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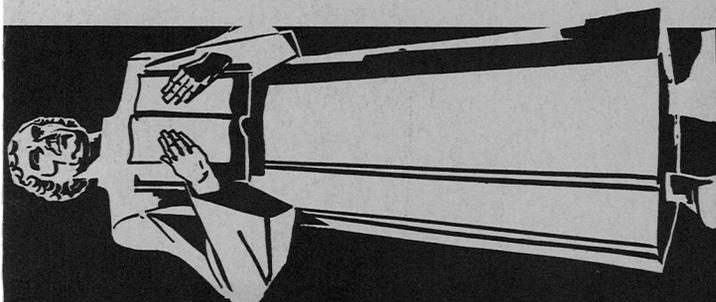
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the springfielder

VOL. XXXVI • NO. 2

SEPTEMBER, 1972



From "Marburg Revisited" to "Princeton '72"

EUGENE F. KLUG

THE LUTHERAN-REFORMED DIALOGUES, under the sponsorship of the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. and the North American Area of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, resumed on April 14-15, 1972, on the campus of Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J. The participation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was in line with New York Resolution 3-04, as well as the Denver and Milwaukee conventions' instructions to the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations "to reactivate Lutheran-Reformed discussions" and "to continue . . . participation in all ecumenical dialogue that permits a clear and unambiguous witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as set forth in Holy Scripture and explicated by the Lutheran Confessions."

Participants were as follows:

From the Reformed side:

Dr. John Leith, Union Seminary, Richmond, Va. (Presbyterian Church in the U.S.).

Dr. Thomas Parker, McCormick Theol. Seminary, Chicago (United Presbyterian Church).

Dr. Daniel Migliore, Princeton Seminary (United Presbyterian Church).

Dr. James McCord, president, Princeton Seminary, and consultant for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Dr. Henry Stob, Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids (Christian Reformed).

Dr. Eugene Osterhaven, Western Theol. Seminary, Holland, Mich. (Reformed Church in America).

(United Church of Christ representatives were unable to be present)

From the Lutheran side:

Dr. Paul D. Opsahl, executive secretary, Division of Theological Studies/LCUSA.

Dr. William Weiblen, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, (ALC).

Dr. Walter Wietzke, St. Paul, Minn. (ALC).

Dr. James Burtness, Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul (ALC).

Dr. George Forell, University of Iowa School of Religion, Iowa City (LCA).

Dr. William Lazareth, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (LCA).

Dr. Arnold Carlson, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C. (LCA).

Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (LCMS).
Dr. Howard W. Tepker, Concordia Theological Seminary,
Springfield, Ill. (LCMS).
Dr. Eugene F. Klug, Concordia Theological Seminary,
Springfield, Ill. (LCMS).

During the years 1962 to 1966 representatives of virtually these same church bodies (Drs. Forell, McCord and Stob were participants also then) conducted a similar series under the sponsorship of the Reformed World Alliance and the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. The Missouri Synod was invited to participate at that time, as were also the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Christian Reformed Church, though none of these were members of the sponsoring organizations. The Orthodox Presbyterians have since withdrawn from further participation.

Essays and summaries of discussion of those initial meetings were subsequently published in a book titled *Marburg Revisited* (Augsburg, 1966). The concluding statement of that publication, edited by Drs. Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord, called attention to the successful completion of the assigned task of seeking to evaluate existing differences between the represented church bodies, recommended that the reports be now carried to the respective church groups for evaluation and study, on the local and larger geographical levels, and concluded with this statement: "As a result of our studies and discussions we see no insuperable obstacles to pulpit and altar fellowship and, therefore, we recommend to our parent bodies that they encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to intercommunion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries." This was followed by a listing of the names of all participants.

It is a matter of record that very little happened for the next five years, on either the Reformed or Lutheran side. Neither the church bodies themselves, nor local churches and conferences, gave the document, especially its optimistic conclusion, any significant attention or study, let alone actual implementation. Perhaps the churches were too involved with their own internal affairs (a likely possibility, especially on the Lutheran side!), or, what is also possible, perhaps the "grass roots" within each church gave little credence to the claims of *Marburg Revisited* as having attained the kind of concord necessary for church fellowship, pulpit and altar.

In any case, after the lull of five years, there is a new determination to proceed, or to reactivate the discussions, on the part of the larger organizations representing the Lutheran and the Reformed communions. Undoubtedly the "Leuenberg Concord" (see the SPRINGFIELDER, March, 1972), adopted at Leuenberg/Basel, September 1971, by representatives of the Lutheran, Reformed, and Union churches on the continent provided immediate stimulus for new hope and activity on the American scene.

The "Leuenberg Concord" was two years in the making. It has

yet to be adopted by the European Lutheran and Reformed churches. Already it has stirred considerable reaction, both pro and con, the latter chiefly on the grounds that it skirts the main issues with ambivalent formulations. There is a long list of previous efforts at "concord" between Lutherans and the Reformed; to name a few, the "Arnoldshain Theses" (1957), the "Prussian Union" (1817), etc., all the way back to Wittenberg (1536), and Marburg (1529). No real fellowship ever resulted, simply because no real agreement in doctrine ever came about. Space and time do not allow the kind of historical review necessary to detail the events along this broken trail. That will have to wait another time, though indeed it should be done, in order that the lessons of the past not be lost.

So the question now was: what could "Princeton 1972" achieve that the rest had failed in? No one probably expected sweeping accomplishments from this initial meeting, though the mood was obviously optimistic and broadly "ecumenical" (in its usual, popular meaning today), a mood that favored moving on, of taking altar and pulpit fellowship for granted on the basis of the "concord" reached in 1962-1966 through *Marburg Revisited*. Sentiment from the outset was patently for the immediate endorsement of the "Leuenberg Concord" as our own, or something like it, perhaps an American version or adaptation.

Three papers structured the program and discussion. The first, by Prof. Weiblen, on "The Church in Dialogue in 1972," called for straight-on ecumenical advance. *Marburg Revisited* should not be looked upon as involving any watered-down formulations but should be seen as a positive step in the right direction. What the churches need now is further implementation of its "agreement on the Gospel." If the "60's" were a decade for "embracing" one another, the need now in the "70's" is for affirmation about our faith concerning Jesus as Lord. To that end, the desired objective should be negotiations grounded on working together, rather than getting stuck with negotiations involving the removal of doctrinal differences. The unity worth having will not be the result of doctrinal unity—negotiations in the past have all foundered by proceeding that way—but a unity in terms of wide pluralism, including differences in doctrine, like that of which the New Testament speaks.

A second presentation, "Beyond Leuenberg," by Prof. Migliore, carried forward the mood of support for *Marburg Revisited*, approval of the "Leuenberg Concord" in the main, but with the additional emphasis that "Leuenberg" had not gone far enough in areas of the "Gospel-in-action", or on the ethical thrust of the Gospel in the present situation within the world. Should church fellowship, therefore, be given the prominent place? Or should the church not rather move aggressively for peace and justice in a world that so sorely needs them, on the grounds that "the Gospel is a truth to be done"? Is not "Leuenberg" largely indifferent to actualizing the Gospel in the social, economic, political spheres? Thus something beyond "Leuenberg," something that grasps the concrete situation on world problems today—racism, militarism, poverty, sex—needs to rise

out of the present situation. In fact, it is to be doubted that an authentic Gospel exists which does not arise from a depressed community and human suffering.

While the first paper raised little static, this one did. A sharp rejoinder by Prof. Forell, respondent to the paper, took issue with Migliore's approach, a rather obvious (at least to the Lutherans) turning of the Gospel into Law, or vice versa. Yet, although old differences between Lutheran and Reformed theology on Law/Gospel, justification/sanctification, surfaced in these discussions, the euphoria continued uninterrupted with the assurance that these differences constituted no barrier for pulpit and altar fellowship!

Prof. Ralph Bohlmann presented the third paper, "Marburg Revisited in the Light of 1972." (It was the only paper available in printed form for the participants.) Basic to its posture was the understanding that a continuance of the Lutheran-Reformed dialogues presupposed an assessment of *Marburg Revisited*. Samplings of critique of that document's handling of certain controverted doctrines, as well as its over-all methodology, were detailed. Theological difficulties obviously remain, and it was pointed out that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, through its delegated representatives, could proceed on no other basis, under its Confessional stance, than that doctrinal consensus was to be the necessary basis for church fellowship in which there would be mutual sharing of each other's pulpit and altar. To claim that "no insuperable obstacles" to altar and pulpit fellowship remained, was to by-pass the fact that basic theological differences still existed on doctrines like the Lord's Supper, Creation/Redemption, Justification/Sanctification, not to mention the meaning of Confessional subscription in itself.

The ensuing discussion indicated that here was the "Gordian Knot." Doctrinal consensus was still very much a red flag to be waving in discussions that were to be "ecumenical." Except for Missouri's representatives, all other participants, Lutherans included, concurred in the view that nothing should disturb *Marburg Revisited's* conclusion that a sufficient basis for altar and pulpit fellowship had already been attained. The Reformed shared the quite obvious insight that inter-communion had never been a problem for them. Missouri's representatives, who had mostly listened to this point, now pressed the fact that our own discussions at Princeton had revealed basic differences still existing on central articles of the faith, like the meaning of the Gospel, the Law/Gospel distinction, not to mention unresolved issues on the Lord's Supper, Scripture, election, etc., which had been skirted in *Marburg Revisited*.

Astonishment was frankly and vocally apparent over Missouri's apparent intransigence on doctrinal agreement as the necessary basis for fellowship. "Utterly un-Lutheran," "sheer fundamentalism," "incredible," "pre-critical stance," "Sasse-Oesch pipe line," were some of the expostulations that greeted Missouri's expressed concern for

This, undoubtedly, because of publicly stated judgments by these theologians against *Marburg Revisited!* cf., e.g., Sasse's article in *THE SPRINGFIELDER*, Spring, 1968, under the title of "What Is the Sacrament of the Altar?" and Oesch's critique in running commentary in *LUTHERISCHER RUNDBLICK*, 1968, 31ff, 49ff, 109ff, 171ff, 186ff.)

genuine doctrinal consensus. This concern was caricatured as "trying to nail down certain truths," "as in a box," and of "absolutizing the language of Jesus," etc.

A stand-off impasse seemed imminent, and the Missouri representatives, assuring the rest that nothing that had been asked for in any way was a judgment on any individual's Christian faith, indicated frankly that, if their presence would be an embarrassment or impediment to the progress of the dialogues, they did not wish to hold the rest back. But to participate in a closed discussion would be impossible, a discussion which, on the one hand, assumed *Marburg Revisited* to be a sufficient and an adequate statement for pulpit and altar fellowship, and, on the other hand, took for granted that "Leuenberg," or something like it, should be the eventual goal of these dialogues.

A compromise arrangement for the next meeting prevailed finally, particularly because the Reformed—some of whom still avow a Confessional stance—favored continued participation by Missouri, at least for the next meeting(s). It was agreed that a critical review of the "Leuenberg Concord" would form the next meeting's program. On that basis Missouri's representatives agreed to proceed along, demurring to assent to any prior conditions which implied support of "Leuenberg" or an American version thereof, particularly since the disposition of *Marburg Revisited* still remained as an unresolved issue. (Of it one of the original LCA participants, Martin Heineken, had also expressed the view that its "summary statements . . . often are in such general terms that they skirt the real issues.")

Though the meeting may thus be described as frank, with no hedging, it was nonetheless also cordial. And there was common consent that all publicity and press releases concerning "Princeton '72" should avoid the impression that the participants had agreed that either *Marburg Revisited*, or "Leuenberg," was a sufficient basis for fellowship. Nonetheless the meeting had served the welcome purpose of frank and open dialogue on matters of common concern to Christians and their church bodies. Future participation by Missouri's representatives was viewed as contingent upon developments flowing from such encounter, one meeting at a time.