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*The Cost of Christian Unity*  
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The Lutherans are at it again—getting along with other Christians that is. At the recent convention in Denver of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, more than two-thirds of the delegates voted in favor of having full communion with the Episcopal Church of America. Although this does not mean that the churches will join, it means that they recognize each other's sacraments, ministers can be exchanged, and that they can cooperate in large-scale activities, like missions, without duplicating efforts.

This is only the most recent step along the road of ecumenism, which began several decades ago. Christian churches have long had a reputation more for splintering and fighting than for getting along. But about halfway through this century, many churches began to look for ways in which they could cooperate with each other. Nearly every major denomination in the Western Hemisphere has been involved in some discussions about working ecumenically with other denominations since then. Now, at the turn of the century, nearly all of them have cooperative agreements of "full communion" with several different churches. The recent vote brings the number of such arrangements for the Lutheran Church to five.

Why do denominations split? And why do they continue divided? The easy answer is that churches usually split over matters of belief, but continued separation comes from that favorite of evils "the bureaucracy." Once a new church has separated from an older one, it must set up its own governing and administrative structures. Once those come into being, then they continue—the new denomination is whole and can function as a complete, self-sufficient institution. The ecumenical movement has

managed to overcome many differences of belief, but only in a few circumstances has it overcome the bureaucracies.

The present move towards unity by the two Dutch churches reveals just how difficult that process can be. A century ago, the Dutch Reformed Church split in two. They developed separate bureaucracies, ministers, and universities. A few years ago, the churches realized they no longer had any serious disagreements, and decided to reunite. Just as in the merger of two big corporations, they had many redundant support units—including a total of seven universities. With that in mind, they decided to close three of them—offering some employees early retirement, moving others to another university, and firing the rest. The human upheaval would be bad enough with one university, but with three universities in a country smaller than Wyoming, the human disruption will be massive. But the Dutch are moving forward with their plan.

However difficult "agreeing to disagree" may be—the approach of ecumenism—true Christian unity, even on the "small" scale of a single country, can be achieved only by determination and the decision that short-term pain will lead to long-term gain.