opinions and convictions with love and kindness and try to understand each other. We should consider how to come to one Christian truth and overcome differences. Everything which has not been correctly interpreted or done should be avoided so that we all may accept and keep to one true religion. Since we are all living and struggling under one Christ we should all live in one church fellowship and in unity". (2)

The Preface to the Augsburg Confession takes up what was said in the Emperor's invitation. It especially repeats the memorable phrase that "we are all living and struggling under one Christ". This deliberate double repetition confers a particular weight to that affirmation. It is an expression of the fact as well as of the conviction that western Christendom at that time was not yet divided. Unity was indeed very much in danger but not yet destroyed. At that time people still considered themselves as "under one Christ". The intention of the Emperor as well as of the signatories of the Augsburg Confession was therefore to maintain the still existing unity of the church in a situation of crisis and not to restore a destroyed church unity. The reason for the Reformers' conviction that they and their opponents were still "under one Christ" was their firm belief that they confessed, preached and taught "the Catholic Christian faith" as Melanchthon stressed in his 2nd draft of the preface to the Augsburg Confession. In the final preface therefore one could add to the Emperor's invitation and its affirmation that "we are all living and struggling under one Christ", the words: "and confessing one Christ".(3) This conviction is basic to the Augsburg Confession.

In order to make it even more evident I would like us to spend some time looking at the origins of this Confession.

The representatives of the Reformation did not at all intend to submit a confession of faith to the Emperor at the forthcoming Diet. Their intention was rather to come with a sort of "Apology" i.e. a document which would give account of the ecclesiastical reforms which had been introduced by the Reformation. In this sense in March 1530 the theologians of Wittenberg (amongst them Luther) had, under the Elector's orders, written a series of articles which dealt with the issues of church customs and ceremonies, avoiding all questions of faith. Although the Elector had insisted on these questions the theologians thought that there was basic consensus in all matters of faith. As those articles, the so-called Articles of Torgau put it: "Dispute is mainly on some abuses which have been introduced by human teaching and traditions". (4)

The theologians of Wittenberg left for Augsburg on April 3rd with this attitude. When they were in Coburg, near Augsburg, from the 15th to the 23rd of April, Melanchthon drafted the first version of the Preface to the Augsburg Confession. Once again he stressed the existing basic agreement in matters of faith. What was expected to be discussed were only the questions of ecclesiastical reforms which aimed at overcoming the abuses within the church.

This situation changed radically when the Lutheran theologians arrived in Augsburg on 2nd May. There they found John Eck's 404 articles which enumerated 380 heretic affirmations taken from the writings of the Reformers and to which Eck responded with 24 theses of his own. This fact indicated that the representatives of the Reformation would be accused of heresy at the forthcoming Diet. Thus the conviction expressed in the Emperor's invitation and shared by the Reformers, i.e. that "we are all living and struggling under one Christ" was fundamentally questioned.

In the light of this new situation there was a significant and important shift in the aims of the representatives of the Reformation. The original concept of a document concentrating mainly on the justification of ecclesiastical reforms, which had been introduced, was replaced by the concept of a document which would also deal with the basic matters of faith. The originally intended "Apology" became a "Confession of Faith".

As we know it was Melanchthon who had to prepare this document. A first draft seems to have been finished by May 11th. There the notion of "confession" appears and begins to replace more and more the original notion of "apology". This also affected the structure of the document. From now on there are two main parts, the first on "Articles of Faith and Doctrine" (Article 1-21) and the second on "Articles about matters in dispute, in which an account is given of the abuses which have been corrected" (Art. 22-28).

It is important to note that with this shift of emphasis from an "Apology" to a "Confession of Faith", the basic conviction was not denied but rather emphasized more clearly that the Lutheran confession of faith is nothing else than a confession of the one "Catholic Christian faith".

The final text of the Augsburg Confession read publically before the Emperor underlines this in three important places: nothing is affirmed which contradicts "the Holy Scriptures or the Catholic Christian church". (5)

All this, however, is still on the level of intention only: according to its intention the Augsburg Confession is as "Lutheran" confession, at the same time a "Catholic" confession. But: how can this intention be verified? This is the decisive question. In an attempt to answer this problem all other questions which challenge the motivation of this intention are only secondary. Of course, it cannot be denied that political considerations as for instance, the official recognition of the protestant parishes and regions by the Empire, and personal fears and worries have played their role in underlining the Catholic intention of the Augsburg Confession. Especially the last motivation has sometimes been criticized with regard to Melanchthon's attitude during the negotiations at the Diet: his pussyfooting, his evasiveness, his silence on important controversial issues, his affirmation that the whole disagreement was only about some ecclesiastical abuses, his personal fear which made him "more childish than a child" as was said at the time.

More important than this question of motivation is whether the "Catholic intention" of the Augsburg Confession corresponds to its content. Before taking up this question, however, we must examine in which way the Augsburg Confession and the Reformation understand and use the notion of "Catholic".

II. THE USE OF THE TERM "CATHOLIC" IN THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

It has to be stated at the outset that at the time of the Reformation the term "Catholic" was not yet limited to the realm of the Roman Catholic church and tradition as is the case today, at least in my German mother tongue.

The Reformers (and this is true still for the 17th century) quite obviously used the term "Catholic" in the sense of the ancient creeds as an essential mark of the church or in an analogous way. Luther for instance writes in 1528 that he believes "that there is one Holy Christian Church on earth that is, the community or number or assembly of all Christians in all the world". (6) The articles of Schwabach and Torgau (preparatory documents of the Augsburg Confession) take this up and lead to article 7 of the Augsburg Confession. Its first sentence refers to the Apostles' Creed and affirms: "It is also taught among us that the one holy Christian church will be and remain forever". Melanchthon's Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531) later interprets this sentence saying that article 7 of the Confession deals with "the church Catholic which is gathered from all nations under the sun". (7)

Thus the term "Catholic" as used by the Reformation and especially by the Augsburg Confession primarily points to the universal dimension of the church and of the true Christian faith in space as well as in time. This is in accordance with the use of the term "Catholic" in the Ancient Church as we can see from the famous sentence of Vincence of Lerin that "that which is believed everywhere, always and by everyone" is "really and truly Catholic".

It is true that in this sense the term "Catholic" can acquire a certain critical undertone and even a polemical note or nuance when used by the Reformers and the confessional writings of the Reformation. Melanchthon's Apology stresses that the notion or idea of Catholicity of the church is "very necessary" and "very comforting" in the struggle of the Reformation, its dangers and temptations. Since it indicates how the church of Christ and Christian faith is not confined only to one place, one country, one era and neither to one specific manifestation; this means it is not confined to Rome and the Roman Church of that time. (8)

This use of the term Catholic does not at all exclude the Roman Church but rather includes it, however, it also transcends the Roman Church in the sense that this Church cannot be regarded as the only and exclusive manifestation of the church of Christ. This is for instance expressed in one of Luther's writings. Starting from the notion of universality or catholicity of the church he says: "This Christian Church exists not only in the realm of the Roman Church or the pope but in all the world". (9)

This broader meaning of the term "Catholic" has to be kept in mind when we try to understand the "Catholic intention" of the Augsburg Confession and to verify this intention with regard to its content. This understanding of Catholicity includes the Roman Catholic tradition, however, at the same time, it goes beyond the realm of Roman Catholicism pointing to other manifestations of the church of Christ and referring back to the heritage of the Ancient Church which together with the Holy Scriptures is the normative point of reference of doctrine and life for the Roman Catholic Church as well as for the Churches of the Reformation.

It is very clearly expressed in the conclusion of the first part of the Augsburg Confession that its basic "Catholic intention" has to be understood in this sense: "This is about the sum of our teaching", which has to be passed on to our "children and descendants"; "there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the Catholic Church or the Church of Rome, in so far as the Ancient Church is known to us from its writers. Since this is so, those who insist that our teachers are to be regarded as heretics judge too harshly".

III. THE VERIFICATION OF THE CATHOLIC INTENTION OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

After having clarified what the notion "Catholic" means for the Reformation, the way is open to verify whether its "Catholic intention" is in keeping with the Augsburg Confession itself.

This task is, however, so broad that it cannot be accomplished here in a satisfactory manner. In this lecture I can only indicate the problem and try to illustrate by taking some examples how it can be solved.

In a recent consultation organised by the German Lutheran Churches, it was stated that the "Catholic intention" of the Augsburg Confession determines its "structure, content and validity". Indeed one could proceed along this line and try to show how far the claim for catholicity influences the Augsburg Confession in these three aspects i.e. in view of its structure, its content and its validity.

A. The structure and the method of the Augsburg Confession

It is obvious and has been correctly emphasized again and again that the articles of the Augsburg Confession on Doctrine, that is particularly Art. 1-17, are in their sequence clearly determined by the ancient creeds, especially by the Apostles' Creed. The sequence reflects, at the same time, the history of salvation and the trinitarian structure which is so familiar to the whole of Christendom. I. Creation by the Triune God, Original Sin and Fall; II. Redemption through Jesus Christ and justification propter Christum per fidem (for Christ's sake through faith). Then - III - there is the realm of the third article with its affirmations on Holy Spirit and Church, an area which is particularly extensive because of the fact that at that time the controversial issues concentrated very much on ecclesiological matters. As in the ancient creeds, this part of the Confession ends - IV - with an article on the resurrection of the dead to eternal life or eternal damnation.

The method used by the Augsburg Confession in arguing about matters of faith corresponds to this structure which indeed reflects the "Catholic intention" or claim for Catholicity of the Lutheran Confession. This method is in keeping with the principle formally stated, not to affirm anything which contradicts "the Holy Scriptures and the Catholic Church". It cannot at all be said that the Augsburg Confession is working with an exclusive and isolated "sola scriptura" i.e. it does not refer exclusively to the Holy Scriptures alone. This becomes particularly evident where the divergencies from the Roman Catholic Church of that time and the problem of abolition of ecclesiastical abuses are dealt with (Art. 22-28): The reference to the Holy Scriptures (to "God's commandment", to the "Word of God" or sometimes to the "Gospel") is, of course, important and has a special weight; nevertheless the argumentation never becomes biblicistic but always goes hand in hand with a reference to the tradition of the church, the church fathers, church law, the history of the church etc. In the preceding articles on doctrine and faith (Art. 1-21) we also find this two-fold reference: on the one side to the biblical witness, and on the other side to the creeds and the anti-heretic decisions of the Ancient Church. Especially the latter, the reception of the anti-heretic decisions of the Ancient Church is of particular significance not only because of the imperial law, the law against heretics (Justinian Code), but especially as a sign that the Augsburg Confession and the Reformation wanted to stay within the tradition of the Ancient Church and its conciliar decisions. It is, as it were, a manifestation of "solidarity with the whole Christendom of all ages". (10)

B. The content of the Augsburg Confession

The decisive question is, of course, how far the "Catholic intention" of the Augsburg Confession determines not only its structure and method but its content and affirmations. This question needs thorough investigation which evidently cannot be undertaken here.

In the course of the last few years there have been quite a few publications on this subject. Some concentrate on only one problem as for instance the doctrine of justification, the understanding of penance or the concept of church and ministry; others try in a very condensed manner to deal with all issues which are important for a common Catholic / Lutheran understanding of the Augsburg Confession.

During the last few weeks a major and unique joint undertaking of Catholic and Lutheran theologians has come to an end. It is the publication of something like a common Catholic / Lutheran commentary on the Augsburg Confession, which will appear soon, probably in January 1980. (11) Certainly we should not overestimate the importance of this commentary on which 24 Catholic and Lutheran theologians from different countries contributed: It has no church official character and will certainly be corrected and supplemented by the work of other experts. Nevertheless, it is the first common attempt in history of Catholic and Lutheran theologians to verify the "Catholic intention" of the Augsburg Confession with regard to its content. As such a common attempt for verification it differs from other similar attempts undertaken by individual authors as has often been seen during the course of church history.

The guiding question of this commentary has been whether and how far a common Catholic / Lutheran understanding of the Augsburg Confession is possible. The final result of the study proves that the Augsburg Confession did not only intend to confess the common Catholic faith but that also its content to a considerable degree has to be seen as a genuine expression of this Catholicity.

This result also and particularly refers to such specific controversial issues as the doctrine of original sin, of justification, the understanding of the Sacraments (particularly of the Sacraments of penance and of Eucharist) and the basic concept of church and church ministry. This result could be achieved through an unbiased historical evaluation of the theological controversies of the past, through new appreciation of the agreements reached during the negotiations at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, on the background of movements of renewal which have influenced our churches since the Reformation and especially in more recent times, and not least of all, through the results of modern ecumenical research and present interconfessional doctrinal conversations, particularly between Roman Catholics and Lutherans.

Certainly there are still unresolved questions: the question whether the office of bishop, as it has been maintained and preserved within the Roman Catholic Church, is in a strict sense essential to the church; the problem whether the mass can be conceived as sacrifice also in another sense than the Apology of the Augsburg Confession does when it insisted that the mass has only the character of sacrifice of praise; the differences in evaluation of monastic life both between the Lutheran and the Catholic Church and within the Lutheran Church itself. (With regard to this last issue it is self-evident that due to the present theological insights and the situation in our churches the harsh condemnation of monastic vows as expressed in Art. 27 of the Augsburg Confession can by no means be maintained by Lutherans today). In addition to this issues which are not yet fully resolved there is another category of

questions which the Augsburg Confession did not deal with and which consequently have not been the object of a common interpretation of the Augsburg Confession. Among these questions are, for instance, the problem of papacy and the role of Mary in the whole of the Christian doctrine of salvation.

But even if there are still open questions, it is not yet determined which weight these unresolved issues possess. It has been noted and stressed that these open questions do not necessarily represent church divisive issues but rather could be understood as an expression of legitimate diversity which does not question the basic Catholicity of the Augsburg Confession. Furthermore, the agreement in basic matters of the Christian faith as for instance with regard to the Triune God, the salvation in Christ, the understanding of justification and the church, give us legitimate hope that even in these open questions a greater rapprochement will be possible.

C. The Validity of the Augsburg Confession

Besides the structure and content it is also the validity or normative character the Augsburg Confession possess within Lutheranism which is clearly determined by its basic "Catholic intention".

In my opinion it is evident that the Augsburg Confession received its normative character not only through its reception in the protestant territories or its recognition by imperial law. The "magnus consensus" (great unanimity) of the protestant churches and congregations which finds its expression in the Augsburg Confession describes what, within these congregations and churches, is and ought to be taught, proclaimed and preached, also with regard to "our children and descendants". "The juridical or canonical validity of the Augsburg Confession was only the external seal of its internal claim to be doctrinal norm and confession of faith at the same time". (12)

This validity is not only ecclesiastically decreed or derived from the "magnus consensus" between the protestant congregations existing in 1530 or simply established by reference to Luther. This would be a validity which lacks any "Catholic" dimension, and would be limited only to a particular church. The awareness within the Lutheran Churches that this is not the case with the Augsburg Confession has never been obscured in spite of the fact that the Confession historically became normative only for Lutheran Churches.

The Augsburg Confession rather gains its validity through the interaction of three factors each of which is characterized by its "Catholic" scope:

The affirmations of the Augsburg Confession are seen as normative, first of all, because they subordinate themselves to the Holy Scriptures which belong to the whole of Christendom.

Secondly, the affirmations of the Augsburg Confession are seen as normative because they are in essential continuity with the Ancient Church and the doctrine of the fathers accepting and defending the decisions of the early councils which are normative points of reference for the whole of Christendom.

Finally, the affirmations of the Augsburg Confession are considered to be normative because they are concerned with the very centre of faith and life of the whole of Christendom, i.e. with the message of the unmerited and unconditional grace of God in Jesus Christ. The Augsburg Confession uses for this central Christian message with remarkable terminological consistency the biblical notion of "Gospel" (Evangelium), which constitutes for the Augsburg Confession a, if not the central theological category. This gospel and its

witness are the true basis for the validity of the Augsburg Confession in its Catholic scope and dimension.

IV. AUGSBURG CONFESSIOŃ - CONFESSIOŃ OF THE ONE FAITH - WAY TOWARDS CHURCH UNITY

If today, after 450 years, firstly through historical and theological research followed by church official dialogues and finally through reception in our churches themselves it has been proved and accepted that the claim for Catholicity implied in the basic and normative Lutheran confession is justified, then Catholics and Lutherans can affirm together: the Augsburg Confession is a confession of the one Christian and Apostolic faith. And if Catholics and Lutherans can make this affirmation then their churches are beginning to enter into a relationship which perhaps could best be described with the term of "sister churches".

Thus we come to a problem which during the last years has been the object of many and lively discussions and which I touched upon already in the introduction, i.e. the question of a possible "recognition" of the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic Church. This question is not the immediate topic of my lecture, nevertheless, I cannot avoid taking it up, at least in one of its most debated aspects. I am referring to the question what the term "recognition" means in this context and whether it is adequate at all.

Even for those who for a long time defended this term and helped to introduce it, it has become customary to criticize it now or, at least, to hesitate in using it. Contrary to this attitude I personally would strongly endorse what was recently affirmed in a consultation of German Lutheran churches, that for a number of reasons the notion of "recognition" is "absolutely meaningful and helpful". (13) It is all the more irreplaceable since its critics must confess their helplessness in proposing another more adequate term.

It is true that until now in the discussion on a possible recognition of the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic Church it has never been spelled out exactly how and in which way such a recognition could take place in accordance with church law and within the given canonical framework of the Roman Catholic Church. However, I am inclined to regard this lack of precision and this haziness not as a disadvantage but rather as something positive since it protects the matter in the present state of development from technical and canonical details which for the time being would only confuse and complicate the matter although these details certainly have to be tackled and resolved at the appropriate time.

It has, however, been stated clearly and repeatedly during the discussions what "recognition" of the Augsburg Confession means. Even if we have heard it already and even if the affirmations largely coincide and seem to be repetitious we should again listen to what has been said. For instance, in 1976, Kardinal Ratzinger wrote a recognition of the Augsburg Confession means, "that the Catholic Church would accept the basic affirmations (of the Augsburg Confession) as a specific realization of the common faith" (14); according to Walter Kasper the Augsburg Confession, after being recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, could "be regarded as a legitimate expression of the common catholic faith" (15); Heinrich Fries similarly says, that a Roman Catholic recognition would mean: "This Confession witnesses in its own manner and in its own language the same content of the faith which is confessed by the Roman Catholic Church; it is a legitimate expression of the Christian truth" (16); finally, the General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation stated in 1977, that a recognition

of the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic Church would recognize "the Confessio Augustana as a particular expression of the common Christian faith". (17)

All these affirmations and statements should have made sufficiently clear, what a "recognition of the Augsburg Confession" would basically mean. They are in accordance with each other and also correspond to what has been said before in this lecture. I would like to put this in a kind of thesis:

The "Lutheran" Augsburg Confession can be a confession of the one "Catholic" faith - and thus serve as basis for church unity - even if Catholics and Lutherans are not or not yet able to pronounce it jointly as their common confession of the one Catholic faith.

This may sound like a paradox, but it isn't. It is, indeed, possible and probably happened again and again in the history of the Christian Church, that Christians and churches have been confessing one and the same Christian faith even if they articulated and expressed this confession of the one faith in different ways.

Behind all this there is the ecumenically important and essential insight that the identity of the one Christian faith is maintained in spite of differences with regard to its individual appropriations and conceptualizations. And a particular concept of Christian unity i.e. the concept of unity as unity in - reconciled - diversity corresponds to this insight.

Only within the framework of such an understanding of confession of faith and of church unity can both, the contemporary endeavours towards recognizing the Lutheran confession as "catholica confessio" and the endeavours towards church unity between Roman Catholics and Lutherans be meaningful and promising.

When, two years ago, in June 1977, the General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation took cognizance of the idea of a Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession, an idea which, at that time, was still mainly being advocated by Roman Catholic theologians, and when this truly representative Lutheran gathering so emphatically welcomed this idea, a peculiar misprint appeared in the first version of the Assembly Report on this matter. Instead of the intended phrase: "The Assembly... welcomes endeavours which aim at a Catholic acceptation of the Confessio Augustana" it ran: "... a Catholic occupation of the Confessio Augustana".

This misprint was not only somewhat amusing but also very significant in the sense that it expressed fears which explain the reticence of quite a few Protestants with regard to endeavours towards understanding the Augsburg Confession as "catholica confessio" and towards its recognition by the Roman Catholic Church. On the Roman Catholic side the reticence with regard to these endeavours sometimes has a quite similar motivation.

Therefore, it has to be stated very clearly, that these endeavours do not aim at a Roman Catholic appropriation or, as the misprint ran, at a Roman Catholic "occupation" of the Lutheran Confession; neither is there any intention to make of the Augsburg Confession a Confessio Fidei of the Roman Catholic Church.

In the final analysis, such misunderstandings are an expression of the fear that these endeavours might lead to a Christian unity which is uniform and which implies the surrender of the individual tradition, heritage and

identity of our respective churches.

It was, therefore, very significant that the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 1977 took two ecumenical decisions at the same time: It welcomed the idea of a Roman Catholic recognition of "the *Confessio Augustana* as a particular expression of the common Christian faith", and, in another statement, simultaneously advocated a concept or model of unity characterized as "unity in reconciled diversity". (18) This meant that the Assembly understood the idea of a Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession as a practical application of this specific concept of unity. In the Assembly statement this becomes evident: The endeavours for a Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession, it is said, "would open the way towards a form of fellowship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church in which both churches without abandoning their particularities and identities would further the development towards full ecclesial communion as sister churches". (19)

It is true, this statement, while clarifying certain misunderstandings, at the same time indicates the existing limits of what reasonably can be expected from a Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession. It would, indeed, open the way for a fellowship between our two churches as sister churches, but it would not answer the need and the call for a common confession of our Christian faith today. Such a contemporary common confession of faith, in which Catholics and Protestants could join and which we so urgently need and are striving for, cannot be attained by the recognition of historical documents and thus by turning to the past. Rather a contemporary common confession of faith is something which lies before us.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that a Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession would be irrelevant and meaningless. The Augsburg Confession, once recognized again as a genuine "*catholica confessio*", could help us in freeing the way towards a real common confession of our faith here and now and could be a signpost on this way.

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FOOTNOTES:

1. Apology of the Augsburg Confession 15, 4 (Latin text)
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