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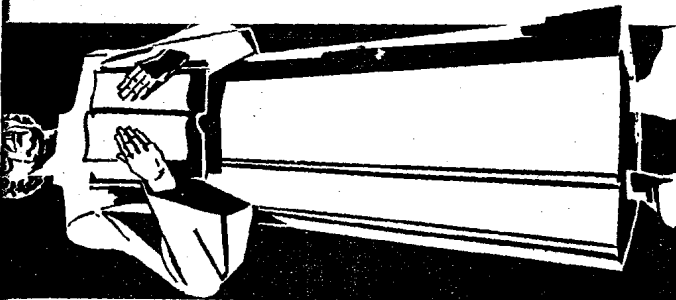
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The Leuenberg Concord

Translation by JOHN DRICKAMER

Preliminary Convention for the Composition of a Concord of the Reformation Churches in Europe, Leuenberg/Basel, September, 1971
Leuenberg/Basel, September 24, 1971

Highly Esteemed Sirs:

In the last decades dialogues between Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches [translator's note: the United churches are churches in which Lutheran and Reformed bodies have already merged] have taken place not only on the regional but also on the European level. Their result has been that ecclesiastical communion among the concerned churches has today, after a long history interwoven with grief and guilt, become possible. After the European churches had with extensive agreement taken cognizance of the Theses of Schauenburg (1967), the so-called Leuenberg Dialogues (1969-1970) took place at the wish and with the direct participation of these churches. These concentrated chiefly on the question of ecclesiastical communion. The participants in the dialogues, who had been officially delegated by the churches, recommended the preparation of a concord which can be the basis for the establishment of ecclesiastical communion. The churches took cognizance of this suggestion, respectively agreed to it, and appointed delegates, who were to prepare the text of the concord.

After a working group drew up in April, 1971, a preliminary text for a concord (entitled: "Draft for the Concord of the Reformation Churches in Europe"), which was presented to the churches for their cognizance and provisional comment, the delegates appointed by the churches prepared in a session from the nineteenth to the twenty-fourth of September, 1971, in Leuenberg (Switzerland) the

Editor's Note: Since World War II, the Lutheran and Reformed churches, especially in Germany, have been approaching full total fellowship with each other. The formation of Evangelical Church of Germany (EKID) embraced the Lutheran, Reformed, and Union government supported churches. The Arnoldshain Theses demonstrated unanimity on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. In my book, The Lutheran World Federation Today (1971) I reported that the Evian convention of the LWF received a committee report favorably supporting fellowship of the Lutheran and Reformed. Also indicated was the need for a 'concord,' i.e., a statement of agreement between the two communions. This statement of agreement has now come into existence under the name of The Leuenberg Concord, named after the town where these theses were preliminary accepted. Leuenberg is a Swiss town in the vicinity of Basel. As these theses are so important, several other contributions scheduled for this issue of The Springhelder have been delayed for a future issue. Mr. John Drickamer, a graduate of Capital University in Columbus, Ohio and a first year student at the Seminary, has translated the material. Understanding the importance of the document and the press deadlines, he produced this translation as soon as the German document was made available. Theological comment on Leuenberg Concord cannot be printed at this time. The Leuenberg Concord claims to embrace European churches. At the time of this writing, it is unclear which churches are included. Certainly all the German state related churches and perhaps the Swiss churches are involved. Though a European document, it will immediately affect the American scene as Thesis 47 hopes that similar agreement can be worked out on other continents and Thesis 48 looks for the involvement of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance. Thesis 49 indicated that Lutheran-Reformed fellowship is to provide impetus to fellowship with still other denominations. As what has been distinctively regarded as 'Lutheran' as well as 'Reformed' for 400 years is involved, it is hoped that our pastors will give their attention to a careful study of this document. The chairman for Lutheran participants, Bishop Dr. Friedrich Hubner, was also a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Lutheran/Reformed Relations at the LWF's Fifth Assembly at Evian.

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enclosed draft for a "Concord of Reformation Churches in Europe." The Preliminary Convention did, in addition to that, advise the continuation of the procedure for the establishment of ecclesiastical communion on the basis of the concord and assigned the administrative execution of this procedure to a Continuation Committee, the members of which were chosen from among the delegates at the convention (see the list of participants).

The draft for the concord is being sent to the churches for their opinions. Thus they have opportunity to advance wishes for alterations which they consider necessary. The expressed opinions do not yet imply any formal agreement, but it is desirable that the churches in expressing their opinions indicate whether there can be held out the prospect of agreement to the concord. The legal situation with respect to the procedure for officially agreeing is varied in the participating churches. The churches are requested to bring also procedural questions into their examination of the text of the concord.

On the basis of the positions thus arrived at the final text of the concord will be completed. For this purpose the Preliminary Convention is to be convened again if one or more of the churches desire this or if the Continuation Committee considers it necessary. Otherwise the Continuation Committee will assume this task.

After the completion of the final draft of the concord it will be submitted to the churches to determine whether they agree to the concord and whether they are able to declare their agreement by means of subscriptional ratification through plenipotentiary representatives. Whether a major convention will have to be convened for the subscriptional ratification of the declarations will have to be decided at a later time with consideration of the situation. In consideration of the importance of the concord for the participating churches it seems best that a period of about a year after the delivery of the final text be granted for the expression of agreement. The subscriptional ratification of the declaration of agreement—if necessary at a major convention—will be possible only after that. Ecclesiastical communion in the sense in which that term is used in the concord will come to exist among the agreeing churches only with the subscriptional ratification of the declaration of agreement. If individual churches which have been requested to agree to the concord can express this agreement only later, then they belong to the ecclesiastical communion from the moment of their declaration of agreement.

They [the churches] are receiving in the enclosure the draft for a concord of Reformation churches in Europe with the request that they take a position on the text by March 1, 1973. We ask that they observe that their stated position should express whether there can be any prospect of an agreement and whether the convening of the Preliminary Convention is desired for the completion of the final draft. Provision has been made for the Preliminary Convention or the Continuation Committee, in possession of the expressed positions agreed upon by the individual churches, to complete the final text of the concord before the end of March, 1973.

We are pleased that the work on a concord of Reformation churches has progressed so far and express the hope that the goal being striven for will be reached.

For the Participants in the Preliminary Convention

(Signed)

PROF. DR. MAX GEIGER
(President)

(Signed)

BISHOP DR. F. HUBNER
(President)

Draft

*Lutheran-Reformed Dialogues at a European Level
Preliminary Convention in Leuenberg/Basel, September, 1971*

*Concord
of Reformation Churches in Europe*

1. The Lutheran, Reformed, and United (the latter having proceeded from the former two) churches which are agreeing to this concord as well as the pre-Reformation churches related to them, i.e., the Waldensians and Bohemian Brethren on the basis of their doctrinal dialogues with one another confirm a common understanding of the gospel, which makes ecclesiastical communion possible for them.
2. For in this they derive their understanding of ecclesiastical communion from the criteria of the Reformation. According to them, agreement in "the correct doctrine of the gospel" and in "the correct administration of the sacraments" is necessary and sufficient for the true unity of the church; for the church is founded on Jesus Christ alone, who gathers and sends her through his gift in proclamation and in the sacraments.
 1. *The Road to Communion*
3. In view of substantial differences in the nature of theological thinking and ecclesiastical activity, and despite many common features, the reforming fathers for the sake of their faith and conscience did not consider themselves to be in a position to practice ecclesiastical communion. With this concord the participating churches acknowledge that since the Reformation their relationship to one another has changed.
 1. *Common Features in the Break-up of the Reformation*
4. From a historical distance, it can be more clearly recognized what basically the churches of the Reformation had in common despite all the antitheses: they proceeded from a new, liberating, and certainty-giving experience of the gospel. By standing up for the truth of the gospel, which they comprehended, the Reformers came to be united in their opposition to the ecclesiastical tradition of that time. In agreement they therefore confessed that life and doctrine are to be measured against the original and pure testimony in Scripture to the gospel. In agreement they testified to the free and unconditional grace of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for everyone who believes this promise. In agreement they confessed that the activity and form of the church are to be deter-

mined only on the basis of the mandate to deliver this testimony in the world and that the word of the Lord remains superior to every human configuration of the Christian congregation. Therewith they, in common with the whole of Christendom, accepted and confessed anew the confession, expressed in the symbols of the ancient church, of the triune God and of the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

5. 2. *Altered Presuppositions of the Present Ecclesiastical Situation*

For the Reformation churches in a four hundred year history, especially coming to terms theologically with the questions of the new era, historico-critical Scripture research, and the ecclesiastical renewal movement has become very effective. These factors led the churches to new and similar forms of thought and life. This development was reinforced through the coming to terms with the challenges of the new era, which also led to new antitheses running crosswise through the confessions. It was simply no longer possible to meet the intellectual and social demands in the new era with the thought forms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This caused the churches, especially since the revival movements in the nineteenth century, to actualize the biblical witness in a new way for the present, as the Reformation confessions did. In this way they learned to separate the fundamental witness of the Reformation confessions from their historically conditioned thought forms and to accept it [the witness] in a new form with respect to the challenges of the present. Because and in so far as the confessions testify to the gospel as the living word of God in Jesus Christ, they do not close off the path to continued obligatory witness to the same but rather open it and demand that it be travelled in the freedom of faith.

6. II. *The Common Understanding of the Gospel*

The subscribed churches describe their common understanding of the gospel by the following.

7. 1. *Justification as the Message of the Free Grace of God*
8. a) The gospel is the salvation message concerning Jesus Christ. The Reformation fathers expressed the correct understanding of the gospel in their doctrine of justification.
9. b) In this message witness is born to Jesus Christ as the One who has become man, through whom God has connected Himself with man;
 - as the One who was crucified and rose again, who took the judgment of God upon Himself and therein manifested the love of God for the sinner; and
 - as the One who is coming, who opens to the world its future.
10. c) Through His word in the Holy Ghost, God calls all men to conversion and faith and attributes his righteousness [*Gerechtigkeit*] in Jesus Christ to the sinner who has faith. He who trusts the gospel is justified for Christ's sake before

- God and is liberated for service. He lives in daily conversion and renewal together with the congregation of God in service to others, in the certainty that God will consummate his Lordship. Thus God creates new life and sets the beginning of a new humanity in the middle of the world.
11. d) This message makes the Christians free for responsible service to the world. They should stand up for earthly justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] and peace among individuals and among peoples. This demands of them that they with other men seek for rational and objective criteria and participate in the application of the same. They do this in confidence that God will uphold the world and in responsibility before his court of justice.
 12. e) With this understanding of the gospel we accept the common conviction of the Reformation confessions that the exclusive salvation-mediatorship of Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture and that justification as the message of the free grace of God is the standard for all proclamation by the church.
 13. 2. *Proclamation, Baptism, the Lord's Supper*
The gospel is testified to for us basically through the word of the apostles and prophets in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. The church has the task of passing on this gospel not only through the oral word in the sermon and in exhortation of the individual but also through Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through proclamation, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is present in the Holy Ghost. Thus justification in Christ is imparted to a person, and thus the Lord gathers his congregation.
 14. a) *Baptism*
In Baptism Jesus Christ through his word grants us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He renews us through his Holy Ghost and calls us into his congregation. God calls us daily out of the old life to follow Christ.
 15. b) *The Lord's Supper*
In the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ, the risen One, bestows himself in his body, given into death for all, and his blood through his promising word with bread and wine. He grants us thereby forgiveness of sins and liberates us to a new life out of faith. He causes us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to persons.
 16. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the death of Christ, through which God has reconciled the world to himself. We confess the presence of the risen Lord among us. In the joy that the Lord has come we await his coming in majesty.
 - III. *Agreement in View of the Condemnations of Doctrine in the Reformation Era*
 17. The antitheses, which since the Reformation era have made ecclesiastical communion between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches impossible and have led to mutual expressions of censure, had to do with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper,

Christology, and the doctrine of predestination. We take the decisions of the fathers [of the Reformation] seriously but can today jointly add the following to them:

18. 1. *The Lord's Supper*

In the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ, the risen One, bestows himself in his body, given into death for all, and his blood through his promising word with bread and wine. He gives himself without reservation to all who receive the bread and wine, to those who believe for salvation, to the others for judgment.

19. We cannot separate the communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. An interest in the manner of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper which disregards this action is in danger of obscuring the meaning of the action of the Lord's Supper.

20. Where such agreement exists the previous censures with respect to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper have lost their application.

21. 2. *Christology*

In the true Man Jesus Christ God himself has given himself to lost mankind for salvation. In the word of promise and in the sacraments he makes Jesus as the crucified and risen One present for us.

22. In faith in God's self-disclosure in His Son, we see ourselves, in view of the breakdown of traditional thought forms, commonly entrusted with the task of reaffirming the integrity of the divinity and humanity of Jesus (Reformed tradition) and the total unity of the Person (Lutheran tradition).

23. We can therefore no longer continue to apply the former censures.

24. 3. *Predestination*

In the gospel the unconditional acceptance of the sinful man by God is promised. He who trusts in it may be certain of salvation and praise God's election. Election can therefore be discussed only with respect to the call to salvation in Christ.

25. Faith does indeed learn by experience that the message of salvation is not accepted by all, but it considers nevertheless the mystery of God's operation. It testifies at the same time to the earnestness of human decision and to the reality of God's universal will for salvation. Scripture's testimony to Christ forbids us to suppose that there is an eternal decree of God for the definite condemnation of certain persons or a certain people.

26. Where such agreement exists the previous censures with respect to the doctrine of predestination have lost their application.

27. 4. *A Conclusion*

Having ascertained this, we are not judging the censures expressed by the fathers [of the Reformation] as inappropriate. They are today, however, no longer applicable to the doctrine

of the partners [in the ecclesiastical communion]. Thus they are no obstacle to our ecclesiastical communion.

28. 5. *Differences in Church Life*

In our congregations there exist considerable differences with respect to the form of divine services, the impressions of piety, and the ecclesiastical regulations. These differences are often more strongly felt in the congregations than in the traditional doctrinal antitheses. Nevertheless, we are not able on the basis of the New Testament and the Reformation criteria for ecclesiastical communion to see any church-dividing factors in these matters.

29. IV. *The Establishment and Realization of Ecclesiastical Communion*

With the ecclesiastical communion between the churches of the various confessions that separation which arose in the sixteenth century and has continued to the present is abolished, communion in word and sacrament is granted, and the greatest possible agreement in testimony and service to the world is being striven for.

30. 1. *The Establishment of Ecclesiastical Communion*

On the basis of the agreed inter-church consensus, the churches declare in their obligatory relationships to the confessions which oblige them or with consideration of their traditions:

31. a) The subscribed churches agree in the understanding of the gospel as it was expressed in Part 2.
 32. b) The doctrinal censures expressed in the confessional writings no longer have reference to the present state of doctrine in the various churches. Such differences as still exist in ecclesiastical doctrine, order, and mode of life have no divisive significance.
 33. c) The undersigned churches recognize one another as the church of Jesus Christ in granting pulpit and altar communion. This includes the mutual recognition of ordination and the possibility of intercelebration.
34. With this declaration ecclesiastical communion has been established.

35. 2. *The Realization of Ecclesiastical Communion*

Ecclesiastical communion is realized in the life of the church and congregations, requires of them common performance of testimony and service and a striving for the strengthening and deepening of the achieved communion.

36. a) *Testimony and Service*

The gospel of Jesus Christ gains in credibility in the world when the churches unanimously witness to it. The gospel liberates and obliges the church to common service. This service is of value for man in his needs and for the elimination of the causes of those needs. The quest for justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] and peace in the world increasingly requires from the church the assumption of common responsibility.

37. b) *Continued Theological Activity*
 As an inter-church consensus the concord allows the obligatory force of the confessions in the participating churches to continue to exist. The achieved central agreement obligates the churches to enter into continuing doctrinal dialogues.
38. The common understanding of the gospel, on which the ecclesiastical communion is based, must continue to be deepened, examined, and permanently actualized.
39. In the future the task of the dialogues is to clear up doctrinal differences, which among the participating churches are not divisive (e. g. hermeneutical understanding of Scripture, confession and church, law and gospel, baptismal practice, pastorate and ordination, church and society, the doctrine of the two kingdoms, and the royal lordship of Christ), and to consider any new problems which emerge.
40. On the basis of their common heritage the Reformation churches must come to terms with tendencies towards theological polarization which become mutually discernible. The problems involved in such tendencies are more serious than the doctrinal differences which once formed the basis for the Lutheran-Reformed opposition.
41. It will be the task of the common theological activity to define the gospel over against distortions.
42. c) *Organizational Conclusions*
 Ecclesiastico-legal settlement of individual questions between churches and within churches is not prohibited through the declaration of ecclesiastical communion. The churches will nevertheless take the concord into consideration in these settlements.
43. It is generally true that the declaration of pulpit and altar communion and the mutual recognition of ordination do not affect the regulations which are valid in the churches for appointment in the pastoral office and for the exercise of the pastoral office.
44. The question of a merger of individual participating churches can be decided only in the situation in which the churches live. In the examination of this question the following points of view should be taken into consideration:
45. A unification which adversely affects the living multiplicity of the modes of proclamation, of the liturgical life, of church order, and of the service activity as of the societal activity would contradict the essence of the ecclesiastical communion entered into by this declaration. On the other hand, however, in certain situations the service which the church renders commends legal mergers for the sake of the material relationship between witness and church order. Organizational consequences of the declaration of ecclesiastical communion are not permitted to have a negative effect on minority churches. Their freedom of decision must be fully respected.

46. d) *Ecumenical Aspects*

In establishing ecclesiastical communion among themselves the Reformation churches are acting out the obligation to work for the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. They understand such an ecclesiastical communion in the European sphere as a contribution to this goal.

47. They expect that the overcoming of their previous separation will have an effect on the churches which are confessionally related to them in Europe and on other continents, and they are ready to consider together with them the possibilities of more extensive ecclesiastical communion.
48. This expectation applies also to the relationship of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to one another.
49. Thus they hope that the establishment of ecclesiastical communion among one another will give a new impetus to meeting and working with other churches.