



THE SPRINGFIELDER

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Report of the Representatives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogues in the U.S.A. 1972-74

IN SUBMITTING A SEPARATE REPORT, we, the representatives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, do so earnestly, aware of the apostolic injunction to Christians everywhere that they “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4, 3) and “that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor. 1, 10); but equally mindful, too, that included in the exhortation is this, that “by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ ye all speak the same thing” and “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1, 10). To be “like-minded one toward another,” to glorify God “with one mind and one mouth” (Rom. 15, 5.6), is not an option which Christ’s followers can take or leave, but a God-given presupposition for genuine Christian fellowship.

We herewith express sincere appreciation for the friendly invitation to share in the dialogues, for the genuine good will shown us by our fellow participants, and for the generally patient hearing given us as we joined in the attempt to assess the claimed consensus and the admitted remaining differences. In the background for us all loomed the controversial opinion of *Marburg Revisited* that there remained “no insuperable obstacles to altar and pulpit fellowship.”

Accordingly, when we now find that we are unable to subscribe the joint statement, we do so with regrets and with the plea that we not be understood as judging the personal faith of our fellow conferees. But we cannot in good conscience set our signatures to a document that claims sufficient consensus for altar and pulpit fellowship. We do not feel that such consensus exists or even that we have made any concentrated effort to heal our fundamental doctrinal differences through the patient and obedient study of and listening to the Word of God, Holy Scripture.

We gratefully attest that our meetings have not evidenced any direct attacks on Holy Scripture. In fact, there has been frequent and professed respect for Holy Scripture. But there has been some reluctance to recognize unequivocally that Scripture *is* the Word of God whose authoritative voice speaks clearly to us on controverted points of doctrinal difference.

The result is that the conferees have *not*:

- attained a genuine basis for fellowship;
- reconciled any existing doctrinal differences, even though they have somewhat inconsistently admitted “serious errors”;
- demonstrated valid grounds for accepting the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973;

- shown *de facto* adherence to their respective Confessions, but have set them aside as viable instruments for the sake of declaring fellowship without formal agreement;
- recognized the seriousness of divergent methods of Scriptural interpretation, but merely profess that there is need for "fresh hearing of the Gospel in the light of their (each of the conferees) understanding of Holy Scripture,"
- stated clearly the nature and content of the Gospel itself, but have sometimes obfuscated it with ambiguous references to contemporary social issues.

We regret, therefore, that our conversations have not been more fruitful in terms of tangible results in the quest for church unity. If nonetheless there has been some positive fruit to our efforts—and we believe there is some—it has to do with recognition of the fact that search for unity in the church must be grounded on an unequivocal and unambiguous subscription to the articles taught by God's Holy Word. Only such unquestioned acceptance of Biblical authority can afford a proper basis for fellowship based on actual agreement on the articles of faith.

In looking forward to future dialogues in the interest of unity and fellowship, we believe that experience has now shown that there is likely to be more promise of and potential for God-pleasing success if future meetings are conducted between individual churches rather than with larger groups of churches. On that level the prospect would seem to be brighter, and the hope more realizable, for delegated representatives, or commissioners, to address directly the differences which divide the churches and to work for a God-pleasing consensus.

May God graciously grant that Christians everywhere be filled with holy zeal, so that the unity which Christ's church, the *una sancta*, possesses under His Lordship, may by the power of the Word be furthered here on earth among the splintered divisions of Christendom.

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Signed:

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