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*Table of Contents*

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*Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Declaration  
on Justification: A Response*

Department of Systematic Theology  
Concordia Theological Seminary ..... 83

*A Formula of Agreement: A Theological Assessment*

Department of Systematic Theology  
Concordia Theological Seminary ..... 107

*Lutheran Liturgies from Martin Luther to  
Wilhelm Löhe*

Vernon P. Kleinig ..... 125

*Theological Observer* ..... 145

A Chapel Sermon on Matthew 8:24 . David P. Scaer

*The Triumph of "Schmuckerism"*

..... Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

*Books Received* ..... 152

**Book Reviews** ..... 153

*John Williamson Nevin: American Theologian.* By Richard  
E. Wentz ..... Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

*At the Lighting of the Lamps: Hymns of the Ancient  
Church.* By John A. McGuckin . William C. Weinrich

*2 Timothy: Be Strong.* By Irwin J. Habelk.  
..... L. Dean Hempelmann

# *A Formula of Agreement:* A Theological Assessment

Department of Systematic Theology  
Concordia Theological Seminary  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## Prelude

The August 1997 assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) acted on three documents defining its relationship to three confessional families: the Roman Catholic Church, three Reformed churches, and the Episcopal Church. While the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Roman Catholic Church addressed that one central truth, the documents proposed with the Reformed churches and the Episcopal Church were intended to establish full fellowship, allowing the clergy to preach and officiate and encouraging the laity to participate in the Eucharist in the others' churches. The Lutheran-Episcopal *Concordat*, which required new ordination procedures for the ELCA, failed by a handful of votes to meet the ELCA's two-thirds constitutional requirement (though attempts are now under way to reverse this rejection by revisions in the document). *A Formula of Agreement* with the three Reformed churches fared better and passed with an eighty-two percent majority. The Reformed signatories to *A Formula of Agreement* (henceforth called the *Agreement*) were the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the United Church of Christ (UCC). In the Lutheran-Reformed "Proposal," attached as a preface to the *Agreement*, these churches are specifically called "the three Reformed churches," which identifies them as members of the family of churches descended from John Calvin, the Geneva reformer and a younger contemporary of Luther. Reformed (Calvinist) and Lutheran churches have historically differed most notably about the Lord's Supper, though even more fundamental differences exist between these two confessional families. Without in any way diminishing the significance of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the immediate results of the *Agreement* are for Lutherans more catastrophic, as even some

members of ELCA have seen both before and after their August 1997 assembly.

In the United States of America the *Agreement* brings to a climax Reformed attempts, reaching back as far as Zwingli's meeting with Luther at Marburg in October 1529, to let Reformed communicants participate in the Sacrament at Lutheran altars. Since then the Reformed have attempted to make formal intercommunion arrangements with Lutherans. They were eminently successful in the 1817 forced union of Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia, an arrangement adopted in other parts of Germany as well. By contrast, parallel attempts in America were voluntary.<sup>1</sup> In our century the formation of the Evangelical Church of Germany (*EKiD*, 1948) and the adoption of the *Leuenberg Concord* (1973) have further advanced Reformed inroads into Lutheran churches. Most recently the Porvoo Declaration (1996) allowed northern European Lutherans and Anglicans, historically a Reformed church, the same privileges now accorded each other by the signatories to the *Agreement*. We can hardly overestimate the seriousness of the *Agreement*. It signals a reversion to the position of Samuel S. Schmucker and a rejection of the great confessional tradition of Charles Porterfield Krauth. By the ELCA's surrender of what is characteristically Lutheran, all Lutheranism has been diminished. With penitent hearts for our frequent lack of gratitude for the gifts of the Reformation and with the full conviction and confession that the bread and wine

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<sup>1</sup>Donald H. Yoder outlines some of these efforts in "Lutheran-Reformed Union Proposals, 1800-1850: An Experiment in Ecumenics," *Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church* 17 (January 1946): 39-77. Johann Probst's argument in *Die Wiedervereinigung der Lutheraner und Reformirten* [*sic*] (Allentown, PA: H. Ebner, 1826) is strikingly reminiscent of the *Agreement's* perspective. He writes: "To Christian people in general it is all the same over what other dogmas the preachers of former days quarreled in their publications. Such writings can only be of interest to scholars. All the old confessional writings have been brought about through particularly grievous and troublesome circumstances and are likewise with time become obsolete and have only historical value." Cited in Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology* (New York: The Century Company, 1927), 48.

of the Sacrament are the very body and blood of Christ, we offer this assessment of the ELCA-Reformed *A Formula of Agreement*. It is our prayer "That pure we keep, till life is spent, Thy holy Word and Sacrament."

### *The Agreement*

The *Agreement* acknowledges that the signatories "recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered according to the word of God."<sup>2</sup> In approving the others' position on the Lord's Supper, the central issue between the Lutheran and Reformed churches is accepted as settled. Lutherans differ from the Reformed on other doctrines: God, Christ, including the incarnation and atonement, Baptism, justification, sanctification, the purpose and goal of the Scriptures, election and the church.<sup>3</sup> Differences on the Lord's Supper, which surfaced in the break between Luther and Zwingli at Marburg, have made this doctrine the most prominent. While the *Agreement* addresses the historical differences made explicit in the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions and other official documents of both churches,<sup>4</sup> it really sets them aside as outmoded: "Furthermore, in the light of the radically changed world of the

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<sup>2</sup>The *Agreement* assumes that a doctrinal consensus was achieved in *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today* (March 1992). Also cited in the *Agreement* as authoritative are *An Invitation to Action* (1981-1983), the *Leuenberg Concord*, and *Marburg Revisited* (1962-1966). Marburg was the site where Luther refused the hand of fellowship to Zwingli and is symbolical of the traditional Lutheran resistance to communion with the Reformed. The title *Marburg Revisited* suggests that this resistance has been overcome. The *Leuenberg Concord* claimed doctrinal unity among the established Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe.

<sup>3</sup>The *Agreement* acknowledges "the differing 'accents' of Calvin and Luther on the relation of the church and word, Law and Gospel, the 'two kingdoms,' and the sovereignty of Christ." For Barth, as for Zwingli, the Law is very much a form of the Gospel.

<sup>4</sup>See for example The Four Visitation Articles of 1592, which has separate sections on "The False and Erroneous doctrines of the Calvinists" on the Lord's Supper, the Person of Christ, Baptism and Predestination and Providence of God. Friedrich Bente, "Historical Introduction," in *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 192, 217, 1150-57.

twentieth century, it was deemed inappropriate to defend or correct positions and choices taken in the sixteenth century, making them determinative for Lutheran-Reformed witness today." We add that they were found to be inappropriate by the Reformed already in the sixteenth century and by some American Lutherans in the nineteenth century. In other words, doctrinally defining documents are no longer binding as confessions. Here the Reformed understanding of confessions has won out over the Lutheran. Karl Barth described the Reformed view as a "timeless appeal to the open Bible and to the Spirit which from it speaks to our spirit." He continued:

Our fathers had good reason for leaving us *no* Augsburg Confession, authentically interpreting the word of God, *no* Formula of Concord, *no* "Symbolical Books" which might later, like the Lutheran, come to possess an odor of sanctity. They left us only *creeds*, more than one of which begin or end with a proviso which leaves them open to being improved upon in the future. The Reformed churches simply do *not* know the word dogma, in its rigid, hierarchical sense.<sup>5</sup>

This the traditional Reformed animosity to confessions and dogma, summed up so well by Barth, provides the spirit and content of the *Agreement*.

The ELCA's "confessional paragraph" seems to give pre-eminence to the Augsburg Confession. In itself, this would be no problem, since the Formula of Concord regards not itself but the Augsburg Confession as the "symbol of our epoch." Nor have strict Lutherans in the past questioned the orthodoxy of those who for historical reasons had no formal subscription to the Formula, but genuinely adhered to the Augsburg Confession. The ELCA, however, while acknowledging "the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord . . . as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church," merely "accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the

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<sup>5</sup>Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), 229-230.

Gospel,"<sup>6</sup> which latter alone is "confesse[d]." Given the ELCA's deliberate exclusion of biblical infallibility/inerrancy from its constitution, all further commitments rest on a slippery slope of relativism. Not surprisingly, "[t]he dispute now is not over anything so refined as the relationship of Law and Gospel. It is, just for starters, over what the Gospel is, whether there is any Law at all, and just who this necessary Christ might be."<sup>7</sup>

In evaluating the *Agreement*, our response takes advantage of the entire Book of Concord (1580), without in any way diminishing the primacy of the Augsburg Confession (1530), which is as anti-Reformed as the Formula of Concord (1577): "Of the Supper of the Lord it is taught thus, that the very body and blood of Christ are verily present under the form of bread

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<sup>6</sup>This has long been the position of the General Synod branch of American Lutheranism. Milton Valentine writes under the heading "The Augsburg Confession Only" ("The General Synod," in *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1903), 41): "The General Synod does not include in its confessional basis any of the other writings that have been, to greater or less extent, accepted as doctrinal standards in some places, such as The Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Larger Catechism, the Smalkald Articles, and especially the Formula Concordiae." What is noteworthy in the case of the General Synod, though, is its militant attitude *against* the other confessions. About the Augsburg Confession itself, Valentine says "That in the differences of understanding and explanation that have always marked the interpretation of some of its statements, undisturbed liberty shall be enjoyed" (47). This is not surprising, however, when one considers the position of Samuel Schmucker, the nineteenth-century American Lutheran. He argued that *only* the Augustana was to be subscribed to, and only in so far as it confessed the fundamental articles of the Christian faith in a manner substantially correct. Schmucker also claimed that because many Lutherans had never subscribed to the other symbolical books, they could therefore not be considered confessionally binding. See "The Doctrinal Basis and Ecclesiastical Position of the American Lutheran Church," in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated*, 155-246 (Springfield, Ohio: D. Harbaugh, 1851). Of note is the significant step back from the position of Schmucker and Valentine by J. A. Singmaster. See "The General Synod," in *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1914), 57-58.

<sup>7</sup>"Editor's Response," *Lutheran Forum* 29 (Lent 1995): 18.

and wine in the Supper, and are there distributed and received. Therefore also the contrary doctrine is rejected."<sup>8</sup>

Pivotal for the *Agreement* is the "*satis est consentire*" of Augustana VII: "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments." In this article not only Lutherans, but also the Reformed, who do not accept the Augustana, find a basis for their alliance.

Adoption of the *Agreement* has an immediate effect in altering the confessional status of Augustana X, which was intended to exclude Zwinglian teaching. Even the Lutheran World Federation's Harding Meyer noted that acceptance of the *Leuenberg Concord* (1973), expressly approved by the *Agreement*, meant a major change in "Lutheran confessionality." It could "only mean that both churches no longer hold to the same position on certain points which had for a long time been considered important." For one thing, "the previous Lutheran insistence on the Unaltered Augsburg Confession" is given up.<sup>9</sup> For the *Agreement*, then, the historic doctrinal differences between Lutherans and Reformed are no longer obstacles to fellowship between the churches at any level. Since the UCC makes no confession binding, historical precedent presents no obstacles.<sup>10</sup>

The ELCA's recognition that the sacraments are rightly administered in the Reformed churches puts the positions on the Lord's Supper of Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger, Knox and other classic Reformed and Calvinist teachers, along with their traditional confessions like the *Consensus Tigurinus*,<sup>11</sup> the

<sup>8</sup>AC X, German, our translation.

<sup>9</sup>Harding Meyer, "The LWF and Its Role in the Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran World* 20 (1973): 28-30.

<sup>10</sup>*The Statement of Faith*, adopted in 1959 by the United Church of Christ, makes no reference to the eternal generation of the Son, which denial is condemned by Augustana I.

<sup>11</sup>It held that the body and blood were received spiritually and only bread and wine were received by the mouth. This was a result of the belief that Christ's body was locally contained in heaven and could not be on earth.



Second Helvetic Confession, the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession on an equal footing with what is confessed in the Book of Concord. Thus pastors and congregations who explicitly deny or deliberately avoid saying that the bread of the Sacrament is the body of Christ and the cup is the blood of Christ are now recognized by congregations of the ELCA as those among whom "the sacraments are rightly administered." This clearly disavows the teaching of the Lutheran Reformation (AC VII and X). In effect, the *Agreement* puts the doctrine of the Lord's Supper into the category of *adiaphora*, matters on which there may be disagreement without disrupting the unity of the faith and the church. It follows logically that the *Agreement* "withdraw[s] any historic condemnation by one side or the other as inappropriate for the life and faith of our churches today."<sup>12</sup> To cite a critique of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: "The document seems to hold to a hermeneutic that would have us believe that disagreements can be overcome if we will only agree that the disjunctive statements really" do not matter any more.<sup>13</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, a former ELCA clergyman, refers to an article by Leonard Klein, a current ELCA clergyman, to offer this assessment: "In the larger world of ecumenical affairs, there has been much talk in recent years about 'reconciled diversity.' The idea is that differences once thought to be church-dividing may not be so, that unity does not mean uniformity, and so forth. 'What we have achieved with the Reformed,' writes Pr. Klein, 'true to the mood of the inclusive church, is unreconciled diversity.'"<sup>14</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions hold that the true body of Christ is present *in* or *under* the bread [*unter der Gestalt des Brots*] and

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<sup>12</sup>"Preface," *Agreement*.

<sup>13</sup>Wording borrowed from Louis A. Smith, "Some Second Thoughts on the *Joint Declaration*," *Lutheran Forum* 31 (Fall 1997): 8. *A Common Calling* cites with approval and as an adequate authority the *Leuenberg Concord*, that the "condemnations expressed in the confessional documents no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal positions of the assenting churches."

<sup>14</sup>"Here I Stand. And Here, and Here: The ELCA in Assembly," *First Things* 78 (December 1997): 72.

that this excludes the contrary Reformed position.<sup>15</sup> Within the new frame of reference, opposing views are valued as equal approximations of the truth.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the condemnations of the Lutheran Confessions against the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper are no longer operable and are therefore withdrawn. With this the Lutheran Confessions are relegated to the position of mere historical documents, which no longer can claim the exclusive right to articulate the faith of Lutherans in the ELCA. Thus ELCA congregations and pastors are incidentally and not necessarily Lutheran. The practical outcome of this new understanding is that pastors of the Reformed tradition, with their denial of the real presence of the Lord's body and blood in the Supper, are welcome to officiate at Lutheran altars and the Reformed laity are allowed to commune at these altars. In turn, Lutheran pastors and laity may celebrate and receive at Reformed tables.

Eucharistic hospitality is conceded by the Lutherans, not the Reformed. In this ecclesiastical treaty between the two great Reformation churches, the Lutherans and not the Reformed have made the accommodation in formally instituting mutual eucharistic hospitality. Already at Marburg Zwingli extended a eucharistic invitation to Luther, which the Reformed have continued to offer Lutherans with few exceptions in the

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<sup>15</sup>See Formula of Concord VII, especially paragraph 33: "Sacramentarians and enthusiasts" who "will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless or Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final." This is no doubt why Bishop Perry at the closing convention of the Lutheran Church in America "calmly and explicitly repudiated Article Seven of the Formula" in the interests of the projected fellowship with the Reformed (*Forum Letter* [September 16, 1986]). Leonard Klein is quite right: "Lutheran and Reformed eucharistic doctrine and practice are not complementary but contradictory" ("Experiential Expressivism—The ELCA's August Assembly," *Forum Letter* [October 1997]: 4).

<sup>16</sup>Neuhaus, "Here I Stand," 72. "The proponents of fellowship with the Reformed repeatedly cited Calvin over the more radical Zwingli. Yet Calvin consistently stopped short of saying what Lutherans insisted upon, namely, that the bread and wine in the Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Christ."

intervening four centuries. In the case of the Prussian Union this invitation was legally enforced by penalties against Lutherans who conscientiously objected to it. The *Agreement* calls on the Reformed to keep on doing what they have always done and requires the Lutherans to do what they have historically refused to do. Concession is totally on the Lutheran side.

Since the ELCA has long practiced open communion (the former American Lutheran Church had full fellowship with the Reformed [1986]), the *Agreement* with the Reformed hardly represented a real crisis for them. It received an eighty-two percent approval vote.<sup>17</sup> Subscription by ELCA congregations and pastors to the Augustana – for some this may include one or more of the other Confessions, something that may differ from congregation to congregation – has been replaced by the *Agreement* requiring a practice that is contrary to the Confessions. This situation is most serious for pastors, who must now act contrary to their ordination vows. Here is a parallel to the Prussian Union.<sup>18</sup> The renunciation of the Confessions becomes most evident in the ELCA's recognition of the UCC, which, in its blending of Congregational, Baptist, Reformed, and Evangelical (Lutheran-Reformed) churches into one denomination, long ago gave up any concept of confessional subscription.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>At least some confusion over the issue is demonstrated by the absurd statement of ELCA columnist Clark Morphew: "An Episcopal bishop . . . is believed to have the power to make Christ present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Lutheran bishops have never been given that power" (*Fort Wayne News-Sentinel* [May 16, 1997])!

<sup>18</sup>Hermann Sasse, *Union and Confession: Christ and His Church*, translated by Matthew C. Harrison (Saint Louis, Missouri: Office of the President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, 1997), 38.

<sup>19</sup>This is frankly admitted by Robert W. Jenson ("The August 1997 Assembly of the ELCA," *Pro Ecclesia* VI [Fall 1997]: 389-90): "The supposedly confessional ELCA was able to enter full fellowship with the United Church of Christ even though it knows that this partner is unable to commit itself creedally or liturgically and was again so informed by the United Church representative at the assembly." For specific information on the United Church of Christ, see Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *Profiles in Belief*, 4 volumes (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 2:664-74.

The *Agreement* has meaning for ELCA laity. They are urged to participate in communion services led by Reformed ministers in Lutheran or Reformed churches. In both instances they may hear a liturgical formula in the distribution of the Lord's Supper that is different and even contrary to what they have been accustomed to hearing in a Lutheran service. Such liturgical ritual has doctrinal implications, because it either confesses or does not confess the truth. What is distributed in such situations may in fact be no Sacrament at all. The Reformed have never gone beyond seeing the Sacrament as anything more than a form of the Word to which faith responds to make the sacramental action complete.

Without formally disowning the historic doctrinal documents, the *Agreement* provides a new operative statement for understanding the Lord's Supper, which for all practical purposes can only be regarded as an interpretative confession: "while neither Lutheran nor Reformed profess to explain *how* Christ is present and received in the Supper, both churches affirm that 'Christ himself *is* the host at the table . . . and that Christ himself *is* fully present and received in the Supper.'"<sup>20</sup> This expresses the traditional Reformed view of the Lord's Supper. Granted, we can no more know the "how" (method) of the real presence than we can know the "how" of the incarnation. Yet, identifying "where" Christ is, as well as "what" is present and received in the Supper, is exactly what the Lutheran Confessions do. He is present in the bread and the wine in such a way that, by virtue of sacramental union, bread and wine *are* actually His body and blood. These are received specifically by the mouth (*manducatio oralis*) and not merely by faith. Unbelievers, too, receive the true body and blood with the mouth (*manducatio indignorum*), since by definition they have no faith at all. Thus reception of the Sacrament by faith is dependent first on Christ's presence in the elements and then on

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<sup>20</sup>This phraseology is taken into the *Agreement* from James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess, editors, *An Invitation To Action: The Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue Series III 1981-1983* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), but the emphasis and ellipsis were added by the writers of the *Agreement* and not the presenters of this critique.

our receiving Him with our mouths. Lutherans have insisted that the bodily reception of Christ exists apart from and independently of faith. Christ is actually sacramentally present before and apart from faith. Faith does not make or contribute to the Sacrament, but faith is created and confirmed and responds to Christ in the Sacrament (AC XIII).<sup>21</sup> This is the whole point of the *manducatio indignorum* and the *manducatio oralis*. Formula of Concord VII confesses this as the teaching of the Augustana, the Wittenberg Concord (1536), and the Great Confession (1528) of Martin Luther, who understood the Augustana better than anyone else (FC, SD VII, 33).

At first glance, it might appear that, even though Lutherans and Reformed have differences on how the sacramental elements are to be understood, they do have a common understanding about Christ being the host at the table, and they can affirm that He is fully present and received in the Supper. This is a totally false assumption. The Reformed see the Spirit and not Christ as the real giver of the Sacrament. They are forced into this position by their doctrine of Christ's human nature, which does not and cannot receive and is not affected by the divine nature (*genus maiestaticum*). Their doctrine of the local session of Jesus at God's right hand is a logical conclusion of their Christology. Though they teach that the divine nature is permanently attached to the human nature, that human nature is confined to heaven and is not present on earth. Thus Lutherans and Reformed have a different understanding of what it means that Christ is the host of the Lord's Supper. For the Reformed Christ does not really give His body and blood in the bread and wine.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "*sacramenta instituta sint, . . . ad excitandam et confirmandam fidem, in his qui utuntur, . . .*" So Christ's bodily presence in sacramental bread and wine precedes faith and reception of it.

<sup>22</sup>We are not alone in our observation that the *Formula of Agreement* is Calvinistic. Michael J. Root, formerly with the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, and recently appointed to the ELCA faculty of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, notes that "The Formula clearly excludes a Zwinglian reading of the Supper and states that Christ gives himself to all who receive the elements" (*Forum Letter* 27 [March 1998]: 4). At issue

Any discussion of Christ's presence in His human nature of course brings up the thorny issue of the historical Jesus, whose bodily resurrection is often denied or "reinterpreted" among both liberal Lutherans and liberal Reformed. This redefinition has been going on since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and was reinforced by the nineteenth-century "quest for the historical Jesus." Though the first two "quests" were declared dead, a third "quest" has resurrected the search.<sup>23</sup> Such a "quest" was unknown during the Reformation, when all parties to the dispute believed in the resurrection, even though the Reformed had their own peculiar views about the confinement of Christ's body to a place in heaven. Marc Lienhard, of the LWF's Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg, informs us that the historical-critical approach to the Bible, which had made possible the *Leuenberg Concord*, had also made it impossible in the Arnoldshain Theses (a precursor to *Leuenberg*) "to connect the institution of the Lord's Supper with the night in which he

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here, however, is not Zwingli's, but Calvin's view, as rightly noted by ELCA clergyman, Russell E. Saltzman, the editor of *Forum Letter*. "As we have read it, the trouble with the *Formula* is not what it says, but what it does not say. It never says plainly that what is given and received in the Supper is the Lord's body and blood. This was of course the same problem Calvin had, how to say as much as possible about the Supper without finally ever saying it is the Lord's body and blood. '[W]e must establish such a presence of Christ in the Supper,' so he wrote in his *Institutes*, 'as may neither fasten him to the element of bread, nor enclose him in bread, nor circumscribe him in any way. . . . 'Careful reading shows the *Formula* accomplishing just that. 'Imparts himself in his body and blood,' to quote *Leuenberg* quoted in the *Formula*, is not nearly as distinct as 'gives himself in his body and blood,' just as an example. The *Formula* is a very good attempt at grappling with the Real Presence, but unless we and the Reformed are both speaking of the elements as that 'body born of Mary' (*LBW* #215), then ultimately we are speaking of different things. We agree, the *Formula* is not 'feel good' ecumenism, which is why a number of us feel worse for it." *Lutheran Book of Worship* #215 is Luther's eucharistic hymn "O Lord, We Praise You," in which the Reformer confesses the identity of the sacramental gift with the body born of the Virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate (*TLH* 313; *LW* 238). We concur with Pastor Saltzman that the *Formula of Agreement* presents Calvin's and not Luther's position.

<sup>23</sup>The *Jesus Seminar* is the best known, but its determining truth by ballot may relieve it of scholarly credence.

was betrayed."<sup>24</sup> This renders meaningless the *Agreement's* citation from the *Leuenberg Concord* that "in the Lord's Supper the risen Christ imparts himself in his body and blood . . ."

Such language as "Christ himself *is* host at his table" is wrong-headed for at least two reasons.<sup>25</sup> Some twentieth century New Testament scholars, most recently Willi Marxsen, claim that after Jesus' death, early Christians believed He was present *at* the table and later *on* the table. Again it is not a matter of presence, but *where* that presence is. Gradually a simple Protestant table became a catholic altar. This is a word game with prepositions and could be dismissed, if it were not so serious a matter with dire consequences for the Church's faith. Similarly, this kind of thinking sees early Christians as moderate unitarians who later evolved into Trinitarians and prepared the way to Rome. The Germans call this doctrinal evolution the *Katholizisierung* of Christian doctrine. Secondly, the word *is* belongs to the bread and the cup, not to the host.<sup>26</sup>

In certain places the *Agreement* seems consciously to follow Melancthon, who attached Christ's presence to the liturgical action and not to the elements as did Luther. Consider the inclusion of this citation from the *Leuenberg Concord*: "We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking."<sup>27</sup> Certainly Christ is

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<sup>24</sup>Marc Lienhard, *Lutherisch-Reformierte Kirchengemeinschaft Heute. Ökumenische Perspektiven Nr. 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, Verlag Joseph Knecht, 1972), 54, our translation.

<sup>25</sup>Emphasis is in original.

<sup>26</sup>It might go too far to suggest that the authors of the *Agreement* were engaging in deception in using the word *host*, which can refer to the person at the head of the table and to the sacramental bread. The former comes from the Latin *hospis* and means one who entertains; the latter from the Latin *hostia* and means the sacrificial victim.

<sup>27</sup>Ernst Sommerlath, "Die kommende Kirche? Anfragen zum Leuenberger Konkordienentwurf aus der DDR," in *Von der Wahren Einheit der Kirche: Lutherische Stimmen zum Leuenberger Konkordienentwurf*, 185, herausgegeben von Ulrich Asendorf und Friedrich Wilhelm Künneth (Berlin und Schleswig-Holstein: Verlag Die Spur GmbH & Co., 1973): "Klar scheint mir aber zu sein, daß die Frage, ob die Kommunikanten beim Abendmahl Christi Leib und Blut essen und trinken, von der LKE verneint wird." ["It seems clear

present in the ritual (act), but identifying *what was eaten and drunk was the historical point of contention between Lutherans and Reformed*.<sup>28</sup> It is simply not true, therefore, that Lutherans and Reformed agreed about the *fact* of the "Real Presence," and differed only about the "mode."<sup>29</sup> Nor is it true, as the former American Lutheran Church was assured in preparation for its acceptance of full communion with the Reformed in 1986, that Lutheran teaching excludes only Zwingli, but not Calvin's "spiritual presence," since "both Lutherans and Calvinists ardently affirm the reality of Christ's presence in the sacrament."<sup>30</sup>

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to me that the question whether the communicants eat and drink the body and blood of Christ at the Lord's Supper is answered negatively by the *Leuenberg Concord*."] ]

<sup>28</sup>Lutherans in no way want to deny that the Sacrament is the work of the Holy Spirit who alone gives all good gifts to the church, including and especially the Sacraments. The Reformed assigning the Lord's Supper to the Holy Spirit should not force us into denying that the Lord's Supper is as much a Trinitarian gift fully involving the Holy Spirit as it is a christological one. After all it is the Father who invites us to the Supper of His Son and so He is properly addressed in all the eucharistic prefaces: "It is truly meet, right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, Lord God, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, . . ." Through the Father's invitation and the Son's gift the Spirit works in the sacramental elements and creates and confirms faith in the heart. This activity of the Spirit is specifically associated with the presence of Christ in the bread and not with some parallel, disconnected working in the heart. In this sacrament as in the incarnation, He is acknowledged and worshiped as *Creator Spiritus*.

<sup>29</sup>So for instance Andrews and Burgess, editors, *An Invitation To Action*, 114-115; and Walter Wietzke, "With Our Closest Kin," *The Lutheran Standard* (July 11, 1986): 9-11). While numerous Reformed proponents of this argument could be cited, we will refer only to John W. Nevin's "The Lutheran Confession," (*Mercersburg Review* 1 [September 1849]: 470): "In particular, we are not able at all to accept Luther's idea of Christ's presence in the eucharist. With Calvin, and the Heidelberg Catechism, we hold the mystery itself, and abhor the rationalistic frivolity by which it is now so commonly denied; but the *mode* of it we take to be such as fairly transcends all local images and signs" (emphasis in original).

<sup>30</sup>Wietzke, 9. Ernst Sommerlath, the long time editor of the distinguished *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, made a similar critique against the Arnoldshain Theses, which prepared the way for the *Leuenberg Concord*. The participants were agreed that Christ was the subject of the sacramental action, "But nowhere is it said, that he gives his body and blood in the elements."



Augustana X's condemnation clause had Zwingli in view. Calvin had not yet appeared, and so could not have been in the minds of Luther, Melancthon, and the other reformers and princes. However, Calvin and not Zwingli was the foremost target of the condemnations of Formula of Concord VII, which meant to safeguard the true sense of Augustana X (FC SD VII, 41-42). True, the *Agreement* does not reflect Zwingli's radical teaching that Christ is not present in the Sacrament. Yet the milder version, which let the Reformed "speak of the presence of Christ in the community gathered by the Holy Spirit,"<sup>31</sup> is no more allowed by the Augustana than is nineteenth-century Unitarianism by Article I, which condemns fourth-century Eunomians. Confessional subscription for Lutherans means that after the historical condemnations are acknowledged and accepted, they continue to be applicable to the church's current situation. The Apology (1531), the Treatise (1537), and the Formula (1577) do precisely this for the Augustana (1530). By making the condemnations inoperable, the purpose of the Lutheran Confessions *qua* confessions is abandoned, so at best they represent only what certain churches *historically* believed. Confessional subscription is rendered meaningless. Not to be cynical, but can we ask whether the condemnations against the Arians and Muhammadans are still operative (AC I)? Or are we faced with *selective confessional condemnation*?<sup>32</sup>

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"Stellungnahmen unter Gesichtspunkten der Lehre and des Bekenntnisses," *Lehrgespräch Über das Heilige Abendmahl*, edited by Gottfried Niemeier (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961), 79 (our translation).

<sup>31</sup> *Christianity Today* 41 (October 16, 1997): 81.

<sup>32</sup> A certain pre-history here inspires little confidence: A 1980 article in *Lutheran World Report* by John Reumann, of the former LCA, had argued that the whole traditional Christology from Nicaea and Chalcedon to Article III of the Augsburg Confession is untenable in light of historical-critical scholarship. Thereupon the LCMS resolved in 1981 to request the Division of Theological Studies of the former Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA) to take up "as a matter of urgency a thorough discussion of the far-reaching implications of historical criticism, as practiced in U.S. Lutheranism, for: a) the central, Christological-Trinitarian core of the Gospel; b) the very possibility of confessional subscription; c) the preamble of LCUSA's constitution, according to which the participating Lutheran church bodies . . . see in the Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church . . . a pure exposition of

### Sundry Items

(1) Each church's acceptance of the other's Baptism is no major breakthrough and plays no major role in the *Agreement*, but perhaps it should have. The Reformed neither believe nor practice emergency Baptism for infants and presumably also for adults. So Lutheran parents whose children are in danger of death should not expect a Reformed pastor serving their congregation to be overly concerned.<sup>33</sup> Also, Lutherans may not be aware that Reformed and Presbyterian churches often welcome Baptist ministers to their pulpits. Ministers of either confession can serve as regular pastors of the churches of the other denomination. Reformed and Baptists differ over the method of administering Baptism and at what age it should be administered, but are agreed that Baptism does not work regeneration. So a Lutheran attending a Reformed church might find himself receiving what purports to be the Lord's Supper from a Baptist who denies that children are morally accountable because of original sin or capable of faith and salvation through Baptism. At stake here are Augustana II and IX.

(2) The *Agreement* notes that "ordinations in both traditions have usually been by presbyters," but acknowledges that one person as a bishop may act in behalf of presbyteries and synods. This may not be a significant issue for the presenters of this critique, but one cannot help note that the likely to be revived ELCA *Concordat* with the Episcopal Church requires ordination

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the Word of God" (1981 LC-MS *Proceedings*, 160).

Five years later, and shortly before it expired, the Division of Theological Studies issued a thin leaflet on historical criticism with a few points of agreement and disagreement, but stating that time had "not permitted" it to deal "with the implications of historical criticism for Christology, justification, and confessional subscription, which are taken up in the Reumann article." But readers were assured that even where "sharp disagreement" had arisen, this "nevertheless did not destroy our sense of oneness in Christ"!

Lienhard, incidentally, points out that when the *Leuenberg Concord* speaks of the "collapse of traditional thought-forms," this refers to "the two-natures doctrine and the doctrine of the communication of attributes" (107).

<sup>33</sup>Sasse, *Union and Confession*, 25.

by a bishop and consecration of ELCA bishops by Episcopal bishops.

(3) Ordination of women as pastors (ministers; presbyters) is not a problem for fellowship between churches, except for a few like the Missouri Synod and the Roman Catholic Church, and is simply taken for granted in the *Agreement*.

(4) Any differences on justification are put simply to the side: "there are no substantive matters concerning justification that divided us." This conclusion is based on defining justification as "forgiveness of sins and renewal of life." The Roman Catholic-ELCA *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* may be more elaborate, but comes to the same definition, a matter to be left to another time.

### Conclusion

The signatories to the *Agreement* were fully aware of the historic differences among themselves and agreed to accept each other's positions without correction. What was once considered false doctrine by one party or the other is now understood as "mutual misunderstanding and misrepresentation" and "complementary rather than contradictory." In this new situation Lutheran and Reformed doctrines are considered traditions, that is, they are historic beliefs with no necessary binding significance for contemporary churches. Confessions have no more value than other historical documents.

The ELCA-Reformed alliance is not without precedent. Lutheran churches have gone out of existence by putting other documents or arrangements in the place of the Lutheran Confessions. Sasse saw the Prussian Union (1817) as the most notorious, but he also saw the formation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (1948) as an umbrella organization in the same light. This was taken one step further by the *Leuenberg Concord*, a foundation document for the *Agreement*, which claimed that the historic Lutheran and Reformed positions on the Lord's Supper simply represented different strands of the

New Testament.<sup>34</sup> By effectively putting Reformed and Lutheran Confessions on a par in the *Agreement*, the ELCA has changed and denied its confessional base and has ceased to be Lutheran in both a confessional and a historic sense. This is in keeping with the global unionism embraced and advocated by the Lutheran World Federation's ecumenical program of "Reconciled Diversity" (1977): the various churches enter into full communion with one another while keeping their former confessions—minus the condemnations. Did theologians invent "postmodernism" before it became a secular fashion?

David P. Scaer, *Chairman*

Kurt E. Marquart

Richard E. Muller, *Secretary*

William C. Weinrich, *Adjunct*

Lawrence R. Rast Jr., *Adjunct*

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<sup>34</sup>For Lienhard whether or not "est" can be understood as "significat" is not capable of being exegetically resolved (54). He refers to Eduard Schweitzer who finds Palestinian tradition of the New Testament perpetuated in Reformed views and Hellenistic tradition in Lutheran views, (*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [1:18]). The uncertainty over the meaning of "is" apparently does not apply to the *Agreement's* own reference: "Christ himself is host at his table." Would they allow, "Christ is signified [as] Host at the Table"? Both Lienhard and Schweitzer work with an evolutionistic understanding of the New Testament in which the simpler Jewish beliefs developed into more complex Greek ones. The Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper is judged to resemble the more advanced Greek (also known as the catholic) form. For a proper understanding of the *Leuenberg Concord*, Tuomo Mannermaa's painstaking *Von Preussen Nach Leuenberg: Hintergrund und Entwicklung der theologischen Methode in der Leuenberger Konkordie* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums. Neue Folge Band I. Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1981) is simply indispensable. It is the first and perhaps the only "historical-critical" study of Leuenberg, in the sense that it examines the historical roots and the development of the methodology behind that document. Without oversimplifying the complexity of the argument, it may be said that the operative principle of Leuenberg turns out to be a distinction between "justifying faith" and "dogmatical faith," such that the "theological explication of faith" comes in the end to be classified with the "human rites and ceremonies" of AC VII, agreement in which is not necessary for the true unity of the church (see pages 62-63).